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1/28/77

This is an interview with Harrison Davis, long-time resident of Odessa, formerly the proprietor of a store in Odessa and living opposite the Corbit-Sharp house and the Wilson Warner house and the other very important houses in Odessa.

Q. Harrison, what about your house where we are right now--what is the history of your house?

A. Well, as far as we know it was built by Davis. Now, the store itself was standing in 1829 because Davis had paid his money to the for the property and the state hadn't received the money, so he had to apply to the legislature to pass a special bill to get the deed to his property and that was done. The store was built first and I don't know in what year and the house was built in 1834, and it was added on to the already standing store. Now, I feel that it was built out of local bricks because we've got Davis' old store books and he was looking in the early 1800's for somebody to tend the kilns at night--fire them, you know--and I've always thought that probably the bricks for the Corbit house were made locally, but I don't know. Their story is that they were hauled all the way from England and I doubt it.

Q. Where was the kiln locally?

A. Well, I don't know. Now there was a brick yard in the 1860's or '70's out on the back road to Fieldsboro because Mr. Henry Heller as a boy carried lunches to the men, and he got to playing around the machinery and his leg was hurt and he lost the leg. That's according to my father so that brings it up to fairly modern time. Now the old blacksmith shop, according to the Finley papers, was built around 1844. That was Mrs. Finley's grandfather.

Everybody made their money locally then. There was no running to Wilmington then for a job--for bricklayers, plasterers, undertakers, carpenters, furniture makers, everything--in town.

Q. What are your earliest recollections and where did you come--you were not born in this house--when did you come here?

A. 1911. I was 8 years old.

Q. And you've lived in this house ever since?

A. No, my father--you know, he was in the bank and we lived there for the balance of his life.

Q. In the bank building. (Yes) And that is the bank building right down here (Yes) on the corner.

A. That's the one. And father, he was required to shut the shutters every night on the first floor, you know, keep people out. They were very afraid of somebody getting in. And he had a pistol and a hole in the floor to shoot through in front of the vault. And there was an old burglar alarm. Now all through the house the floors were grooved and the wires laid in the grooves.

Q. All over--upstairs and down.

A. Upstairs and down. And every night he had a little switchboard to turn the alarm on, you know.

Q. Was the bank ever robbed?

A. No. He was afraid during the depression that somebody would start a run on the bank. He said the bank was perfectly sound but that no bank could stand a run on it, you know--if somebody started a rumor.

Q. Your mother's family were the Vandergrifts. (Yes) And they've been in this area since the early 1700's?

A. Well, in the general area. But grandfather--maybe it was in the 1880's--he started--after the Civil War he built a store near the railroad tracks in Mount Pleasant and he kept that until my grandmother's oldest brother died. Then he sold it to Mr. Allison and went to McDonough. Now he succeeded Uncle Tom Eaton--he was my mother's uncle. Now he had succeeded your grandfather there. He clerked for Mr. Poole and then he had taken over when your grandfather retired. And your grandfather had taken over from Mr. Watkins. Now that was Mr. Gassaway Watkins and he was the father of Mr. Columbus Watkins, who was the father of Mr. Frank, Mr. Columbus and Mr. John Watkins.

Q. And they were in Odessa. Frank Watkins lived in Odessa.

A. Mr. Frank and Mr. John lived in Odessa and Mr. Columbus lived in the city--I don't know whether it was Philadelphia.

Q. So your father came to the bank at Odessa. How did that happen? He'd been at a bank earlier, before Odessa?

A. He often said father started working in Mr. Columbus Watkins' store in 1880 when he was 15 years old and he kept it up until Mr. Watkins retired. Then he went to work for Mr. Frank Watkins for a few years, and then he and Uncle George took the store vacated by Mr. Columbus Watkins. And that was in 1885 and they had no money and the suppliers--they agreed to ship them goods and let them pay for it when it was sold. Now, father kept up that 'til about 1890. Then he went to work in the old Citizens National Bank that was run by Mr. John Crouch. Now, he was the son of a man that built the house next door, you know.

- Q. Where the Findley's used to live (Yes) and directly across from Corbit-Sharp.
- A. Yes. Now, Mr. Crouch was the father of Mrs. Coppage, Mrs. Ennis and Mr. John Crouch. Mr. Crouch had most of his sons in the bank and maybe they didn't work just as hard as they should have and, you know, father had to go and work sometimes at night. In those days there was no pay for that--you just went and worked anyhow. And sometimes he'd have to work two, three hours after supper and he felt it was hurting his health. So Mr. Gibson was about to retire over here, father heard about it and applied for the place.
- Q. Excuse me, I didn't understand, where was the Citizens National Bank--where was the place you lived, before Odessa?
- A. In Middletown. And the old Citizens Bank later sold out to the Delaware Trust.
- Q. The one now on the corner there? (Yes) Which is now Delaware Trust.
- A. Yes. Well, now, the bank building was later sold to the Fire Company and its stood exactly where the Fire Company stands now.
- Q. So he came over when the opening happened in Odessa. (Yes) Was he the bank manager?
- A. No. The house really should have gone to Mr. Brown, Mr. Joseph G. Brown, but Mr. Brown owned his own home and his wife was in poor health and he didn't want to move. So the place was open to father if he came and took the bank house. They felt that--the vault was in the bank and they needed a night watchman.
- Q. Was that the earliest kind of burglar alarm that was electrified? Was it wires along the floor?
- A. Yes, and it worked off wet cell batteries. Now you've never

seen anything like them.

