

Vernon (Gordy) Lambert  
Personal Interview by Paul Harris and Helen (Ward) O'Connor  
25 May 1989  
Whiting, NJ

Tape 1A

- 003 Vernon posed for a cover of Colliers, 1920. The cover had several children on it but he posed for the artist for each child. (Charles McClellan)
- 025 Vernon married to Alma at Trinity Lutheran Church, Stapleton, Staten Island, NY, by Reverend Sutter, 10 Sep 1938. Jim Collett was his best man. He had asked Paul Harris, but he was unable.
- 038 Helen recognizes a dress in the wedding picture that she wore to her high school prom.
- 043 Honeymooned in Washington, DC with friends they met on the bus.
- 070 Harry Lambert was from Paulding County, OH. May have lived in Dayton and claimed to have played with the Wright brothers. His real name was Herkemer or something. Named after an uncle who had promised him a suit. Changed name to Harry because that is what somebody he worked for called him.
- 100 Harry Lambert had a brother named Bart and another brother.
- 115 Daughter, Patty, born 13 Dec 1939.
- 140 Vernon lived on Sand Street about one block from the house at 111 Prospect Street on Staten Island.
- 146 Place outside Pulaski, NY where Harry Lambert died, Orwell, NY.
- 158 Lost a baby (boy) at seven months. Alma in hospital with him for three months. Alma had appendicitis and went into labor after surgery.
- 164 High school in Weedsport, NY, eight miles from Montezuma.
- 170 Montezuma is thirty-two miles west of Syracuse and recalled as being a town of about 400.
- 193 Orwell, NY, where Harry Lambert died, is thirty-seven miles north of Syracuse.

- 197 Harry Lambert died the day before Election Day in 1965. Vernon and Alma voted on the way up to the funeral.
- 212 Harry Lambert's favorite expression, "I was born in the big woods of Ohio." Nearby was a glass factory and a saw mill. Wood sleigh ride on the sawdust pile with an old rocking chair.
- 225 Harry Lambert pushed a cart from Montezuma, NY to Staten Island (265 miles) in the month of September (?) and arrived with more money than he started with. Fixed cars, watches, mended awnings, etc. & camped with the cart.
- 238 Harry Lambert was a guy that you didn't let do anything. He left Staten Island because of high taxes. "When they think they're going to put their hand in my pocket..." He got out. Took a bus ride and bought house in Orwell, NY, Ethel's choice. She liked it there at first but later hated it. Too quiet, couldn't sleep.
- 251 "We lived in a theatrical neighborhood in Manhattan, 38th Street just off 7th Avenue. May Peters used to come over to visit and stay up all night watching the show in the street (drunks, etc.).
- 259 May Peters was Catholic.
- 269 Patty Lambert - Started writing early and talked of college, which Vernon took with a grain of salt. Good small school in Charleston. Valedictorian, eighth grade teacher like a second father, very praising and guiding.
- 288 ? Bement ? Avenue - long driveway - last place she lived (Ethel).
- 300 Patty living in Ann Arbor, MI. Her husband, Richard Stock, from Staten Island.
- 327 Reference to a photo of a model railroad setup on a 4 x 8 sheet of plywood that was later made into a chest or trunk in use in Vernon's bedroom.
- 330 Helen stopped in Orwell, NY on the way to visit us in Michigan, with Mike, Linda, and her three children and Dottie. Didn't sleep, parts of house seldom used, no heat, bugs.
- 346 "Billy" (Alma's brother?) drove Vernon and Alma up to Harry's one winter and while Vernon was gone to visit her mother in a nursing home. Harry, sitting in a rocking chair, told Billy a story and fell asleep while telling it. When he awoke, he continued right on with the story where he left off.
- 358 Had a "Steam Packard" (boat) one winter in Buffalo that didn't work but gave him a place to live for the winter. Made friends with the Chinaman where he ate so much he got the gout. Bought a set of encyclopedia Britannica and spent the winter reading it. Main interests; battleships, Navy, wars, countries, England.

- 370 When Harry was about eighty-five, his grandson, Binky, mentioned he had seen something on TV about the Titanic. "At the drop of a hat, Harry recalled the captain's name, owner's name, date and time, an owner in a lifeboat was almost lynched when they got to New York, etc.
- 386 Harry Lambert's family, his father was English and his mother was Scotch. Mother's name was "Densmoor."
- 490 Marilyn is Billy's wife - (Dorothy) baby daughter Sharon.
- 498 Binky's wife, Caroline, became manic-depressive as did her mother and grandmother - almost divorced, but daughter Christa still in college. Other child, David, is done with college.
- 522 Binky born in Aug 1945

#### Tape 1B

- 001 Beginning of tape is going through second photo album, mostly of his grandchildren.
- 115 Poem by Patty and the story behind it. "Seeds," she had brought Harry some seed packs for his garden, vegetables and flowers. He gave her back the flower seeds and told her to take them back and change them for vegetable seeds, "You can't eat flowers!"

