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## 04 Interview with "Sarge" Clark

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# Interview with "Sarge" Clark

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Reference: T. Walter "Sarge" Clark, interview by James A. Jones (West Chester, PA, September 9, 1996).

This interview took place in Sarge's home on East Linden Street in West Chester. Sarge (S) and the interviewer (J) were the only people present. Sarge had a collection of photos and memorabilia to share.

## *BACKGROUND*

"Sarge" Clark was born on January 19, 1915, in Wawa, PA. He was the son of Walter Clark (born in Kennett Square in 1889/1890), and the grandson of Obadiah and Julia Crossan Clark. Sarge's mother was Emily Pennell Clark. Sarge worked most of his life as a carpenter, but he became well-known in West Chester for his ability as a baseball player. He played minor league baseball before World War II, and remained active in local sports circles his entire life.

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Jones: The newspaper said that you lived up at 135 ENS and [your father] died in 1963 after 42 years at that address . . . that works out to 1921 when your family moved there. I noticed that you got married in 1942. Where did you live when you first got married?

Sarge: We moved in here (200 East Linden Street) after the war. I was married before. We lived up on Magnolia Street during my first marriage, and we lived up on Barnard Street for my second marriage.

J: I'd like to talk to you about baseball. You're kind of a local hero and ...

S: No, not really ...

J: Well, you know how much people around here liked baseball. And you went farther with it than anybody ...

S: Farther I guess, than anybody from around West Chester. But there are kids from West Chester high school who got higher in the leagues than I did.

J: How far did you get exactly?

S: The farthest I got was with Harrisburg in the Interstate League. That was Class B league then. Of course, baseball has changed now--all the teams and leagues.

J: Harrisburg was a farm team for which team?

S: Pittsburgh.

J: And what position did you play?

S: I pitched and played the outfield.

J: Were you any good at hitting?

S: Yes. One year in the minors, I hit 358. That was in the Florida State League.

J: How many years did you play minor league baseball?

S: Six.

J: Was this all after the war?

S: No, it was before World War II. After I got back from the war, I still belonged to a minor league team, but I decided not to play.

J: What did you do? Did you get a job around here?

S: Well, I was working in the shipyard at Sun Ship before I went in the service. I went back there for about a year after I got out of the service, and I came back to West Chester to live.

J: How did you get to work?

S: We car-pooled because everything was rationed. I rode with Harry Wilson, a local insurance man, and ... I can't think of his name now.

J: Did they all work at Sun Ship?

S: Yes, we all worked at Sun Ship.

J: Dotty Parker said something about car-pooling too. Was there any public transport to Chester?

S: Yes, there was a special bus to the shipyard. It was one of the largest employers around. I rode the bus a couple of times. When there were launchings, I had to be in there because my department had to help with the launchings. We took the blocks out from under the ship before it was launched.

J: What was your department called?

S: 66.

J: What did your department do?

S: We built scaffolding for everybody to work on. Of course, we lost a lot of guys who got hurt.

J: Yes, I guess so. [change of subject] Getting back to minor league baseball, when did you start playing baseball.

S: In 1935, I left West Chester [after one year at West Chester State Normal School]. Herb Pennock was a big league ball player with the Yankees, and he signed me to a contract with Charlotte (NC) in the Piedmont League. He was one of my father's best friends and he had heard that I was playing ball, and he wanted to give me a chance. I went down there in the summer, but I had no idea that I was going to stay there, because I had a good deal up here at the college. I was living at 135 East Niels Street and they gave me a job over at the college.

J: What kind of job?

S: We used to have to report to the gym for a couple hours a day to see if they needed us.

J: Cutting grass or something like that?

S: No we didn't cut the grass. We worked in the gym, handing out equipment and straightening up the place.

J: How did your father know Pennock?

S: They were kids together. Herb Pennock was from Kennett Square. Do you know where that shopping center is on Route 1 right before you get into Kennett? That was his property. It used to be a farm. He tried raising silver foxes there when he was at the height of his career, and he lost his shirt.

J: You played from 1935 for six years to 1941. When the war started?

S: Yes, they closed down minor league ball during the war. [discussion of the film "A League of Their Own." S was not familiar with the women's professional baseball league during WWII.]

J: What were you doing on December 7 [1941]?

S: I was on Bataan ... no, on December 7, I was working at the shipyard.