Q. Were they like automobile batteries?

A. They weren't lead cell batteries. (Were they large?) They used a glass container for each cell and they were wired in series. As I remember there were three of them.

Q. And you came and lived there, and did you start at Mrs. Findley's school early?

A. It wasn't Mrs. Findley's, it was her sister's, Miss Mary Asprell. Now the doctor's son went there and Mr. Brown's daughter, at the same time. And later Willis Nedain, he came.

Q. Was it a private school then?

A. It was a private school and cost my father three dollars a month to send me there. Of course the others paid as much.

Q. Where was the school?

A. It was in a first-floor room of the Asprell house. You know, it's up across from the police station, just this side of the Gulf Oil.

Q. And they taught you every morning?

A. They taught us every morning because we were only required to go half a day and then we had the afternoon free, which we liked.

Q. And how many grades was that school?

A. I came out of the second grade in Middletown and later I went into the fourth grade in the public school here.

Q. So you just had two years at Miss Asprell's school. (That's right) It was called Miss Asprell's school?

A. It didn't have any name. Miss Mary Asprell taught it.

Q. And did you like that school?

A. I liked it because I got out in the afternoon.

Q. What about Mr. Sharp when he lived in Odessa--Rodney Sharp. He was a resident of Odessa, wasn't he?

A. Now, Mr. Sharp lived here and taught school here for two years. And that was 1902, and I don't know whether it was 1901 he started or 1903. But he was teaching school here when my mother was married which was 1902.

Q. And he must have loved Odessa to want to spend his later life with the reconstruction plan, acquiring of the properties.

A. The rest of the DuPonts were putting up museums and Mr. Sharp had been a guest of the Corbit house, he knew the Corbit daughters well and he knew what a fine old house that was, and I think that gave him the idea. Now he could have gotten any number of properties if he'd wanted to but--you know Mr. Townsend who was head of the Wilmington Trust, he knew him well.

Q. Was that Mr. Burrell Townsend?

A. Mr. Burrell Townsend--Sylvester. So he got him and came down, and Mr. Daniel Corbit had charge of the renting of the place--

Q. Oh, you mean the family rented the house then--the Corbits rented the house out?

A. I think they thought it was nice to have the house occupied and they charged little or no rent.

Q. But they had moved.

A. Oh, Mr. D.W., he had died and the house was largely unoccupied. Now the next that came in was Mr. Moxson. Now, his wife had been a DuPont, and he headed the Electro Company, which never turned out to be commercially paying, but they spent a lot of

money for a time.

Q. Was it located here in Odessa?

A. It was down where Mrs. Callaway lives now.

Q. That's Odessa Heights?

A. No. (By the water) She owns down to the creek by what used to be known as Poke's Wharf.

Q. That large, lovely house there, sits up a little bit?

A. It's off this way, off High Street

Q. When you were a boy, your cousin was Malley Davis? And they lived in what's now called the Malley house? (Yes, that's right) And were the Malleys here a long time, the Malley family?

A. They were here a considerable time, but I don't know just how long. Now they were related to the Thomases that lived in the house that is tenanted by Cavis now, and Mr. John Corbit had had it later.

Q. Were the people of Odessa glad when Mr. Rodney Sharp started to buy places, or not?

A. It was in the depression and it made a certain amount of employment, and I suppose that you could say that they were glad, I don't know.

Q. Had the Wilson Warner house been occupied at that time--by what family?

A. Mr. Corbit, his aunt was Mrs. Warner, so she left it to a board of which Mr. Corbit was the principal one. And Mr. George Whittack was a great friend of his so--Mr. Whittack was in his late 70's at least--and he brought him in to live in it because Mrs. Whittack could be the librarian and take charge of the house, and Mr. Whittack could bring men in from the farm to work the garden and mow the grass.



Q. Where was the Corbit farm at that point?

A. The Corbits had lots of farms--had them clear down in Kent County.

Q. You mentioned the library--it was there then, in the '30's--the Odessa was in the Wilson Warner house?

A. The library was in the old schoolhouse, you know (Yes), it's got a tablet over it.

Q. But it was in a house, too, wasn't it, at one time?

A. It was in the school until Mr. Corbit brought it down here to the Wilson Warner house.

Q. Yes. And that's why she was the person living at the house and taking care of the library--the woman you just mentioned--Whittock?

A. Yes, Mrs. Whittock.

Q. How do you spell that name?

A. Whittock. Now they were a family around here for a long while, Mr. Whittock and his brothers. Now, one brother, Mr. Alonzo Whittock, he and his wife lived down by Hangman's Branch where Harry (Jr.) Roberts now lives. And he wasn't too successful as a farmer. The Whittocks, they had to have money help.