#### SEEDS

My grandfather's garden grew no flowers  
"You can't eat them," he said.  
At nine I never worried about eating flowers.  
Now I think of him as I prepare my day.  
Black coffee, warm toast, - crocuses,  
Purple, white, and yellow.

- 157 Binky is president of teachers union. "MC" (Middle Country) Teachers Association, Long Island, NY.
- 271 Ethel Ward - death certificate - coronary osculation, 11 May 1967, age 79, older than Ida.
- 287 Vernon was adopted. Ethel and Harry had no children of their own.
- 305 Vernon was born out of wedlock (Odie was not married to Henry Gordy). He doesn't know if they were ever married.

- 325 Vaguely remembers house in Texas. Left there when he was six in 1916. Margie and Grandma Ward met them at the dock.
- 349 Came to NY with Ethel on a ship from Galveston, TX. Ethel had Vernon from age four months. Ethel had lived in St. Louis and Dallas. She was a telegraph operator and made pretty good money for that time (\$5 - \$6/hr).
- 364 How he and Ethel met Harry. She answered an ad for a housekeeper that Harry ran when living on the lower east side.
- 410 Vitals on Vernon Lambert. Middle name is Robert (Bobby was Robert Vernon). Birthdate 14 Jan 1910 but has always celebrated on the fifteenth. Born in Oklahoma City. May have been baptized at St. Mary's on 46th Street, Manhattan (high Episcopal) some time around 1916 or earlier, probably by Father Dunham. Made more than one visit to New York from OK or TX.
- 447 Vernon married on 10 Sep 1938, Trinity Lutheran Church, St. Paul and Beach Street, Stapleton, Staten Island, NY.
- 464 Father's name was Harry Gordy. He had two first names, Frank or Harry. Was told by Ethel that his name was Franklin, name on death certificate. Died 15 Jul 1958 in Garvin County, OK (Pauls Valley). Father's father was Benjamin F. Gordy and father's mother was Drusilla Langdon. Harry Gordy was in WWI. Died of extensive liquefaction necrosis of brain. Ethel said he drank and was in trouble a lot when young. Born 27 Jul 1886, Pauls Valley, OK. Died in VA Hospital at 921 NE 13, Oklahoma City, OK 71658. Funeral director was Street and Draper, 920 North Robinson, Oklahoma City, OK

#### Tape 2A

- 006 One of the birth certificates for Vernon "Franklin" Gordy, 14 Jan 1910, County of Oklahoma, Town of Oklahoma City. Father's name, Henry Gordy (may have been mistaken about the name "Harry" and may have heard of Henry before, but Ethel always said he was Franklin or Frank), age 24, born in Pauls Valley, OK. Mother's name, Odie Shahan, age 17.
- 042 Another birth certificate from the Bureau of Census, Record of Birth Registration, Cert # 1400, indicates his name as Vernon Gordy.
- 078 Daughter, Patty, didn't know Vernon was adopted until Ethel died.
- 084 Born at 300 W. Maple Street (See tape 2A #042).

- 088 6011 5th Avenue (on Helen's birth cert). Aunt Ida lived at 59th Street and the corner of 4th Avenue. Remembers Margie living on 45th Street with her mother, before Dorothy was born. Margie lived with Vernon, Ethel and Harry on 40th Street when they had the candy store on 40th Street between 4th and 5th Avenues on the north side of the street. From there they moved to Ft. Hamilton Parkway. Helen was a baby in a carriage.
- 107 The Ft. Hamilton Parkway house was known as a parlor, floor, and basement. Moved in in 1929 (Helen born) and moved out in 1931 to Staten Island.
- 114 A lot of flim-flamming. They were trying to fix Margie up. A lot of falsification going on.
- 121 Statement from Ethel when Vernon went to work in the ship yards. "Vernon Gordy, from the age of four months, has been known as Vernon Lambert, and is one and the same person." Worked in the ship yards 42-45 on Staten Island.
- 236 Harry Lambert's real first name starts with an H but is very weird and probably has a Z in it.
- 254-  
365 Stories of Harry Lambert and doctors and door on a boat (his temper), etc.
- 366 Story about Tom Collett and Harry Lambert.
- 385 Harry Lambert was born 13 Sep 1876 and died the day before election day in Nov 1965, in Orwell, NY.
- 419 Ethel and Harry may not have been married. Joked that they were going out to get married. If so, it would have been 1916 in Manhattan, east side. Lived on Water Street, may have been 674 Water Street. There were horse stables across the street.
- 449 Harry had been married before. Had a daughter, Frances, who he called "Punkin" because she could not say pumpkin. Suspect that Harry's first wife played around so he just left. Probably all took place in Ohio.
- 522 Vernon talks about his mother's picture she had sent and a ring with a 2 1/2 dollar gold piece that he has lost.
- 542 More stories and comments on Harry Lambert.

Tape 2B

- 005 Ethel born 12 Sep 1887, 11 years younger than Harry). Ida was 1 or 2 years younger. Both Harry and Ethel buried in Orwell, NY.
- 030 Ethel was born in Brooklyn.