J: How did that work? Did you play ball part of the year and work at the shipyard the rest?

S: I wasn't playing ball that year. I took the job at the shipyard, and then I was called up. I was taken for limited service, and I didn't want to do that so much, so I volunteered for the Seabees. That's how I wound up on the island [Bataan].

J: What did you do, blow up obstacles?

S: No, we built runways out of coral. We had dump trucks and he hauled crushed coral all day and all night. Roll it out, wet it down and it would turn hard just like cement. We also built tank farms for fuel.

J: Can you remember what places you got to while you were in the service?

S: I got to Pearl Harbor. Took the maiden trip of the Bunker Hill. We were in Pearl Harbor for nine months. We built a bunch of barracks and runways for the army. Then when it came time for the invasion of the Marianas, we were selected as one of the units to go along. They sent about thirty battalions of Seabees to construct things.

J: Where did you get to in the Marianas?

S: I got to Tinian Island; that's the only one.

J: I'll bet there's a story about that.

S: Yes, well the first atomic bomb [was dropped by a plane from Tinian].

J: So you guys built the runway that used by the airplane that carried the atomic bomb.

S: One squadron was chosen to carry the bomb and you couldn't get near them, and then when the bomb arrived, you couldn't get near that either.

J: How long before the bomb was dropped did the people on the island know that something was up?

S: About a month, I think. The colonel that was in charge of the squadron came and made a speech that the war would be over in two weeks.

J: Did you believe him?

S: [laughing, emphatic] No!

J: How did you feel after you heard that the bomb went off?

S: Oh god, everybody was happy.

J: How much longer did you stay on Tinian after that?

S: Oh, about another year. At that time, they let you out of the service according to how many points you had, so we all went back in different groups. One time while we were there, we had a typhoon and lost everything. We had frame tents and ... gone! When we got there, we landed on LSTs [because the Seabees hadn't built the harbor yet] and then when we went back, the harbor was all gone because of the typhoon, and we had to go back to our ship in LSTs and climb up cargo nets. [laughter]

J: You must have got back in early 1946.

S: Late '45. I was discharged down in Havre de Grace at the navy base down there.

J: What did you do then? Hitchhike home?

S: No, I had a cousin who lived in Havre de Grace. She came and got me, and I stayed at her house for a few hours, and then she brought me up here. [change of subject]

J: Back to baseball again. After you started playing minor league ball, did you ever play up in this area again so that the people you grew up with could see you play?

S: Yes, I played in Harrisburg.

J: And folks from West Chester came to Harrisburg to see you?

S: Sure. I played in Harrisburg and in Wilmington against the old Blue Rocks.

J: So sometimes the people from the neighborhood came down to see you. How did that work? Did they all pile into cars and come down to the game?

S: Yes, or they took the bus. They were running buses down to Wilmington on a regular schedule too.

J: One day a while back you told me that you once got your picture on a Wheaties box. Now that seems to me like pretty big- time stuff, because I don't know anybody who has had their picture on a Wheaties box.

S: We thought it was at the time. [laughter]

J: What did people do around here? Did anybody collect the pictures?

S: [laughing] Oh no, I wasn't that famous.

J: Yes, but it was someone local who got themselves on a Wheaties box, that's kind of neat ... you must have gotten your name in the newspapers a few times ...

S: Oh yes.

J: I found a couple of newspaper articles: "Junior Elevens in Hectic Fray" in Daily Local News (November 16, 1925). In a local football game, the Riggtown Terriers defeated the Matlack Street Bums by 47-0. The team lineups included: Position  
Riggtown Matlack St. Left End Reilly Stamper Left Tackle Malin Delaney Left Guard  
R. Fox Divine Center Clark Gibson Right Guard Gincley Whitecraft Right Tackle  
Green Barry Right End Young Painter Quarterback Peck O'Neill Left Halfback Fox  
Burnett Right Halfback Hamilton Reed Fullback Wilson Ewing

J: Were you the Clark who played center in 1925?

S: That was me. [I read off the names but Sarge didn't remember many of them. Just Reilly from across the tracks and the Hamiltons from Riggtown.]

J: You should know some of the names from the Matlack Street.

S: Gibson ... that must have been Jack or Chip. Stamper, that was Bud Stamper. [didn't recognize other names] There was a Painter who lived over on Price Street named Bud. I remember O'Neill. I remember the Reed boy ... Herman Reed.

