This interview is with Charles Cauthorn of 116 West Hortter Street is part of the ora1 history project of West Mt.Airy Neighbors in conjunction with the Germantown Historical Society. **The interviewer is Gregory Woods, on June 22. 1992.**

My name is Charles Cauthorn and I live at 116 West Hortter Street. I was born in 1916 and raised on Stafford Street in Crermantown. I went to the Hill School, Roosevelt Junior High School, and Gratz High School. My parents came here from Virginia. My father was from Essex County and I can't remember my mother's county. They came looking for work. My mother's maiden name was Jenny Myers. She had ten children. We had a lot of fun, beautiful times together. Ten kids and the neighbors' kids.

What was your block like? Was it integrated?

A multi-racial block. We had Italians, Irish, colored people (they were known as colored people then), and some Jewish people. Plain working people, but no wealthy people. My father did landscape gardening. He took care of people's lawns and gardens and stuff like that. He would work for people who had money. These people who he worked for were mostly in classy neighborhoods. They lived on West Tulpehocken Street and West Chelten Avenue. He only worked for about eight people. One lady owned an apartment house. One man (I believe his name was Mr. Pierce) had a huge house on Tulpehocken Street—he was a wealthy man. There was a doctor who lived on E. Claelten Ave. All of these people were wealthy people. They were close to our house. One thing that I often wonder about… strangest thing was that my father was a landscape gardener and he did not have enough money to get a truck. I wonder about how he managed to carry all his tools on a wheelbarrow, including his lawn mower and other material. He waltzed all the way from Stafford Street back and forth. He kept his tools in our basement. He carted those things up and down the street and I just wonder how in the world did he do this?

Did you ever help him?

There were five boys in our family. When we got larger he would have the older boys help him cut the grass and do the heavy stuff. He would make me read by having me pull grass out between bricks. Bricks were very prominent then. They were used for pavements and they were very artistic. It was just the thing to do in those days. Germantown Avenue was made of Belgian blocks. Some places they will never remove them especially Chestnut Hill. The street that I lived on had a bad house. It was a place where they made liquor. There was the Whosoever Gospel Mission—a place for homeless people. It was there when I was a kid and it's been there for over 70 years. There was a saloon on the corner. I used to get money by selling bottles. I used to get two or three cents a bottle depending on if the bottle was a pint or quart. 1 would get these empty bottles when the guys threw them away.

How old were you when you were doing that?

I was seven or eight years old. I wasn't allowed to go into the bar, but that was the way I got my pay.

What did you spend your pennies on?

Candy, ice cream, cake and any other thing kids love. I used to love bananas. I also used to haul ice for people in my wagon with wheels.

Where was the icehouse?

Three blocks away at Armat Street and Baynton Street — a man named Mr. Hill.

Did they hire lots of kids from the neighborhood?

I don't how about lots. Sunday morning was a big day for selling ice. I used to go there and work at the icehouse and I would give taffy out to the kids and I would get my share. The kids would come with their parents. At that time there weren't many refrigerators except in wealthy homes. Ice at the box. [?????]

Your block was really integrated. Did you play with the other kids? Did you go into their houses?

Yes, We went into each other's houses nearly every day just about. Most of my companions were Italians. We interrelated whatever and we had lots of fun. At that time I don't think people paid as much attention to race as they do today. Today it's a big thing. It was like we were in a big box and everybody knew each other. I knew everybody and everybody knew me. O e thing I wish for today is you had to respect anyone who was older than you. You had to behave because Mrs. Jones could spank your behind and when you got home you could expect another spanking because she would tell your mom or dad. Those things no longer exist. But it kept the children.[???] Another thing that was very important, streets were small and there were houses in front of that called Price Street—the backs of their houses ran into street that we were on. There was one family on that street called McHenry. He was an attorney. He was Irish and his son did not have anyone to play with. There weren't many Irish people to play with. He would come get us to play with him. He had a high wooden seven-foot fence. We would go back there and play ball. Hit balls and play tennis. He was allowed to bring us in to play ball at certain times of the day because he had no companions to play with. His father had a colored chauffeur and a colored maid. We thought that they had money. They also had a car. They brought their car off of street on which we lived. They had this driveway and garage and entered on the street we lived, on Stafford Street. They entered the front door of the house on Price Street. There was an undertaker on the street, Mr. Hayes. They just moved ln the last 15 years. OIC took over that place and made a branch place out of it.