- 032 Robert Ward may have died young and dropped dead on a trolley car.
- 050 Could Ethel's mother's name have been Ryan? No reaction or recall.
- 063 Ethel's Aunt Ethel married to a Cliff or Clift whose first name may have been Harry. He was a furrier in Albany and Ethel may have lived with them at one time. Ethel very independent.
- 103 Ethel was baptized Catholic but raised by the Protestants in the family.
- 128 Knew the Peters boys as uncles, Marty, Harry, and Al. Harry might have been the youngest and Al might have been the middle one who was in WWI and was shell shocked. Marty was a banker and a side drummer. Worked at Chatham Phoenix Bank about 1929, big shot of the family. Had a place in New Jersey and married into the Barber family, who owned the house on Ft. Hamilton Parkway where Harry and Ethel lived.
- 142 Al worked for Postal Telegraph Company, 20 Broad Street, after WWI.
- 153 Harry Peters was a sort of a shiek - stocking hat for hair, red hair, mustache, derby hat, snappy dresser, worked with radiators.
- 158 May Peters was a nurse. Loved show business. Took Vernon to several shows.
- 178 First recollection of Peters kids was on 45th Street between 5th and 6th Avenues.
- 260 Harry Peters was a "Dapper Dan." He made fun of Margie's friend, Agnes, because she didn't "measure up." He later married her.
- 300 Talking about convent and hospital on Graham Avenue where May Peters may have been as a child. No knowledge.
- 329 Went to Catholic school (Sudan Street, Brooklyn?) with Jimmy Collett while living with Aunt Ida for monetary reasons. When he was in show business.
- 352 Margie told Helen her father was Irish-English.
- 363 Ethel and Ida had a brother Jim Ward in WWI. Was in the water so long that he had tuberculosis and lived with them in Montezuma for a while. Was in Navy and shipwrecked, probably in hospitals in Brooklyn. Died in early twenties, after 1922.
- 398 Vernon hurt in 1918 - first went to Montezuma.
- 442 Grandma Ward had bad eyesight and thick glasses. Used to buy Loft's candy and when Vernon or Margie would sneak candy she would say, "I might be blind but I'm not deaf."

- 450 Shown picture - "I've seen that picture before, . . . my mother might have said that was her father."
- 483 Story of Robert Ward's death. Family may not have known of his death immediately.
- 508 Vernon shown picture of "Mother and Jimmy" and identified as Grandma Ward, no doubt about it. Confusion over which Jimmy.
- 585 Discussion of Jim Ward. Jim Ward probably younger than Ethel and Ida.

Tape 3A

Mary Ward's 45th Street address was on the second floor in the front. There was no porch like the one in the picture of her.

Ruth [Maroney] and her sister, Mrs. (Maroney) McNamara, Margie, me, Helen McNamara, Donald McNamara, and Gerald McNamara, a priest. McNamaras lived next house over in Montezuma. Had to be taken 1918 or 1919. Photo taken at McNamaras house because they had a nice lawn.

Picture of Margie Vernon in Army costume with a crutch was taken in front of their house. "See how crummy that looked?"

Ethel had told Helen that Dotty's father was a McNamara. There was a Bernie and Elmer McNamara, but the father was an older brother. It happened in our house in Montezuma, and Bobby was born there too. Margie may have fallen down the stairs just before going into labor. Vernon said she saw black dots the night before. He was sent off to sleep at someone else's house.

Mrs. (Maroney) McNamara was known as Mame.

Picture of porch in Montezuma was the McNamara house.

First got to Montezuma in 1918.

Identified picture of May as having the barn in Montezuma in the background.

Margie had a dog in Montezuma named Fluffy. It had eaten the meringue off of a pie.

Margie's nickname was Terry. May have only been used at Coney Island.

Henry Peters married a girl named Agnes. He didn't think she was classy. He took her to a good hotel or restaurant and she ordered a ham sandwich. He was mortified and always held that against her.

Woman in front row of group picture with Margie in front of what seems like a church, looks like May Peters.

Tape 3B

Helen tells a story about being separated from her step-father, Paul, as they were getting off the Staten Island Ferry, on the Staten Island side. She let out such a scream that Paul had no trouble finding her. [May have been about 7-8]

Vernon says that Paul Harris said that New York has two seasons—winter and August.

Margie and Ed Remson got married in the house in Montezuma. Thinks they lived in Montezuma for a while, then went back to Brooklyn to live. Ed Remson used to call Vernon "Duke."

They lived year-round in Montezuma until about 1925 when he graduated from school.

Helen was told by Paul Harris that her father may have had a gas station in the west. "They" (Tom, Ida, and Ethel) once went out to pick Margie up in Indianapolis. She was stranded with Bobby who was taken away and made a ward of the state.

Ed Remson may have sold lemonade with Vernon at the ball game.

Man in picture of Midge's baptism may be Dale, Margie VanName's husband.

Woman with baby on steps at 111 Prospect may be someone that Margie met in the hospital when she had Midge.

Talking about Martin Peters and Barber who bought a house in NJ, maybe Boonton.

Paul and Helen talking about Bill Lutz.