J: You lived up on on Matlack Street, but you were playing for Riggtown. I realize that not all of the boys we just named lived on Matlack Street, but you did, and you had to make a choice. How did you decide who to play for?

S: Well, Matlack Street was the dividing line for Riggtown and the other neighborhood.

J: It looks like the Riggtown team was a lot better, at least that year. Or was the Riggtown team always better than the Matlack Street team?

S: Well, they sort of feuded all the time--football, baseball ... it wasn't really bad.

J: The other article has first and last names. Daily Local News (September 9, 1926)  
"After a successful baseball season the Riggtown Terriers have traded in their bats and balls for football togs and are now ready for the opening of their grid season. Manager "Cie" Gincley is on the lookout for games with teams composed of players that range in age from nine to 13. The formidable line-up presented by the Terriers follows:  
Tommy Davis left end Howard Malin left tackle Sam Holston left guard Lloyd Mason center Lester Quillen right guard Jack Gibson right tackle Lewis Green right end "Cie" Gincley quarterback Walter Clark right halfback Ray Fox left halfback Jerry Davis fullback Herman Reed substitute Bud Singer substitute Robinson substitute Fling substitute

S: [in response to my reading the names] Lloyd Mason moved away from here. I went to school with Lester Quillen [of Quillen's store on Matlack Street]. Lewis Green lived in Riggtown, but he moved out to Marshalton. His wife is still alive out there, but he died about twelve years ago. Cie Gincley died a few years ago. He and I were good friends. [Cie Gincley was Anne Gincley's husband.]

J: Cie was also the manager for the team. Was he any older than the rest of you?

S: No, he was about the same age. He was just organized. Is his widow still alive? [discussion of Anne Gincley and Sidy Stanley]

S: Sidy Gincley married Jim Stanley. He was out at Esco Cabinet Company for years. [Cie Gincley worked at Esco when he was 16 years old, in 1933.] ... Oh, I've got something to show you. [S produced an invitation to a reunion for the 1931 WCHS football team.] This is the second reunion. We had a fiftieth reunion ...

J: And this one is the 65th. Wow, that is pretty incredible. [I showed S some of my Riggtown pictures to get his reaction. He recognized Jack Harvey's house and the Wyeth plant.]

S: Where do you live? Which house?

J: I'm the fourth one up from the corner, next to where Cie Gincley lived.

S: Were you there when [sounds like] Carrie Reem lived there?

J: No. I recognize her name ...

S: Her father was out the other day going bow hunting. He climbed a tree, and fell. Didn't break a thing, but he was in bed for a week. He had a big bruise on his butt. [laughing] [continued to look at pictures. S enjoyed them but had little to say about any of them]

S: Did anybody go into any detail about the saddle shop?

J: I've heard a little about it. Alonzo Harvey's old place, then Reggie and Grace got a hold of it and made it bigger. Why, what do you know about it?

S: Oh, just that. I was wondering if you knew about it, that's all. [picture of Jack and Charlotte Harvey]

S: Oh, there's Jack Harvey.

J: Did you know him very well? You're both about the same age.

S: Oh yes. [pause] Are they both doing pretty good?

J: Oh, yes. Jack's pretty amazing ...

S: Well, he was always full of shit [general laughter].

J: Well, he certainly has the gift of gab. Jack still mows about eight lawns for people. They both get around pretty good.

S: He's pretty friendly with Shainline, isn't he? ["Shainline" is Ted Shainline, who used to own a house in Riggstown and still owns a wood-working shop on the southwest corner of ENS and SF.]

J: [repeat story of Chock Carey's tattoo, acquired during his service in the navy at the beginning of World War II]

S: I took boot [camp] at Williamsburg [VA]. [picture of pre-WWII backyard at 500ENS, showing Carey's horse]

S: Speaking of horses, did anybody ever tell you about Jo-Boy, the harness horse? He belonged to the Learys. They were horse people, Dan and Joe Leary. They used to race him at the fairgrounds, and he was one of the best around.

J: Did they live around here in the neighborhood?

S: They kept the horse up there just before you reach the borough stables. [S gestured up the alley that runs along the side of Ramsgate town houses in the direction of the town center.] They had a little barn up there and that's where they used to keep Jo-Boy.