Q. So they were living here when Rodney Sharp acquired the house from the Corbits?

A. When he acquired the Corbit-Sharp house they were, but it wasn't 'til years later that the succeeding board--the members were getting older and they decided to turn it over to Mr. Sharp--(The Wilson Warner house) Yes.

Q. Were there any other Corbit properties that were sold at the same time?

- A. What's known as the Pump House. And he could have had the old hotel at the same time but he didn't want that at that time. He bought that later. And I always thought that he would want the Janvier house and it was in good shape, but he didn't buy that--he let the Methodist Church have it for a parsonage. Now it's a very old house, too, and my grandfather, you know, Harrison Vandergrift, he owned that for 15 years and he was very fond of the place. But grandmother and mother persuaded him to sell to Mr. Henry Donovan because grandfather's health wasn't good. And I used to cut the grass up there, I don't know, I was about 12 to 14 years old, and grandfather had a small mower that he had bought. Well I didn't like that mower--it didn't cut enough grass, it wasn't wide enough, but I used it anyhow.
- Q. What about Mr. Corbit and his friends in the senate--they had a group of men called the senate?
- A. Well, you know, that was a room connected to the store and that consisted of Mr. Daniel Corbit, his brother Mr. Alek, the two Watkins--Mr. John and Mr. Frank, Mr. Jim Keggan, and several others who would drop in from time to time. That was called the senate. Mr. Corbit, he was the Speaker of the House, Mr. Daniel, and in the winter when he came in he had a special chair on one end of the radiator and Mr. Whittock was old and getting to feel the cold and he had the other end of the radiator. But Mr. Corbit when he came in, he would pat the radiator to see if it was hot and then he would turn the valve on. Now, they weren't the first to inhabit the senate, there

had been earlier, because I have heard Mr. Corbit say that he couldn't understand it in his earlier days when his father had gone home early that after the older men got done and went home, you know, the younger fellows would congregate. And he had been in that bunch. But now he could understand why they had gotten home now that he had gotten older.

Q. What did the senate talk over, senate business?

A. They were all farmers. They talked over farming, politics, and anything else popped into their head.

Q. What was old Mr. Corbit like, what was D.W. like?

A. Mr. D.W., he was a very nice old man and he was president of the bank. And then Mr. Alek Corbit succeeded him as president, and Mr. Dan, he was next in line. And Mr. D.W., he was a very nice old gentleman and he was one that wore a belt and wore suspenders, too. Now, why, I don't know, but he always did.

Q. When did the senate disband? Did anyone take their places when they died?

A. When I got the store in '34 I didn't open it again. I thought I'd save a little coal. And Mr. Corbit said to me that he would supply the coal, but I never did, because what he didn't understand was that his friends had pretty near all died and he'd had no company up there. He still had the bank but he would--you know, originally he'd come over to the store, he'd sit there for awhile, then he'd go on down to the bank, and he teased Mr. Brown who was the head of it as long as he lived, and then after that--he had a special chair down at the bank, too.

Q. He was living at the Corbit house then?

A. He was living at the John Corbit house that had earlier been inhabited by the Thomases, and I've heard him say many a time that he had advised the people that would inherit from him to sell it right away if they couldn't get but \$500 for it. And it had several acres of ground in the back.

Q. Why did he want them to sell right away?

A. He thought that a house that wasn't inhabited went back. Now, we have a wardrobe upstairs that I paid five dollars for--that was all was asked. Now at first I said I didn't want it, and Dick Revinger, he'd been told to sell it and he said you ~~ould~~ should buy it if you just want to make something out of the wood--it's a good buy. So I finally agreed and moved it, and it's a very nice piece of furniture. Now we have a wardrobe of our own that was bought in maybe around 1870, but our family didn't have the money to buy that fine a piece of furniture.

Q. Is this a very early wardrobe?

A. Well, it's about 1870, I'd say. Now, I don't know when theirs was built, but Mr. John Corbit, he fixed up that house about 1870 and he took his family to the house now owned by Clarence Everett. And he would say--and that's been nearly 35 years ago--that every time the wind blew that they thought the house was going to tumble down and he would say, now look, it's still standing.

Q. What was the story about ferrets--did someone hunt with ferrets?

A. That was old Josie Yeager. Now, he was Dr. Carrow's hustler. And he raised canaries, ferrets, chickens, and I think a few pigeons. Now one of his ferrets got loose at one time, and you

know, they resemble a weasel. And it went over into Mr. Corbit's hedge and it was seen, and they killed it. They didn't know it was one of Josie's, they thought it was a wild weasel. And of course he was put out about it. Now, Josie had come over on a whaling ship earlier to escape the conscription in the German army when he came of age. And of course he had been a German, and my mother spoke German, too, because she had learned it from Mr. Kronimier's mother.