St Vincent's Church is on the corner of Price and Lena Streets. At that time we were not Catholics. My parents were Baptists. We went to Mt. Zion Baptist Church, which is still there on Rittenhouse Street. That is where we had to go every Sunday just like we went to regular school. We went to Sunday school regularly without any question. You got up on Sunday morning and took your one pair of shoes and shined them up and got the little clothes you had and you went to Sunday school. Your parents would give you a nickel or a dime to put in Sunday school and when you would think your parents weren't aware of it you would take part of it and buy some penny candy from a store near the church.

How was your house set up?

We had a three-story house with four bedrooms. I often wonder how we managed that with so many people in it. The house is now torn down. At that time railroad ran across the street. They had gates across the street and a man would wind it down when a train would come. They would stop traffic and let the train go by. When I was about 14 years old we had to move because the railroad bought the property and put a bridge there, which is there now. We moved to Duval Street. On Stafford Street I shared a room with two brothers. Three of us were in one bedroom. I was number six of ten children. There

were three older boys and two older girls that is why I came in number six. All the older ones are gone. The rest of us are still here.

Are most of your siblings living in Germantown too, or did they move out of the city?

One sister in New York, one grandniece in Atlanta, Georgia, one niece in California, one niece in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The rest are in the Philadelphia area.

Were things different when you moved to Duval Street? Different setting, were the neighbors different?

Yes, they were different because at that time only certain blocks had colored people living in thein, only some blocks were integrated. For example, when we lived on Duval Street, from McCallum Street to Greene Street was where colored people lived. On the other side of Greene Street there were no Black people. There was an unwritten line but it was still there. There were certain areas of Germantown where many Blacks lived, such as Pulaskitown. Where I lived they called it… I don't think they had a name.

Did they call it Dogtown?

No, Dogtown was up at Sharpnack Street and Weaver Street- that was called Dogtown. There was another area called Brickyard. That was at Collum Street and Ashmead Street. We lived in the in-between area. I don't think they had a name for our area. Price Street, Baynton Street, Strafford Street, Rittenhouse Street, Haines Street, High Street, and Lena Street. The colored people and Italian people were very prominent in this area. The Italian people, when someone died, they would have a parade and have someone carry a large statue of the Lord or the Virgin Mary. Some people would fasten money to it as they passed through the streets. We did not think of it in terms of someone who had passed away. We would go out and watch it. Most of the time it happened on weekends—on Saturday. It was a big day for the kids. They would celebrate. Isn't that what the good book says, celebrate? Rejoice?

They would always have big parades too, Fourth of July, Memorial Day, and Flag Day. They always had parades in Germantown, oh yes. Different organizations marched, different posts, American Legions, V.F.W. Mostly it was your people [whites].. At that time I don't think we had any bands. Except the Elks and Masonic organization. They had bands, but they only participated in the large parades that they had downtown. They would not bother coming to Germantown. They were just small units, maybe just one or two bands and there were lots of marching people. To the kids it was a big deal.

The Italian people who lived in that neighborhood were poor just like the rest of us. They did not have a lot of money and since then they have all migrated and I don't know what is in that street now, but I knew at that time everyone had their nice own little old houses, clean, you did not have a whole lot materially. I never missed a meal except when 1 was bad. My dad might say, "Go to bed without your supper" instead of whipping me. But ł got a few of them too. He was very strict, very insistent that you do what was right, especially that you obey older people. Yes, my father was so strict; it didn't matter what he would spank you with. You just knew you were supposed to do what he said. I remember getting one whipping with the frying pan. Yes, when I got older I thought my father had a lot of nerve calling me over and saying, "Come here, pull your pants down, boy, get across my knee," and I was kind of crazy to do that wasn't I? No, I wasn't. I did what I was supposed to do. He wanted us to do what he thought was right. My parents were not educated. I don't know what education they had, if any. The biggest thing I knew was they were both church people. They both insisted on that. At that time that was the important thing in colored people's lives—the church. I

was baptized at Mt. Zion.

Where you an acolyte there?

No, There are no acolytes in the Baptist church. You have them in Catholic Church and Episcopalian Church. That is where I go now. Our son now is an acolyte at Saint Luke's Church down at Germantown Avenue and Coulter Street—my son is head of the acolytes there. I never went to an Episcopal Church because they were a little straight. Being brought up in a Baptist Church it was more emotional because our people are very emotional people anyway.

Can you name any of the pastors of the church?

Yes, Reverend Winston the founder of Mt. Zion Baptist Church on West Rittenhouse Street. Along after him came Reverend Lamb and Reverend Jackson. I left them after Reverend Jackson. In fact, Reverend Jackson married me the second time.