J: So when you were kids, did you used to go up and see him?

S: Hell yes, that was a big deal in those days! The Learys lived up a block, right on the alley.

J: On Lacey Street between Matlack and Walnut?

S: Yes, on the last house right at the alley [Mechanics Alley]. And when I lived at 135 [East Niolds Street], it was an easy walk to go over and see the Learys all the time. They had Dan, Butch, T, and one younger one. There were three Leary boys. Mrs. Leary was a real ol' Irish lady--she was real nice. So was Dan. And Joe was his brother--he used to drive the horse and Dan used to train it. Dan was a groom really, and he worked for a lot of rich people in Chester County. He was real good with bad-legged horses, just like a doctor with them.

J: It is kind of neat that he got his own horse together, instead of just working for other people all the time.

S: Well, really they had their horse before they went out to work for other people with thoroughbreds. [on to more pictures ... picture of ESCO Cabinet Company workers circa 1933]

S: I worked up there back when it was on Lacey Street. [The ESCO cabinet company was located in the brick building at the corner of Lacey and South Franklin Streets. Later, it was purchased by the United Dairy Equipment Company.] I played ball for them in the summer time and they gave me a job when I was in high school.

J: Was that how they did it around here? All of the companies sponsored teams, paid for uniforms, and so on?

S: Yes. Andrew Hockenbach was the guy's name. He ran the ball club. He was a real smart guy with ESCO about building and engineering. He came down here from up-country around Harrisburg to run the ball club, and he ran it just like a big league team. Everything had to be just right.

J: Where did you play in those days?

S: We played out at the fair grounds, out where the cemetery is, where the black cemetery is. [some discussion of location, but I'm not sure if we established its location]. They had a ball diamond right about in the center of the tract. A family named Sheller, they farmed it, and two of their boys, Bud Sheller and Hap Sheller, they played on the ball team. In those days, I don't remember if you could still ride out there on the trolley. I think that was later . . . [he remembered] . . . the trolleys weren't running because they used to have mule races, and on the third day that had automobile races out on the dirt track.

J: In the summertime, is that when they had the fair?

S: Yes, in July or August. This was when I was little. The trolleys used to run all the way into Philadelphia, to 69th street. The trolley used to start down by the college and run up to the center of town.

J: Did it go up as far as the Friends School (at Marshall Street and North High Street)?

S: It went up there somewhere. The trolley barn was right there across from the old police station, and the Daily Local News was right next to it. It was the center of the whole town. [picture of Cie Gincley at the Hoopes Brothers and Darlington Wheel Works]

S: He [Cie Gincley] was a character. He was a lot of fun. [S did not elaborate, but his manner suggested that he and Cie were good life-long friends.] [tape stops and resumes after S pulled out a picture showing him and other members of the 1933-1934 West Chester High School basketball team.]

J: Can you remember their names?

S: Oh yes. That's Billy Bender. That's Jake Johnson from [unintelligible, maybe Marshallton]. That's Petey [sounds like] Himmelwright, he was a carpenter ... or a plumber. And that's Harold I. Zimmerman, the coach. Did you ever hear of him? [That's who they named] Zimmerman field [after]. That's Spuds Bruno--he lived up in the West End. He went over here to college and he became a Little All-American football player. That's Jesse Lewis and that's Ed Marinoski--he had a shoe store up in town for years. That's Robert Spaziani, who had Spaz's Beverage. He graduated with me.

J: What about this guy? Was he an assistant coach?

S: He was a high school student, what you'd call a manager. His name was Paul and he became a doctor. . . . that's all of them . . . oh, yes, the last one was Durnal, Skip

Durnal from Marshallton. He later was in the storm window business for years. His wife just died not long ago. They still lived out in Marshallton. [Interviewer's note concerning the names of the people in the photo: 1st row: Robert Spaziani, Ed Marinoski, Jesse Lewis, Billy Bender, Jake Johnson, Petey Himmelwright. 2nd row: Paul the manager, unnamed, T. Walter Clark, Spuds Bruno, Skip Durnal, Harold I. Zimmerman]

J: It sounds like a lot of people lived out in Marshallton. Did a lot of people move out there?

S: It was a nice place to live, a little village.

J: Was that a big trip to go out and visit someone in Marshallton?

S: No, not really. I can still remember when I used to go out there, a lot of those roads were dirt roads.