Q. Did they live in Odessa, too? Where was your mother born?

A. She was born in Mt. Pleasant. Later they moved to McDonough when grandfather had the store there. Now in Mt. Pleasant grandfather was station master, postmaster, and storekeeper. And he bought peaches by the carload and shipped them to New York.

Q. So he was also a produce buyer? (Yes) Do you remember your early life at church? Did you go to the old church at Old Drawyers when you were young, or did you go here in Odessa?

A. No, we went in Odessa. Now, our family have been Presbyterian but at one time the Presbyterian congregation was nearly wiped out in town, and the Methodist was stronger, so grandmother switched to Methodist. And when the Presbyterians came back stronger she and mother decided that they would not switch back again. And they liked the Methodist minister very much. It was the same way with the Asprells. Mr. Asprell, Mr. Lynn's father--I remember him--he was blind, and he had built the blacksmith's shop.

Q. Is that where the former Governor Tribbett hardware store is--

(Yes) On the corner of Route 13.

A. Where it was. And that was very successful in its day.

Q. The blacksmith's shop.

A. Yes. You could hear the anvil all over town in the morning, you know.

Q. Well, were the Asprell family long-time Odessa residents? They were.

A. Yes. Now I couldn't tell you from how far back, but Mr. Asprell died in the early 1900's and his parents had been among the early Old Drawyers congregation.

Q. What about the Cochrans? Were the members of the Cochran family in Odessa or were they all around Middletown?

A. They were mostly about Middletown. Now, I couldn't tell you what Cochran, but you know one lived outside of Odessa here and that was Mrs. Conroy's father, Mrs. John McCoy's father and Ginny Belle Cochran's father. You don't remember him.

Q. Well, now, which Cochran was Mrs. Rodney's mother? I noticed--

A. She was a Green.

Q. Yes, she was a Green but it must be that Mr. Green's wife was a Cochran.

A. Well, it may have been--I don't know. Well, they were like the Vandergrifts related to pretty near everybody.

Q. The Vandergrifts were related to the Shallcrosses, weren't they?

A. Yes. And Mr. James Shallcross's mother was a Vandergrift. Now, she was the daughter of Mr. Wilson Vandergrift and I believe that he was the brother of Andrew Jackson Vandergrift who was my cousin Eva's grandfather.

Q. That was a nice name.

- A. Yes. Well, you know, he'd probably been born during the reign of Andrew Jackson. And my grandfather, Harrison Vandergrift, was probably born during Harrison's presidency.
- Q. Where was the main stable? Was there a livery stable in Odessa? You said there was the blacksmith shop at Asprell's, was there a livery stable?
- A. No. Now you know the doctor had his own stable, the Corbits had their stable, but there was no livery stable for hire.
- Q. Everybody had a horse.
- A. Well, everybody that had a little money had a horse. Now even the bank had a stable and the hotel had a stable, and a horse could be put up there--I believe Mr. Gibson's was.
- Q. Did you spend time on the water when you were a young man in Odessa? Did people go down on boats, pleasure boats the way they do now? Did they have sail boats?
- A. No, there were no sail boats, but several families had bateaux.
- Q. What's a bateau? An open boat?
- A. Yes, it's an open boat usually with a square stern and a pointed bow and it's propelled by oars--what we used to call armstrong motor. And everybody left their oars in their boat and they were never taken.
- Q. What about fishing? Did you do fishing down here in the Appoquinimink Creek?
- A. First time I went fishing Billy Bogensheets took me and I was small and that was before we moved over here. Maybe I was 6 or 7 years old and he took me down there--I remember he pointed out the muskrat houses.

Q. Well, what did they look like? Little straw--

A. You know. The rats built 'em out of reeds for the winter, and we caught a nice little string of fish. It's been a long while ago but I think they were mostly white perch, yellow nids, maybe a few Cape May goodies in 'em, I don't know.

Q. But pretty good fishing. You didn't have a long time to catch them, probably. You probably could catch them pretty fast.

A. Yes. The water wasn't as polluted by oil and--fishing was very good in those days. Later there was Mr. Howard Morris--he was a fisherman--and he'd get his three boys and me and take us fishing. And usually one of the boys would row, and sometimes we'd go a short way up Drawyers Creek and sometimes we'd go down by a bar in the creek here and catch a nice string or two of fish, all of us fishing. And then we'd come home and the boys would go around and sell those strings of fish.

Q. About how many people lived in Odessa in the early 1900's?

A. I would say not more than 700.

Q. What about Christmastime? Did you have Christmas parties in Odessa? Or was it a quiet home Christmas almost always?

A. There was nothing special, but the stores had a lot of things in them. My uncle, you know, had a better grade of candy than you'd find this side of Wilmington nowadays. And then there were always dates, figs, and eating raisins. You know they came in the clusters (on the stem) on the stem. Now, they could be bought in several sizes and he got large ones and they were very good. And the dates.

Q. Was there a famous gardener? Odessa has such lovely gardens.



Were there some people that other people went to for advice?