The first time I got married we eloped to Elkton, Maryland. It was considered the capital in the East of eloping people. If you got anywhere near that town people on the roadside would lead you to a minister. The fellow who helped you would be your witness. You paid the fee and the fellow who helped you would share in the money. Everybody knew about it. I was about 19 years old or 20 — what did I know about anything. I did not have any money, but I got married. I married a girl five years younger than me. I must have been 20 and I was in love and did not care.

How did you get down there?

I had an old piece of car.

What kind of car?

Little Ford Roadster, six-wheels job and I thought I was the cat's meow. Six white wire wheels, no five wheels—what am I talking about. Had a rumble seat too and I thought I was the cat's meow. I had a little piece of job at a tailor's shop at Wayne Avenue and Walnut Lane. Then I got another job malting a little more money.

You went to the Hill School?

Yes, elementary school. Went there to the sixth grade. I left there and went to Roosevelt Junior High School.

What was Hill School like?

Hill Elementary School ran from kindergarten to sixth grades. It was all colored teachers, no white teachers. Everybody in the school was colored - everybody. The administrators outside the school were all white. The principal of the school was a colored woman — Roland I think that was her name. We had some good teachers there and we had some teachers who did not take any foolishness from us. At that time teachers were permitted to give you a little thrashing if you misbehaved in class. I got a few myself. What did kids do? Especially boys when they are young—anything that they are not supposed to do they do. If they tell you not to talk in class you talk anyway. I remember one whipping I got. We had a new teacher. His name was Aiconetti, Gerald Ainonetti. He introduced to the school what he called the Johnson Bar. He had this bar 30 inches long 1 ½ to 2 inches wide, ½ inch thick, and smooth and sanded down like ice. He called it the Johnson Bar. He whipped the guys who got out of line with it.

Why did he call it the Johnson?

I don't how and I did not care what he called it, because he hit me with it a few times and I know I did not like being hit with it. They wanted you to learn. This was very important to them at that time. The gentleman I was telling you about, Mr. [Jack] Jones [another of the interviewees] is the most intelligent man there is. But he is self-educated. He reads any and everything that is available, even at 80 years old. His first job after he eats in the morning is that he goes out and buys the *New York Times* newspaper and reads it. I never read that paper, because it too thick and the biggest thing I want to read is the sports news. He read the financial pages and all that stuff. He can tell you anything you want to know about Germantown. Like we were talking about the type of stores on Germantown Avenue. Someone made the remark that there were no Jewish merchants there. We had to laugh at that because most of those merchants there were Jewish.

Was this when you were in high school?

No, this was when we were kids before we moved from Stafford Street — Irish merchants, Jewish, and some Italians, but most of them were Jewish. From Germantown Avenue and Chelten Avenue which was the center spot, there were the drug store, paint store, hardware store, grocery store, and the meat store — Girard Beef store, they just sold out two years ago. They had been there for over 70 years. That was about the only store that was original. Everything else has changed.

When did the Jewish businesses move out?

I can't really say. Haberdashery, shoe store, and a men's store. I can't remember their names — they were all Jewish. This one family owned about three stores. It was a family affair. Then there was the Proper store run by Jewish people — it was like a small department store. Then was a paint store I think called Henning's paint store? Then there was the McCrea and Hunter, which was a grocery, vegetables, and fruit store. We used to run by there and grab apples and keep running. That was right across from Vernon Park. Right on the corner across the street from Vernon Park at Price Street where there is an empty lot now, there was a coal yard, I think it was called Newton's Coal Yard. Right in back of it there is a place you can see where cars could come in an dump coal in bins. Kids from Stafford Street would come over and play in freight cars that load sand in them. We would play a game of jumping in and out of these cars. I can't remember the name of this game.

We didn't have many toys. The only ones who might have toys would be kids whose parents worked for the Postal Service. At that time a postal clerk was considered a big job. They were not making big money, but it was considered a big job. There were a few policemen and the guys that were chauffeurs. Chauffeurs would come by in their uniform, caps and they had the people's cars that they were driving. They were sharp, but we did not use such words as sharp then!

Vernon Park was different then. The place now called Center in the Park was a library. That is where we went to get our books. The Hill School that we went to was just around the corner on Rittenhouse Street. I was a very avid reader. I read books like *[The Three] Musketeers, The Knights of the Round Table* and Sir Galahad and those other great knights. I would fantasize about being a knight. I remember going to the library many times and getting two or three books and reading them that same day and taking them back the same day. The librarian said, "You just can't do that, bring back the books the same day." I said, "I read the books." She said, "You must keep it out a least one day even if you did read it." I felt she didn't think I read the books. She was a real nice woman. She just didn't want me doing that, I guess. I was just a great dreamer. When I

wasn't playing, I guess I would be reading books.