J: Some of them still are. [S produced an old newspaper clipping and I read part of it out loud on the tape]

J: The title reads "Pitcher of Southern Leagues with locals Walter "Sarge' Clark ..." even back then they were calling you Sarge. Why?

S: That nickname came to me back in high school when I was playing ball with ESCO. There used to be a comedy team that showed almost every week in the movies--Slim Somerville and somebody else--and they called me "Sarge." He was Somerville's boss. [I continued to read.]

J: [summarized except where noted] S played ball in Florida and Georgia before obtaining a tryout with the Harrisburg Senators in the Interstate League at age 23 (this is probably inaccurate, since S was born in 1915 and later in the article, it suggests that this was already in late 1939). Clark pitched in Class C and Class D ball games for the past five years. "With a big frame and lots of power to qualify him for pitching duty ..." the article mentions that S weighed 205 pounds in those days. He played with the Charlotte NC team of the Piedmont League in 1935 and 1936, and got a tryout with the Baltimore Orioles of the International League. He wasn't experienced enough yet, so he was optioned to Thomasville GA where he pitched for a record of 14-9 in 1938, including a no-hit shutout against the Albany GA team. That earned him a promotion to the Jacksonville team of the South Atlantic league where he went 9-5. In 1939, he went 9- 8 for Leesburg FL. [S produced a picture of the Thomasville GA team which "won the pennant that year." He also had pictures of one of the Florida teams.]

J: If you were 205 pounds, how tall were you?

S: I was six two-and-a-half.

J: Then you must have been one of the biggest kids in the neighborhood.

S: I was fairly big. Kids weren't that big back then.

J: My dad was six-three and around 205 pounds, and he was always the biggest dad around. Then when I went to college and he started coming to visit, there were kids in my dorm who were bigger than he was. The next generation got a lot bigger. [change of subject]

J: I'd like to ask you a couple of questions about growing up in Riggtown. Did you guys ever get in trouble?

S: Oh sure, we were ornery, like all kids. We used to have fun, rob cherry trees, things like that.

J: There was a story from 1928 about a bunch of kids who used to call themselves the "Riggtown gang." They stole a bunch of motorcycle parts from a garage that belonged to Frank Stancato, and they had to go up in front of the burgess (mayor). [S laughed and acted as if he knew all about this, so I asked him] did you ever have to go up in front of the burgess.

S: [laughing] No, I never got in that bad trouble.

J: Who were the kids who got in trouble like that?

S: They were Riggtowners. I don't know if Jack Harvey got into it or not; he was ornery enough. Anyhow, one good story was ... the Bituminous Company was up there, and they said Jack Gibson set it on fire, but I don't know if it was true or not, but anyway [significant pause] somebody set it on fire. [This was the 1931 Goose Creek fire. S confirmed details.]

J: Where were you when it started?

S: I wasn't there! [meaning he didn't start it].

J: I heard that the boys used to sit on the bridge over the creek and smoke cigarettes, and someone dropped a match in the creek and set it on fire.

S: There was a lot of suspicion thrown around at the time. Later on, every time I'd see Jack, I'd ask him, "Hey Jack, what happened to the creek?" [laughter]

J: One of the stories I used to hear about Riggstown was that if you wanted to date a girl from over there, you had to get past her brothers.

S: That's true.

J: Did you ever date anyone from over there?

S: No, I never did. I lived up above Matlack Street, but I was accepted by Riggtowners. I used to almost walk through there at night when I came home from high school. I was one of the few that could walk through Georgetown [the black neighborhood].

J: You could walk through Georgetown and Riggstown. Was that because you were big?

S: Probably. Nobody ever challenged me.

J: Well, it sounds to me [based on other interviews] like the Riggtowners never went over into Georgetown and the Georgetowners didn't come over to Riggstown at all!

S: No.

J: Do you remember anything about Georgetown?

S: Jerry Harmon's father was the junk dealer over there.

J: Was he the guy who used to come around with a horse and cart?

S: His father used to come around with his truck to pick up junk and stuff, and he used to sit in his wagon and holler to get people's attention--this is what he used to holler-- "Oh party rags." Jerry was quite an athlete. He went to Lincoln University and started there. He died young. He used to play with the old Liberty Boys baseball team ...

J: A black baseball team?