A. No, I don't think so. You could get plentiful help in those days and my uncle had one of the prettiest gardens that I've ever seen.

Q. Which uncle was that?

A. Uncle George. He was the only one that lived in Odessa at that time.

Q. Was that Malley's father?

A. No, it was Malley's uncle. Now Malley's father died a year or two before I was born and of course Malley was very young.

Q. Did his mother bring him up here in Odessa?

A. His mother and his grandmother. Now his grandmother was Mrs. Rachel Jane Malley and his mother was Mary Ann Malley. And his grandmother, at least after 1915, she was badly crippled with I suppose it would be arthritis nowadays--arthritis hadn't been invented then.

Q. They called it rheumatism.

A. Well now, Mrs. Watkins had what was called neuritis, and my mother had it. You know, they couldn't raise their arms, it hurt. And my uncle had rheumatism.

Q. What about doctors that you remember from your youth?

A. Well, there was Dr. Henry Field Smith. Now, he was teaching at the University of Pennsylvania during the week and coming home on weekends. And he'd prescribe for my grandfather and for years grandfather ate practically nothing but he drank a gallon of milk a day. And you know that would get pretty tiresome. That milk was 5¢ a quart in those days and we used lots of it.

Q. That was the doctor's prescription?

- A. Yes. Grandfather was a Civil War veteran and the fare during the Civil War kind of ruins your stomach, you know--hard tack and biscuit and if you could catch somebody's chicken he went in the pot, too. And for years after my grandfather took medicine that Dr. Smith had prescribed. They could get a prescription refilled any number of times then and grandmother would just get it refilled and feed it to him. And beside, there was Dr. Carrow. And Dr. Carroll was the principal physician--
- Q. That was Rainer Carrow's father?
- A. His father. Now, he had his own drugstore and filled his own prescriptions which was very nice in those days. Now, Mrs. Carrow, she manned the drugstore when her husband wasn't around but she didn't fill prescriptions. The doctor was also on the school board, as was my father, and Mr. George Townsend. Now, he was Mr. Burrell Townsend's father, Mr. George Townsend's father, Miss Helen Townsend's father and Mrs. Cook's father.
- Q. WERE they any relation to the other Townsends?
- A. I never heard about it. Now they were related to--Mrs. Townsend, I believe, had been a daughter of old Bishop Scott of the Methodist Church--he was quite famous in his day, and lived below town.
- Q. So Dr. Carrow was the principal doctor then in the early hundreds and twenties, was he? <sup>A.</sup> Dr. Carrow came around around 1895.
- Q. And he took care of Odessa except for Dr. Smith coming down on weekends.
- A. He took care of Odessa and he went to Port Penn and all the country around, and then of course there was Dr. Niles.

Q. That was in Middletown, wasn't it?

A. In Towns End. Now, he later established his hospital in Middletown in the old Peoples Bank Building. But Dr. Carrow, he went around to all the farms from Mt. Pleasant to Taylor's Bridge, and below--he was a hard-working man. Now, he had three cars. One was an old Overland touring that he used to take patients to the hospital when they had to go.

Q. And he took them.

A. He took 'em. There was no ambulance. He'd put a pillow in the back seat and prop them up there and make a trip to the hospital. And he kept two Ford Model-T's--they were roadsters--in a garage that was right along the property line. Now he kept one in the front of the garage--

Q. Was it in the lot next to your house, that's empty now?

A. No, that's our lot. It was on the corner of Gerald's property. You can still see the cement approaches to it if you know where to look. Now, he used the one nearest the door 'til it wouldn't run any longer, then he pulled it out and he backed the other one out. He always had one to go in. And he went to up to after 8:00 at night. I've heard my mother say that if grandmother was ailing the doctor would come in the morning to make a call and then maybe he'd have to walk down the street at night and he would stop in just to inquire how she was. Now there was no charge for that. They thought well of Doctor. And I think he went too hard. He was a brother of--you know the wife of the Miller at the end of Silver Lake--well she called him one time and he went out and he was practically sick then, and that call

practically shoved him into pneumonia.

Q. People died of pneumonia in those early 1900's, didn't they?

In the wintertime they didn't have any biotics.

A. They didn't have any biotics.

Q. They also had diphtheria then.

A. Oh, diphtheria, measles, mumps, colds--when I was a kid I had some of the worst colds--but I never caught measles until I was about 35 or 36 years old. And my father was well along in his 40's before he caught it. But you know, things like that would just go right through a school--be dozens of the kids out at the same time.

Q. Dr. Carrow had his work cut out for him.

A. He had it cut out for him and he went morning, noon and night. From the old days of the horse-drawn carriage up to the automobile.

Q. What about the boats on the river? There were commercial boats going to Philadelphia, weren't there, when you were young? Couldn't you take a boat from here to Philadelphia?