Did you go out and see movies?

At that time there were only five movie theaters in Germantown. The colored people could only sit in certain parts of the theater. At the Upsal Theatre, colored people sat in the right-hand corner with a brass pole separating the people. The pole was moved when more people showed up. At the Germantown Theatre you had to sit in the balcony, at the Colonial Theatre you had to sit in the balcony, Orian Theatre you had to sit in the balcony, and at the Manheim Theatre it did not matter because it was located where a lot of colored people were. The Manheim was located at Manheim and Germantown. My brothers and I was very lucky. We were light complexioned. When we went to the theatre with the Italian boys we did not go upstairs but we would sit with the Italian boys downstairs. The dark-colored kids had to sit upstairs in the balcony or they didn't go.

Did the people treat you differently because you were of lighter skin?

Yes, of course they did. At that time lighter-skinned people were considered better off as a person or better than the darker ones. It was not true. It was very stupid but that is way we looked at things in those days. I don't know what else to say.

What high school did you go to? Did you play sports?

Simon Gratz High School. I did not play sports. I stayed to myself most of the time. I should have played. I played in the streets and I wasn't bad. I sometimes I wished I could have done well. I often wish I had and I didn't. I loved all sports, especially football.

Did you play football in the streets?

Yes, when we moved front Stafford Street to Duval Street. We would play almost every day at Duval and Ambrose Streets. We would play touch football. The houses were about 30 yards apart. You had to touch the person with both hands. When you pushed the person with both hands you had to watch out you did not hit your head on the curb if you fell. We had fun times playing football in the streets.

Was the group integrated?

No, there were no whites. This was strictly a colored neighborhood. Duval Street, Pomona, and Ambrose were strictly colored. There were a few whites in the unit block of Duval Street. I don't thinly there were any in the one hundred or two hundred blocks. If they were, they were down close to Greene Street. There was another street called Burbridge Street which is between Greene Street and McCallum Street, which was all white and had very few kids on it. There were a couple of young pretty white ladies on that block. McCallum Street was mixed. Between Johnson and Washington Lane down to Harvey Street I think was all white. Harvey Street to Rittenhouse Street on McCallum Street was practically all colored. That was right to the school. Harvey Street was all white except Dr. Warrick. Dr. Warrick, Jr., was the only colored on Harvey Street.

Was he there because he was a doctor?

Yes, he was there because he was a doctor. They did not mind him moving there because he was a doctor. They did not want a painter or laborer there.

How would they keep you front moving onto an all-white block?

The same as they do today. Block you out. Just like they do today. If they didn't want colored in a certain block until that law came out they would block you out. But they still do it occasionally. They have those blockbusters. I would not want to be a blockbuster.

You couldn't deal with that?

No, because you have to fight sometime.

First one on the block?

You had to fight or take all the insults all the time. Or until someone says let's not do that anymore. I am not that lind of per son. I am like brother King. Dr. Martin Luther King — peace, brother, peace. I think it's better that way.

When did you get your first job?

My last job I worked for a shop while I was still in high school. I told you about it before. Jewish fellow had a tailor's shop at Walnut Lane and Wayne Avenue. I worked there on weekends and after school. I think my salary was eight dollars a week. Of course I got tips. All that I did was to carry clothes and clean out pants beforehand to make sure they didn't leave marks or dents when pressed. That was my biggest job at that time. Eight dollars a week wasn't bad at that time. Some grownups were only getting 25 dollars a week.

Did that leave time to study and things?

I did not do any studying after I left the sixth grade. I did not want to study. I was lazy mentally. Had the ability, but would not pursue anything.

Did you have a choice to where you could have attended high school?

Yes, I should have gone to Germantown High School. I did not want to go to Germantown High School because they would have made me study. Germantown High School was considered one of the best high schools in the city. Only the good students went there. That is why I went to Simon Gratz. I went to Simon Gratz because they had what you called industrial courses. Industrial courses had a lot of work with your hands stuff, like carpentry, auto mechanics, and sheet metal works and stuff like that and I like do things with my hands so that is why I went there. My major was auto mechanics. Today the only thing I could do would be to pull a spark plug or change a tire. That's about all of my auto mechanic ability but later I did something else. I went to plumbing school and became a plumber. That is way up the road.