S: Yes. And ESCO was ... we were real deadly rivals. I was only a kid, sixteen years old, most of them were older than me ... It was real fun.

J: When you were growing up, you had two sisters?

S: My older sister Betty, she married Vince Talley. He was from down Brandywine Summit. My other sister Mary Ruth is a nurse supervisor on two floors at Chester County Hospital. I was just at her birthday party last night. She's worked there for some thirty years.

J: What did your older sister do?

S: She was a nurse too.

J: So everybody made out all right in your family?

S: We did good all our life. My father always made a good living. He worked in a dairy ...

J: Highland Dairy?

S: Yes. And then he went to Wyeth. He was in charge of the boiler room. He went to college and learned to test milk--that's how come he did so well.

J: That had to have been unusual in those days.

S: Oh yes. He took that course on how to test milk, and then, I can remember, during the Depression, he was making \$65 a week. All the rest of the family wasn't doing too good, so they came and lived with us so we could feed them.

J: Did your mother ever have to work?

S: Yes, she worked in her later years after all the kids were raised. She worked at Wyeth, over on the line.

J: Nobody in your family ever worked at the Tag Company [Denny or Keystone]?

S: No. Honey Hamilton worked at the tag company.

J: Anne Gincley worked there too.

S: Almost all of the girls in the neighborhood worked at one of the tag companies.

J: I also heard that people used to take in boxes of tags and string them at home.

S: Oh yes.

J: Did your family ever do that?

S: Oh hell yes. We didn't make much, but it was money.

J: Tell me how people in the neighborhood thought about the Keystone Tag Company. Was it easy to get on there, so that people always figured no matter what, they could get a job at the tag company?

S: It wasn't too hard to get on there, but a lot of people worked [... end of side one of tape]

J: What can you tell me about the relationship between people who lived in this part of town and the State College? You went to school there for a bit, and you mentioned other people who went there.

S: Over the years, as the kids grew up, we used to go over to the college for a lot of games, and we knew all the players. Do you know where the new science building is-- that's where we used to play football [behind the fieldhouse at the site of Schmucker II]

J: Did you guys used to get in to watch the games for free? Is that how it worked?

S: Yes. And we used to sneak into the girls' gym on the quadrangle. We used to go into the steam vents, lift the lid off, and go through the tunnels up in the girls gym and shoot baskets on Sundays.

J: Nobody ever caught you?

S: A few times, but nothing was said. They'd just chase us out.

J: Chock Carey told a story something like that. [change of subject]

S: By the way, I went to Demonstration School [in Ruby Jones].

J: Do you remember any of your teachers?

S: Sure, Miss James and Miss Pierce. I went through grades one through six. I got sick in the second grade and had to repeat it. I missed half a year's school. I had what they called back then "a spot on the lungs"--a touch of tuberculosis. I was over it in a year's time. My sister, who's a nurse had the same thing later in life, but she had to go away for six months.

J: Where did she go?

S: Where Bryn Mawr is now. She was like me, she got well.

J: Did anybody in your family ever smoke?

S: Oh yes. My father smoked, and I smoked up until about ten years ago. I quit "cold turkey." Of course, I don't breathe as well as I used to, but I exercise every day as much as I can.

J: Do you have arthritis or anything?

S: I've got arthritis in the hips, so I had to quit playing golf.

J: But you mentioned that you went out fox hunting the other day, so you still get out.

S: Oh yes, I still get out and get fresh air. The huntsman at Brandywine Hunt was one of my closest friends. He just passed away. I still go out--I've been out once this year ... but he was a ball player too, that's how I knew him.

J: Speaking of hunting ... did you ever go hunting back in the swamp before World War II?

S: Sure.

J: What did you get?

S: Muskrats. We used to set traps.

J: Leg-hold traps?

S: Yes. All the kids in Riggtown were trappers. That's how we used to get a little bit of spending money.

J: What did you do? Who bought them?

S: Different people bought them that were in that business. There were three or four around here. We used to get about a dollar and a half for a real good skin.

J: Whoa! That was serious money! Did anybody ever eat the muskrats, or just get the skins?

S: Nobody that I knew ever ate the muskrats, but they used to eat groundhogs. People around here used to shoot the groundhogs for fun and take them up and dump them at that [sounds like] "High Corner" place in the West End ...

J: ... out there on the way to Downingtown, over by the "Pizza Island?" Why?