A. There was the Clio, you know.

Q. That's what I was wondering about.

A. Now, it was owned by a company, and it was steam, of course--there weren't any diesels in those days. And earlier there had been other boats. Now Mr. Watkins owned a boat. My father used to tell of Mr. Colum Watkins, when he was a boy, several of them went down and they used the light boat on his larger boat and when they brought it back it was dirty. And the captain said to them, that was no way to bring a boat back, that they should wash it out. And Mr. Colum said well, it was his father's boat

and he wouldn't wash it. But the captain wouldn't accept that boat until they scrubbed it out. And they did.

Q. Do you know how much it cost to go to Philadelphia on the Clio, can you remember?

A. I have no idea. Now I've come down on the Clio from Philadelphia and gone to Port Penn at least once. Now sometimes it would run in to the pier at Port Penn, but its principal port was Philadelphia. And father had run, two seasons maybe, on it as Purser and that was when Mr. Oliver Stephens had been the Purser on it and during unloading he had been caught by the gang plank, between it and the wharf, and he had lost a leg. So they got father for a replacement.

Q. How many people would have been in the crew on the boat?

A. Well, there was the captain, first mate, the fireman, there was also the engineer, and they had a cook.

Q. They served meals on the way up.

A. Yes, and probably while they were in Philadelphia, too. Now father said that the Schuylkill was so free of pollution at that time that the boat threw their water barrel overboard off the mouth of the Schuylkill and got their drinking water. Now, you know that wouldn't do now. But he said what finally ruined it, he said their wharfish charge was very low when he started and then they went up later and while at first the Clio had her own wharf that she could come into, later she only had second call on that wharf--she had to anchor and take her produce and unload over another boat if the other boat was in. And then the Coast Guard rules got more restrictive, that is they have to have

life jackets for everybody on board and carry so much crew if they had any paying passengers, and a few rules like that.

Q. But it made regular trips to Philadelphia.

A. It made twice a week.

Q. Even when there wasn't any produce to take. Would it take things like potatoes in the winter up to the Philadelphia market? Was that the reason that the boat was going up?

A. They hauled freight, too, for Odessa and Middletown. Now, I've heard my uncle say that a barrel of molasses, the freight down from the city, was only 75¢. Now, it had to be hauled when it got here--the Tuckers, they had teams, you know. A barrel of molasses, or syrup, either one, weighed over 600 pounds.

Q. They were shipped for 75¢.

A. So I was told. Now, by my time it came by peninsula auto express and that later sold out to the Wilson line. And they were very good, but of course it cost several times that by that time.

Q. Well, the Wilson line had its terminal in Wilmington. Did it ever come down here?

A. It delivered to here, Middletown, and generally down the peninsula. Now I suppose it went as far as Dover.

Q. I've always thought of the Wilson line as the excursion ship from Wilmington without remembering that it delivered produce and freight.

A. It took over the PAX's freight--bought them out.

Q. Now of course we have no boat traffic at all in Odessa. Do you think we'll get back to it with the car problems the way they are?

A. I'm not sure whether what is known as Fennimore's bridge has been

made so it can't be turned off, or not.

Q. What do you mean by that--turned off? The bridge?

A. You know, it's a draw bridge, and it's cheaper to make them stationary.

Q. Oh. Right.

A. I don't know what the War Department will stand for that way.

Q. You said you took over the store in 1934 and when did you close your store? I've forgotten. When did you decide not to have your store?

A. In '63.

Q. That was a long time, then. Just shy of 30 years.

A. Yes. But it got unprofitable.

Q. So you've been retired for 13 years now.

A. About, I don't know. I was about 58, I think, I'm 73 now.

Q. You've always helped with Old Drawyers. You've helped with the grounds, you've been on the board. Is that not true?

A. Yes, I was for several years.

Q. What changes do you see in Odessa now? There are new people coming in and buying the old houses. Isn't that true?

A. Oh, the prices have gone out of sight. At one time everybody made their living in town and I know of at least two houses that were formerly sold for \$800 each. One Mr. Sharp tried to get and couldn't.

Q. And now they're just fantastically expensive, aren't they?

A. They are.

Q. I'm noticing the clock behind your head there and remembering that the Corbit-Sharp house has a couple of locally-made clocks. Is this one here a Janvier, a Duncan--

A. No, this came from your aunt's in West Chester, you know--

Q. Oh, then that's a Philadelphia clock probably.

A. Margaret thinks it was in the family of her uncle (The Embry family)--the Embry family. Now I can make that clock go again-- it's not at this time. One of the most interesting things is how people earned their money and their living. Now there was the Rose family who were carpenters. They made sashes and door and window frames in the wintertime, you know, so they could be inside. And then they would have them ready when they wanted them in the good weather. Now they built the old Methodist Church which was built in the early 1850's and they were good carpenters. They're all gone now. Alvin Rose was the last of them. And the Methodists were getting ready to put a bill through the legislature to move the Methodist graveyard. And that so upset Alvin Rose that he died, because his ancestors were buried there.

Q. I guess he had to be buried in the new churchyard then.

A. I don't know. But some of our family's buried there, too. Now, great-grandmother--I think she's buried in a lot of her brother, John Wigby.