Were you still living at home?

Yes, until I got married I could live at home — after that too many people. Three of the oldest brothers were married and did not live at home and my youngest brother was there. All my sisters were there. My oldest sister had married and was separated from her husband. I couldn't stay there with my wife. I stayed with my mother in-law for two or three years. Then we had a baby. We had one daughter and soon after that I left. The young lady that I had married, we had a problem and I left and soon after that, I took my little self and went into the service.

What where you doing when you first got married?

I was working for a family by the named of Holts.[spelling?] He was an exterminator. He used to take care of large estates in Narberth and Bryn Mawr and out on the Main Line area. He took care of them. I did the driving and all the labor work.

Was that good money?

No, it wasn't good. It was a job. It paid about 15 or 20 dollars a week. Then when the old man Holts passed, some friend of their by the name of Klein—this man was vice-president of a shipping company. They had a home up in Chestnut Hill Avenue. I went there and became a butler, chauffeur, and general maintenance man around the house.

Did you live there in the house?

Yes, I lived there. His office was down on Fourth Street in the Bourse Building.

How long were you there?

About four years. We finally went to New York and they ask me to go with them. I told them ok, but they would have to give me a raise because I was smart enough to know things were higher there. She said they couldn't afford it, so I said I couldn't go. I don't know what I did after that, but I do know I did not go to New York.

Did you feel that you faced a lot of discrimination when you were looking for jobs? Were your choices limited?

Yes, Of course they were very limited, but in those days you really look- did not look at it in that sense. The discrimination was there. You just accepted it. You did not pay too much attention to it. When you got older you really realized that many things you might have done or could have done you did not get the opportunity to do them. You accepted what you had and went along with it. It wasn't until after the war that I really realized what discrimination was.

When did you go into the service?

I went in in 1942 and got out in 1946. I was drafted. I went first to work for the Frankford Arsenal, which was a government agency that made weapons. When they called you up, you had to go. I worked for the Frankford Arsenal from 1942 to 1944. Then I was called into the service. I came out in December of 1946. I was in there for 33 months.

What unit were you in?

I went into the artillery. My job was to bring down low-flying aircraft. At that time, Blacks were only in certain areas. I became a gunner. A gunner's job was to direct the person—the weapons were controlled by a person called a range finder. Guns were under automatic control — all you had to do was put the right figures in them. I first I became a gunner, then I became a range setter. That is to set range for how far and how high the weapons would go. I was trained in Camp Steward, Georgia — this was the camp that we went to for training.

Was it an all-colored company?

Of course. There were no mixed companies then. The only whites there were officers. All the officers were white. The non-commissioned officers were Black. All the non-commissioned officers were Black, and the rest of the men were Black. This was true

even after I went overseas, with at least the unit I was in. Before we went overseas, they cancel our [orders] that we were under and shipped us to Camp Lee, Virginia. This is where we learned how to drive trailers, semi-trailers, and trucks. This was known as the Red Ball Express in the World War II. This line of trailers and trucks carried all the ammunition and food from the rear to the front lines. We became a part of this unit. I never left camp. My job was to let the commanding officer know how many trucks were ready, what the status was of the rest of the vehicles. We had close to a hundred vehicles. That was my job. When I got out of service, I tried to get a job in that area, but all that time they were not accepting us in that area.

Where were you stationed?

I was in France and Germany.

You were right there with the troops.

The closest I got to the front lines was five miles. I was lucky. Ships brought in the supplies and the ships had to be unloaded at the docks. The supplies had to be taken to the battlefront. As I said before, my job was to see that we had X number of trucks running all the time. I got one rating while I was there; I became a T-sergeant. It was much. I tried out for OCS (Officers Candidate School) but unfortunately for me, a young man beat me out. He had a higher average than me; also he was a high-school graduate. I never graduated from Gratz High School. I stopped in 11th grade. I could have finished, but my dad got ill and I stopped and went to work. I got some kind of job and I never went back to school. I started back once or twice a week, but I never finished.

What about discrimination in the service?

When I came back from the service, I was more aware of it than when I went in the service. I saw more of it in the service. I saw it from the officers. I did not have any dealing with white enlisted men. When we went overseas, there was some bad things being said about the Black troops. One thing was we had tails. White troops put this out because the Black troops were making out with the women over there and they did not like it. In England there was a saying- be careful of the Black troops at night because their tails came out.

Who started something like that?