S: There was a taproom on the corner. They used to dump them there and the black used to come and pick them up and eat them. Groundhog isn't bad to eat, they say--I never ate them. They don't eat anything but grass, so they're clean.

J: The swamp sounds like it was the playground for a lot of kids in the neighborhood when they were growing up.

S: Oh yes. We used to go "tuft-jumping" from one tuft to another. The swamp grew up in chunks. There was some right here [gestured across the street towards Ramsgate Townhouses). There's not many cellars underneath those places. [discussion of wet basements and sump pumps]

S: This house has the old stone base and double brick on top. Later they poured the concrete basement floor about six inches thick, so it cracked, and when it rains, the water comes up through the cracks. [change of subject]

S: Carrie Ring--Ring wasn't her married name--but Carrie Ring was related to Beth Ring who lived up on Matlack Street. Beth was her mother. Now they live up in Lionville.

J: Are you still in contact with the people you knew growing up?

S: Yes, but a lot of them are gone. It's sad in a way.

J: Are you much for religion?

S: No, not really. I've been in the Masons for fifty-four years.

J: Are the Masons a very big deal around here?

S: Oh yes. I just got a notice from them. There's still five hundred and eighty-some members in West Chester--in this lodge. You know where the lodge is located?

J: No, I don't think so.

S: It's up on Church Street at the corner of ... they own the stores at the corner of Church and Market, opposite the bank. All of those stores belong to the Masonic Temple.

J: Your father was a member of ...

S: He was a Mason. He was a member of the West Chester band for years.

J: He was a member of the West Chester Lodge #322 F & AM, ...

S: That stands for "free and accepted Masons."

J: He was also a member of the Uppowoc Tribe 47 of the Improved Order of Red Men. What was that about? [laughter]

S: I don't know. I was never too interested. They used to have a big home up, you know where the home for the aged is on Church Street? The apartment house?

J: Up north [on the north end of Church Street]?

S: The south building, right from that [first building south of the home], that's where the Red Men were. And where the home for the old folks is--that used to be, like a hardware store, there for years.

J: Did you ever go up there for meetings?

S: A few times. I had to go up there for my fiftieth anniversary to get a pin. I was surprised at how many fifty-year members there were. [Note: I'm not sure of S was referring to the Red Men or the Masons in this sentence, since he was a member of the Masons but not the Red Men.]

J: That's interesting, because from all my conversations with Riggtowners, it seems like not too many of them joined organizations like that.

S: [thoughtful] No ... no. In fact, when you went in, you had to be asked. You couldn't just chose to go in, and if anyone decided to black ball you, you couldn't get in.

J: You father was a member and you got asked--is that how you got in?

S: Yes.

J: I wonder if, since there weren't many Riggtowners who belonged, there was no one to ask them to join. In other words, I wonder if they didn't get asked to join, rather than they didn't want to be part of it.

S: It was different. Traveling around, you got to know a lot of people.

J: With all your traveling around as a ballplayer, did being a Mason ever help you out?

S: Not really. When we were in the service. we had a club on Tinian Island and we used to get together about once a month, just to socialize.

J: Did that include beer?

S: Yes, it included beer. In our outfit, we had access to all the beer we wanted for five dollars and something a case. We knew guys in the ship's store, and they weren't too "solid." They were making money. [laughter]

J: Well, all of this is good. You've filled in some holes for me,. and now I know why so many people from around here talk about Sarge Clark.

S: I tried to be nice to people. And my wife--my second wife-- she was in my class in high school. I married her after I got back from the service.

J: Did she grow up around here?

S: She lived on Lacey Street when I started going with her, right across from where Bob Ayers lived.

J: How did you know her? From around the neighborhood?

S: I knew her before I went in the service. Everybody went out and had a drink once in a while. Then, there were taprooms everywhere in West Chester.

J: More than there are now? [S nodded] Where did you like to go for a drink?

S: I used to go to the "Corners." That's up near the Catholic School [St. Agnes], right on that corner. At the end of Chestnut Street and the bridge over the railroad tracks. [more discussion eventually led to the conclusion that the bar was near the old Sharpless Separator Works, probably at the corner of Chestnut and Patton Avenue. In that case, I am not sure what Catholic School S referred to.] One of my best friend's sisters and her husband had that place a long time. Now she lives over on the corner of Church and Price [by the 4-way stop sign one block from the Burger King.]