Q. You were talking about the way people earned their money. Now, the Roses were carpenters and Mr. Asprell had the blacksmith shop, your family had the store and worked at the bank.

A. That was later. Well now, my father told me that about 1870 that the Asprells were casting plowshares. I don't know whether anything else or not. But they had molders come down once a week and they did the casting, and that the boys would hurry up from school to watch them. That they had this special molding sand--



they made the molds and then they poured the hot metal. And of course that didn't last more than a few years. But the Asprells also had a wheelwright shop, you know, with it and that was the Rhodes.

Q. That was the Rhodes Company, you mean?

A. No. In my time it was Mr. George Rhodes.

Q. That was Rhoads, like the tanning company in Wilmington? They were tanners in Wilmington.

A. I would have spelled it Rhodes but I don't know, I might have been wrong. And one of his cousins was Mr. Smoky Rhodes who was the fireman on an ocean-going tug, and he was quite a character. He had started by firing on the Clio and he was--got enough coal dust on him to be called Smoky. And he hired his own fireman--he was the engineer at that time. And the last I heard of him he was traveling with the firemen on a motorcycle and they didn't know how to stop the thing--they could shove it out of gear but the only way Mr. Rhodes could get on was to hop on the moving motorcycle and he was doing that. And he had a fireman who was struck by heat once and he became unconscious so Mr. Rhodes--no doctor near--he had some liniment handy so he poured some of this down the man's throat and he said it brought him upstanding. (Laughter) Now, you don't know what kind of liniment that was.

Q. Probably it was 90 proof.

A. Well, I don't know whether it's got red pepper in it or what.

Q. It could have been apple jack.

A. Well, it would have suited both Mr. Rhodes and the fireman if it had of been. But when he came to town he always came down to buy

one or two pen knives because we had knives that were, I think they were a quarter apiece, and two blades. Now earlier than that there had been the old IXL knife and you know, it was made in England and it had--they call it the bolster--it was metal.

Q. What was the bolster--is that the handle or the blade?

A. It's the guard, you know. Now, the old IXL sold for 15¢ come the first World War and then it went out of sight.

Q. Why? Just after the war all prices went high.

A. Well, the factory probably went into war work, you know.

Q. So he bought two pen knives, did he?

A. He would buy two at a time. One so he could lose one and still have one. But they would maybe to Boston and go around in the ocean. He was a very interesting man.

Q. But he came home here. This was his home.

A. His sister lived here, his parents had lived here.

Q. Did everyone--I asked you about people having horses and you said if they had money they had horses, but in the early days, in the 1850's for instance, almost everyone had help, didn't they? What about in the late 1800's. People in Odessa, you were usually able to have some sort of domestic help.

A. Yes. My grandmother--she didn't have help regularly, but when she needed help--the house cleaned--there was always somebody that could be had. And my grandfather wasn't able to mow the lawn and after I got big enough I did. But before that--and then if the chimney needed some work there was always a colored man that wasn't a regular bricklayer but he knew enough to do the work. And the same way with his garden. The first asparagus I remember was my

grandfather's patch and it looked very pretty, you know, in the early morning with the dew on it. And my grandfather one time visited his brother in Kansas and he reported that they raised elegant gooseberries, much superior to ours here, but he said their strawberries can't compare to ours. He had strawberries, gooseberries, (currents?) currents--

Q. I remember seeing currents when we visited Aunt Mary Watkins when I was a little girl.

A. Yes, well, father had current bushes and my uncle did, too.

Q. I don't think we see them much any more.

A. No. Well, I raised gooseberries for a time but Margaret--I would pick them, she would give them away right away. And then the bugs would get on them. So I stopped raising them.

Q. What about Sunday evening--what about entertainment in Odessa? You certainly never had any movie house--

A. Oh, well--it was before you were born--but the old Chautauqua, now it came around every year and it lasted three days and there were two performances a day, afternoon and evening.

Q. Where did they set up their shop, where did they have it?

A. They had it in the old Town Hall, and it was also a local company. Several persons, you know, had shares in it and it was put up for a place to have entertainments in. Now they would start the day off in the afternoon with a lecture which I didn't care for, but then they would have singing and music and--

Q. Did they come by train?

A. To the best of my knowledge, they did.

Q. And then what would they have in the evening? Dancing?

A. They would start off with a show of some kind. Now one time they

had a magic show, another time they had a trained bird act. It was called Amahascas Trained Birds. And I saw it once years later and that was up in a park in Pennsylvania and it was no doubt the same--couldn't have been the same birds, but--

Q. That was a different kind of thing. I don't think I've ever seen that on television--trained birds. I guess I have seen trained falcons or parrots. Is that what it was? WERE they falcons or parrots?

A. As I recall--I would call 'em parrots, but I think they called 'em parakeets.

Q. The little budgies.

A. Well, they were the size of a parrot.

Q. So they came for three days every year, about.

A. Yes. Now, they had to have several citizens that would guarantee to sell a certain number of tickets. And your aunt, Miss Watkins, was one. Mr. Corbit was another. Father was a third. And it slips my mind.