Not the officers, but the regular, white soldiers. For some reason, many of the Black soldiers became very popular with girls over there. White soldiers did not like this because all of the girls were white. I could understand them feeling this way- this was normal. We had many fights over this, but I never got involved in it. I stayed so much to myself, but my brother could tell you a lot about this because he almost brought a French girl back to the States. He never told me too much about it, but he did mention it a couple of times. I know he had girls and he had fun over there. I was a church person and I was always involved with the church. We had no minister because we were out in the field. There were eight units and one chaplain, and he went from unit to unit. We might not see him for maybe six months. I used to hold services on Sunday with another soldier and he did very well. And later he became a minister, but I never did pursue it. They used to call me Rev. in the company. It used to make me feel good when we were sitting around in the company and some of the soldiers started to curse. They would say "Can't you see the Rev. sitting there?" It made me feel good to know they thought enough of me to stop cursing. That was funny to me. But I enjoyed it. I only had one problem. I challenged a first sergeant. I told him he was nothing but a pantywaist, or

words to that effect. He was a six-footer who had played football at Morgan State University. This is a colored university down in Maryland. I don't know if he had reported me to the C.O. or not, but the Captain was a Greek. He called me in and told me he should get this First Sergeant to take me to back of the house over there and beat the hell out of me. You know I didn't say anything because there was no way I could beat the sergeant unless I had a hammer in my hand. That was about the only way I had a chance. I guess the good Lord was looking after me. I laugh about it now, but I wasn't laughing then. I called him a chicken something. The captain was doing something I did not think he should be doing, and that reason why I called him that. At that time, the officer's word was law. If he said "jump," you jumped. It was good in some sense. It was experience.

Did the men see action on the front?

No, it was our job in trucking to make sure the supplies, food, ammunition, and gasoline got to the front line. It was our job to get them these supplies to fight with. We got a citation for this. I how that on the Berlin highway you could travel 85 to 100 miles an hour. They used that highway to get these supplies from the rear to the front lines. Fellows used to take a load of supplies up there and you wouldn't see them again for a month. They were smart too. They would get with some girl and you wouldn't see them again for a month and then they would come back.

Could you get away with that?

Yes. They would shack up for a while and then they would come back. They got away with this. A lot of times I would lie and made our reports look good on paper.
I think that is why I got my stripe. I was a corporal. Sometimes we had only forty vehicles available and I would report having seventy. I got an extra stripe for lying good. I am sorry I did not go to OCS but I don't know where I would have landed. This way I stayed in the background. I got close enough to the front lines to hear the big guns boom and flashes in the sky. I was never shot at or ever shot anyone. I am glad of that because I had no desire to kill anyone. I remember one of the fellows saying to me, hey Rev., what would you do if someone shot at you? I said, "I'd do the same as you, I would shoot back, Rev. or no Rev." It was quite an experience. If I had to do it over again I would do it quite different. I would take advantage of every opportunity that came to advance myself in every respect. I think education is a very important item to everybody. In those days we did not stress it too much. Maybe they did not have enough money to send kids to school. But a large amount of our parents were not educated. They did not realize the advantage of education. Like I said about Mr. Jones — people like him realize what education could do. He was nothing but a Post Office worker, he worked in the Post Office but he was tremendously intelligent. Come to think of it, one of my older brothers was a very good student of books. He could read booths on psychology, stuff I wouldn't even think of reading. But he lacked one thing that I had: common sense. He was not very much into that. He played the banjo for 40 years and could play almost any instrument. But he did not do anything with it. He had the book sense and I had the common sense. He had the ability but did not do anything with it.

What happened when you came back from the war?

I went back to the Frankford Arsenal, but first I try to get a job as dispatcher at United Parcels and other places like that, but they were not accepting us in those jobs. So I went back to the Arsenal. First I became a chauffeur who drove trucks with supplies to the different buildings. There were 48 buildings in this vast complex. They loaded boxes with loaded and empty shells on those trucks and you had to take them to the different buildings. This was dangerous work and you had to be careful when driving these

trucks. You tried not to make sparks when you were in this area. After that I became a clerk. It was a job taking care of time cards and other duties supervisor wanted me to do. I got tired of that because I wasn't getting anywhere. I saw on the bulletin board that they were offering school for people interested in becoming proficient in trades jobs. I chose plumbing school. You had to go eight hours a day for four years. It was just like going to school outside, 8,000 hours. We got less money, but you gain it back later. I graduated in 1959 and I been doing plumbing ever since.

Do you feel that there were more job opportunities after the war?