J: You said that you were married a first time. Was that someone local too?

S: Yes, her name was Ralston. She's still alive. Of course, my wife and I--we went to high school together, and I met her after I came back out of the service.

J: There's some other stories about people whose marriages did not last through the whole war. I wonder if people got married quick before they went in the service ...

S: Well, I knew her already for a long time. I went with her when we were in high school. We had a long relationship, but those things happened ...

J: I think the war changed a lot of people, so even if you got along before the war, after the war you were different people.

S: Oh yes. [more discussion about people, personal relationships and change]

J: Laura [Lessig Clark], your second wife, had a sister too?

S: No, she had two brothers. One's Park--he's still alive. He lives down in Marshallton. The other was Bud, he was at the Battle of the Bulge, and he died of a heart attack about 15-16 years ago. He lived in the first house out on Forest Lane. Do you know where that is?

J: No.

S: You go down the hill before you get to Lenape ...

J: Oh, okay. Right after the Mews on the right side, which actually cuts you back towards the creek, and if you keep on going around, you wind up coming back into town on Miner Street.

S: Yes. Before they built all those houses, that used to be fox hunting country.

J: Oh, I'll bet, with all that creek and brush. There's not a lot of fox country left in Chester County, is there.

S: No, there isn't. The other day, I went fox hunting over on Frolic Weymouth's place down below Twin Bridges, down below Chadds Ford. They cross the Brandywine Creek. I go down there lots of Sundays to hunt foxes.

J: You know the Weymouths? [wealthy family connected to the Duponts]

S: Just to speak to. I know the fellow who keeps the hounds down there. His name is Hansby.

J: They've built houses down there too.

S: Not on Weymouth's land.

J: No, but right past there. I know about it because I bought a motorcycle down there a few years ago.

S: Weymouth doesn't fix up his road so that people won't drive onto his land. There's big potholes and you have to drive slow. [laughter] But it's beautiful country down there, with lots of deer ... you can see almost anything.

J: I used to like to get a canoe and go down there from the Art Museum [at Route 1].

S: When I was a kid, I used to go from Niels Street and go out to Lenape and camp in the summer time.

J: Did you walk out or take a car?

S: We used to take a car. There used to be a road that ran up there behind all those cabins out there [probably on the west side of the creek, across from the Lenape Forge.] At the first falls there, we used to camp alongside of it. We had a camp canoe-- our own canoe--and we had another canoe with a motor on the back of it.

J: You were equipped then! [laughter] Camping--that's something that I do a lot, but did a lot of people go camping back in those days?

S: No, but we had a nice tent that we put up, and four of us lived out there in the summertime, and we had a lot of fun.

J: You and who else?

S: Bill Burnett, he worked for the [Daily] Local [News]. And Toby Bowman, he lived next to us at 135 [East Niels Street]. A kid by the name of Blackburn from Media, and there were three or four other kids from Media who came up here. I remember Blackburn because he wanted to go to college--he played football--and he had to have a scholarship because he didn't have any money. I talked to coach Killinger and they gave him a scholarship to go to West Chester.

J: Did he do all right when he got there?

S: Oh yes, he graduated. I think he ended up coaching, but you lose contact ... [change of subject]

J: In all of your ball-playing years, what was the greatest moment you ever had?

S: [thought for a bit] Playing baseball?

J: Playing any kind of sports.

S: I guess it was the 105 yard touchdown.

J: Yes, I suppose that would stand out. [laughter]

S: I did kick a football Thanksgiving Day against Berwyn from one end of the field to the other. A lot of people still remember it. [sounds like] Allen Cook, he still [pretends to] broadcast it every time I come up to the barbershop. [laughter]

J: Were you punting?

S: Yes, punting.

J: Wow, that is pretty good, if you didn't have anyone holding it for you. How did you get the 105-yard touchdown?

S: We were back in kick formation, behind the goal line, and the quarterback said to me, `This tackle is playing kind of wide. Maybe if I block him to the outside, you can get inside of him. When I came inside of him, I broke to the left and went right down the sideline.

J: Were you fast?

S: Oh, I could run. I wasn't exceptionally fast, but I could run. [discussion of Dallas-Eagle game from the previous week, with a runback for a touchdown, thank-yous, and end of tape]