Q. In other words they came in because they knew that those three days would be profitable.

A. Yes, but they had to be guaranteed of enough ticket sale before they would come. And I think the last time they had some trouble getting a guarantee. We usually <sup>attended</sup> ~~ended~~ the Sunday School picnic at the piers. And we would rent a carriage from Lee Orrell and very often his wife, Miss Annie Orrell, would drive.

Q. How was that name spelled?

A. Orrell. Now, he and the Longs were related and that's how he had first come about. And then later he had gotten into competition

with the Longs for carrying the mail. Now, that only amounted to less than \$1000 a year and they had to make about four trips a day.

Q. Where were they making the trips? To Delaware City?

A. To Middletown.

Q. Get the mail in Middletown and bring it over? Four trips a day? That was good mail service.

A. A mail from here to Middletown at 7:00. There was a mail to here at 9:00. Then there was another trip at 3:00. Then we got the evening mail about 5:00 or half past. And about half of the town would be--around Christmas--would be up at the Post Office waiting for the mail.

Q. You had better mail service then than we do now.

A. Oh, much better.

Q. So the mail that would come from any other place for Odessa would go to Middletown and Odessa would pick it up.

A. I believe that the mail carrier got the mail at the train and took it to the Middletown Post Office and then brought the Odessa mail on over. Now, around Christmas time the Post Office would have to keep open until the last mail got in and sometimes that would be 7:00.

Q. Well, the Odessa Post Office was in the store, <sup>is</sup> ~~was~~ that not correct?

A. It was in the 1890's. Now, one of the earliest postmistresses I remember was Miss Emma Echols. She married Mr. Frank Reynolds later and she is still living at the state home and hospital in Smyrna. And she's in her 90's now. Now, the mail could carry

passengers and the fare was 25¢ to Middletown and return. But if you got on the train it was 50¢.

Q. So people wanted to hop on Mr. Orrell's wagon.

A. Well, very often they did.

Q. Oh, when was the oyster shell road between Odessa and Middletown--the road that was an oyster bed?

A. It was never a whole road, it was the approaches to town.

Q. The rest of the road was a dirt road. Well, why did they put the oyster shells down on the approach to town?

A. To fill in a muddy strip, you know. Now, pebbles or stone would have done, but they'd get a load of oyster shells. And the causeway the same way.

Q. We just used them because they were plentiful--probably, maybe cheaper than getting the stone? You think?

A. I'm sure that was it. I remember they got a big load of oyster shells from--for the causeway once and it had enough scrap iron in it that us boys would sit down on the bridge abutments on Sunday and see a car coming and bet each other will it make it across the oyster shells or will it have a flat tire?

Q. It got the flat tires because it had the scrap in it? (Yes) Wasn't that interesting?

A. It might have been for us but it wasn't for the motorists.

Q. What was the first garage in Odessa? After the automobile came in.

A. The Annis boys. And Mr. Webb. He charged \$5.00 a month and our first Model-T we put in his garage. He always kept his own car in good shape. And he later moved it up on the highway--you know McNattsville. But he was around originally behind the bank

on High Street on a lot that Mr. Sharp now owns. And right next to him was the Lightcap house.

Q. What about the new Callaway Memorial Library? Who were the Callaways?

A. They came from down the state and he came for a salesman for Texaco

Q. But was her family from around here? I thought you mentioned something about Mrs. Callaway's mother, or something.

A. I never knew any of her family. Now, Margaret can tell you more. Mrs. Callaway went to Delaware College and I think she was about in Grace's class.

Q. That would have been the class of about 1923 or 24.

A. Probably, yes. But he was a fellow from downstate and of course--

Q. Well, did they give the Library?

A. Mrs. Callaway gave the Library in memory of him after his death.

Q. What about the Findleys in Odessa? Perhaps you better mention them.

A. Well, Mrs. Findley of course (She was an Asprell), she was Mr. Leonard Vandergrift Asprell's daughter. Now, Mr. Asprell, he was the son of Asprell and he was related to the Vandergrifts, of course, his mother would have been, and he was a cousin of

Q. grandfather's. And that was an old Quaker family. We need to tell the people a hundred years from now who hear this--the Vandergrifts were Quakers early, weren't they? When they came to this country--

A. Indeed I don't know.

Q. I think they were Quakers. And then they went to the Presbyterian Church later, but they were Quakers.

- A. I doubt that they were very religious, really.
- Q. No, they weren't, I think. Mary Shallcross Ferguson said that. They really didn't go to church. A lot of those early people didn't, in the early 1900's. They didn't go to church on Sunday the way most people do, or many people do today. Isn't that right?
- A. Mr. Corbit over here--he wouldn't--now Mr. D.W. he was in the Presbyterian Church, took an active part, but Mr. Dan, he said--he would say after the Sunday service that he'd gone to Quaker Meeting--well, he'd sat right still on his front porch--and he had held the whole meeting. It was a kind of a joke.

Today the time of this interview is January 28th, 1977.

Thank you very much, Mr. Davis.