Yes, of course there were. Because the colored solders would not take no for an answer. President Truman was talking about everybody getting a fair shake. You know all of that didn't go through. It did get a lot better. There were many colored who got decent jobs after that. I got a better job. I certainly made more money as a plumber than as a clerk.

Who paid for- the training?

The government paid for it. But in a sense you paid for it. The job you had before you started you only got two dollars an hour and every six months you got an increment. By the time you graduated you were doing fairly decent. It took 8,000 hours or four yearns to go to school and every six months you got a raise. As long as you stayed in the school you had no problem. When you came back you got a raise. You became an apprentice plumber. After a certain period time, if the supervisor thought so, you got raised to plumber. I kept that until the Arsenal closed down, in 1977.

Do you remember and of the politics in Germantown when you were growing up and later on?

I remember one thing for sure. If you were not a Republican you were in trouble.

Was it machine politics?

Yes, Absolutely. The Democrats now have been power for over 40 years. The Republicans were in power for over 60 years. I became Republican. I said those people are the ones you had to see to get something done. Then I am a Republican. You can join any party you want and vote for any one you want. I have been a registered Republican ever since then. But I don't vote Republican. I vote for whoever I like. I don't care what party they belong to. If I think you are a good person, you can get my vote. I don't care what you look like or you are who struck John. If I think you are a good person, man or woman, I will vote for you. If I think you will do a good job, brother, you will get my vote.

Where there any political leaders living in your neighborhood?

Yes, We were living on Duval Street and there was a man named Murphy. He was Irish gentleman and he was called a ward leader. He had two men working under him; they were colored. They got handouts doing election time. They would give him a little bit of money to throw out during the election time. We called these men flunkies. One of these men who name was Reed. That was around 1931. I was 14 years old and he and another lady was the only two colored people with cars on the block. I will never forget him.

Where there connections with the Republican Party had any reason for that?

No, I don't think that was reason. I think they had little more money to buy something. He was one of Mr. Murphy's flunkies. He was a Republican. At least that was they said they did. At that time Democrats were not in good shape. Later a lot of people changed to the Democratic Party. I never switch.

Would your father or mother accept money from Mr. Murphy?

My father and mother was very religious people, church people. I don't think my father would do anything wrong if he could help it. He was a simple man, honest, nothing fancy, straight-forward. My father biggest thing he did when he came home at night was to have a big rocking chair brought out to near the curb. Get his chewing tobacco (brown mule) and apple. We had to go to the store and get it. He would spit his chewing tobacco into the street or into the spittoon. That was it until he went to bed. He did not have any other recreation that I can think of. But with all those kids I guess he was just tired.

Did the church take any active role in politics?

No, not in those days. If they did it was subtle. Not like it is today. I guess that is why I feel the church today should not have anything to do with politics. I feel no minister should have anything to do with politics. Politics is crooked. If you get involved in politics you can't be straight, that why you can't be a minister. I don't care what anyone says, politics is crooked. If you want to be a politician you cannot be straight. A minister is supposed to be straight now. That man who is coming to town, Billy Graham, Reverend Billy Graham. He wears $200 shoes and $500 suit. You going to tell me he not? I heard him say the other day on TV he doesn't accept any salary when he comes to Philadelphia. Where does he get his money? He's a millionaire. They are going to have this big affair down at the stadium. Free to come in, but don't you think they're not going to have some great big baskets to pass around. They not getting that stadium for nothing. They must pay for that stadium.

Did everyone in your neighborhood feel like that? The people that you grew up with feel that way about politicians and politics?

Everyone thought politicians were crooks. A lot of them would not express it. I said you are a crook, you're a crook.

Was that just because of your experience?

I have seen enough to know. If you want things done you had to see certain people. If you didn't see them you did not get it. You take like when some kids would get in trouble. They would run to the committee person, who may have to go to the ward leader to get them out of jail. They had to do this kind of stuff, that the way it was. It the same way today. It no different. When I was coming up, many times I heard people say this. Committee people would be awaken all time of night, because someone's son got into trouble. The police would arrest them for some silly thing, like breaking a window or something stupid. The parents were worried and wanted them out of jail, so they would go see a committee person, who would call a ward leader, who would call a judge who would call a sheriff or person in charge of the jail and say, "Let that person out." That the way it worked. They did not have any money. You better remember I did you a favor.

Where there any hind of issues and problems?

Plenty of issues and problems. People as a whole did not pay much attention to it. They left it to the leaders to handle or so called leaders.

Who were the leaders in the Black Community when you were growing up?

Don't ask me, one man I mention before Mr. Reed. I don't remember too many others. Anybody who had a halfway decent job was consider a leader. The ministers were very much more prominent in the role of leaders in those days. The ministers were respected very highly then, not today. He was at the top in the colored race. All he had to do was to say he was a reverend. That would put him in a separate category. You are supposed to act right way if he say he is a minister. Or you would be in really big trouble. They were highly thought of in those days. The kids didn't think so, because they came around and ate up all the food.

Did they come around to people houses to eat, that you knew, deacons?

They usually came around to certain people, prestige people; I never remember a minister ever coming around to my house to eat. They couldn't have because there were too many people there. There wouldn't have been anything for him to eat.

The average person would follow the leaders?

Yes, ministers were the leaders. If a minister said something it was almost like law. If a minister said something that was it. Not today. People think a little more today for themselves. In those days, we accepted what they said in a sense. They were considered the leaders. They would not tell us anything that was wrong. Not today. People think a little more today for themselves. In those days we accept what they said in a sense because they consider the leader. They would not tell us or do anything which was wrong. So we believe what they said. If Reverend Jones said it, that was it. Not today, because people of today think if my brain is working so why should I accept what you say without diagnosing it.

Why do you think people changed?

People became more educated through education or personal studies because someone says something, it doesn't always make it so. You don't have to be wealthy to use your head. You can be poor and still think.

You didn't think the local leaders responded very well to the issues?

No, only to their benefit. That is nothing new. That true today and probably will always be that way.

Do you remember any Black businesses in Germantown?

Only Black business was the real-estate business by George Deane, later taken over by William Byrd at the same office. First homes for Blacks were building by William Byrd on East Upsal Street. They are still standing. They are still there. Mr. William Byrd was a real-estate agent and he bought and sold houses to our people.

Was he a developer?

They did not use that term in those days. He is the only one I can remember.

Catering business?

There weren't any in Germantown. There were catering business but none in

Germantown. In those days Blacks did most of the catering. Whites hire them to do their catering. Mr. Trower owns all those houses at Duval and Ambrose streets. These houses were three stories high. He also was a caterer. I don't know too much about this man. He had money. Jack Jones could give you more information about him.

Where does he live? What is that place where he lives?

Gwynedd, you go out Route 73. If you get the interview, you can ask his son how to get there.

After the war, did racial composition in the area change?

Yes, many people could move to areas that they could not live in before. People like postal, police and so called upper class started to move. Some had to be blockbusters. Until such time the government came out with this law against redlining. (Fair Housing Act) help to open up, too. One or two Blacks moving in they did not mind but when three or four or more they would move out.

What did you or your family thinks about Democrats coming in, when it had always been Republican administration?

I never thought much about it. They were trying to give everyone a job in W.P.A. We thought Roosevelt was a good president because he seem like he wanted to help everyone. I did not pay much attention to politics at that time.

Did you see the different from coming out of Depression? The changes, did he make a different in the way people were living?

Yes, he made some difference; he was starting a trend. Later it was enhanced by Truman, LBJ and John Kennedy until Reagan got in there. He turns everything all upside down. Now it almost like what it was before. His predecessor, Mr. Bush, he is no better.

What do you think about Germantown now as you walk through the streets?

No way the same way same as when I was a kid. When I was a kid you could walk around leave your front and back doors open. No one would bother anything. Hardy any crime was going on. The people trusted more people. Today you don't have that feeling. Mistrust is very much apparent thing today. That was not so when I was a kid. Most of it is due to circumstances. A lot of people don't have jobs, don't have money. Like I said before, the biggest thing we did was to run past a fruit stand and grab a banana or apple. That was the kind of stuff we did. But today with drugs and all the other crap, people don't react notwal. They don't think normal and they don't react normal. They don't do normal things. No one ever thought of killing anyone. Guns, what was that, something foreign. We didn't buy guns when we were kids.

Do you think it make a difference? Also education and the role of the church in the community now?

It definitely played a part in it. Church has always been a big thing with our people, but I don't think they have done all that it should. If it had some of the problems that we have would not be here.

Do think they could be moving away from the church?

Oh, definitely. Yes indeed. A lot of them move, because first of all just like I was saying about Billy Graham, he made be an OK guy, I don't know, but to me, if you walking around with a $50.00 tie and I got a $2.00 one, there something wrong. You are supposed to be helping me and you are not helping me by acting like a big shot and I got to be a little guy. I sit down here and you sit over there. No there have to be a difference. Charles, do you have someone else to interview today?

No.

Charles, I was going to say you are out of luck.

We can stop there now.

END.