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07 Interview with Martha Stanley and Anne Gincley

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Interview with Martha Stanley and Anne Gincley

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Reference: Martha Gertrude Gincley Stanley and Anne Gincley, interview by James A. Jones (West Chester, March 29, 1996).

This interview took place in Anne Gincley's dining room in her house in Riggtown. Besides the interviewer, Jim Jones (JJ), Anne Gincley (AG) and Martha Gertrude Gincley Stanley (MS) participated.

BACKGROUND

Martha Gertrude Gincley Stanley was born on May 15, 1915 in West Chester, PA. In 1915, her family lived at 386 East Niels Street, but later moved to 392 East Niels Street and lived there until 1962. After that, her mother went to live with M and her husband, James Stanley, but moved back to 392 East Niels Street in 1963 five months later and lived there until she died in 1974.

Anne Troseki Gincley was born on November 11, 1919 in Phoenixville, PA. She married Martha's older brother Charles on October 20, 1941. Charles was a year older than Martha, and hence must have been born in 1914. He died in the early 1990s.

The first part of this transcript is based on some handwritten notes and Jones' recollections as he remembered them about three hours after the interview ended). The second (longest) part of the transcript is based on a one-hour audio tape.

The interview begins here

In 1941 when Ann married into the Gincley family, Charles worked at the ESCO Cabinet Company at South Franklin Street and East Lacey Street. Ann allowed me to photograph an old picture of the work crew showing about twenty men lined up in front of the building (which still stands in 1996).

MS: When she was a child, children played in the streets because there was nowhere else to play. However, the streets were much less busy than they are nowadays.

MS: Riggtown was known as a "bad part of town." The kids from Riggtown wouldn't let any other kids across the Goose Creek bridge into their neighborhood.

The tape transcription begins here

JJ: What families can you remember in the neighborhood? [Neither M nor A remembered the Baldwins, who owned 387 East Nields Street (Jack Harvey's house) when M was a little girl.]

MS: There were Holstens on the corner, (386 East Nields Street), the Thomsons (388 East Nields Street), then there was the Gincleys, ... next door (392 East Nields Street) there were so many different families lived next door.

AG: [Said something that sounds like] Peoples?

MS: Peoples. Christmans lived in there. And then the Davises (394 East Nields Street). Mom-mom Townsend (396 East Nields Street). The Hamiltons (398 East Nields Street), and then the other family of Townsends (400 East Nields Street). Then the Careys, two families of Careys (500 & 502 East Nields Street). And then John Hamilton (504 East Nields Street), and the Smileys (506 East Nields Street). That was on this side of the street. On the other side was ...

AG: Well, Harveys. That's including Big Jum (Earl Harvey) when he lived here (500 East Nields Street), after the Careys.

MS: Afterwards. Big Jum lived on Franklin Street when the Careys were here.

MS: Well, first Christmans lived there (gestured towards 437 East Nields Street but was not precise), but then they moved across the street (392 East Nields Street). And then Dougherty's moved in on the corner (385 East Nields Street). And then Woodward's ...

AG: ... where Jack (Harvey, 387 East Nields Street) lives.

MS: And then [sounds like] Wynans moved in on the corner of the alley (431 East Nields Street), and then there were several families after them, Waltons, ... [she hesitated]

JJ: You're doing fine.

MS: ... and then another family of Waltons lived next door (433 East Nields Street). And then Larry Hamilton ... you know, Mrs. Hamilton and Larry lived next door (435 East Nields Street). I don't know who lived in this other house (437 East Nields Street) before Aunt Gert.

JJ: I might be able to give you a hand with that actually, because that's what I was looking up yesterday. Let me see if I've got that one.

AG: There used to be a Mitchell family that lived where the Walton's did at one time. [confused voices about too many families]

JJ: Well, that's one of things that I did notice, was how often these places turned over.

MS: We lived there a long time, and Davises (394 East Nields Street).

JJ: [to himself] Let's see what we've got here ... [louder] okay, Mitchells? You're talking just over there across the street, the end house (437 East Nields Street)?

MS: They lived there when I was a kid.

JJ: When you were a kid, the Mitchells, Harvey and Margaret, lived there. Before that ... or after ... after that, Alonzo Harvey lived there, or at least he owned the house.

AG: Aunt Gert's house (437 East Nields Street).

MS: But pop-pop owned the house (Alonzo Harvey, 437 East Nields Street, 1933-1942). He sold it to Aunt Gert.

JJ: I got it right here. Now Gertrude Ferrier is Aunt Gert. Whose sister was she?

MS: My mother's sister. She was Jack's mother (Jack Harvey).

JJ: Jack's mother? Wow, everyone is connected here.

AG: She had him before she married Ferrier.

JJ: So she's your aunt and Helen's sister (Helen Harvey Gincley, wife of Levi Gincley, 390 East Nields Street) ...

AG: Helen's sister.

JJ: Would it be fair to say that more people were related to each other in this neighborhood than outsiders who moved in?

MS: The Davises and Townsends were related, and the Smileys were related. Hamiltons were related. They were all related.

AG: Not to the Gincleys.

MS: No, not to the Gincleys. To each other.

JJ: So we're really talking about three or four families [in Riggstown], when you put it all together.

AG: Uh-uh [affirmative].

MS: Well let's see. We're related to Aunt Gert and the Ferriers, and then there's Jack. He always lived with my grandfather over on Franklin Street. You see, my grandfather raised Jack. Gert

was his mother and of course, she married this Ferrier, so he (Jack) stayed with the grandfather.

JJ: What about Jack's father?

MS: I don't know who it was ... [very quiet and hesitant]

JJ: I'll ask him (Jack) about that ...

MS: Jack knows that.

AG: I never heard of him.

MS: I think his name was Pyle, from something mom said. I really don't know. But Jack knows.

AG: Well, your mother's father, poppop Harvey, he (Jack) lived with him.

MS: They raised him.

AG: He had a ... what do you call that kind of shop they had over there ...

MS: A harness shop.

AG: A harness shop! On Franklin Street, right next to the alley behind Jack's. That little house ... he had a barn back there.

JJ: Oh, so that's what that was.

MS: He used to have a horse. But then he got rid of the horse and then we was a harness maker.

JJ: I'm thinking ... this was William Harvey, Jack's grandfather?

MS: No, Alonzo

JJ: Okay, Alonzo Harvey, who bought the house across the street (437 East Nields Street). This is starting to make sense.

MS: Alonzo Harvey was the one who owned Aunt Gert's house, and then she bought it off of him. And he also owned my mother's house (390 East Nields Street), but he gave it to my mother.

JJ: That was the one I'm in now, 392 (392 East Nields Street)?

AG: No, 390. [conversation about how complicated these relationships are]

JJ: Did most people own their houses, or rent them? I mean, they weren't renting from someone

else who lived here (in the neighborhood)?

MS: The majority of them owned them.

AG: there were so many changes.

MS: So many changes. Now 392, where you live ... I don't know how many people lived in there.

JJ: Well, now I do know something about that. [pulled out notes and showed a long list of names. Laughter]

MS: My mom lived in there. After my dad died she moved in with me, but she was satisfied, so she came back to live in Riggtown.

JJ: [read a list of names, starting with the sheriff who sold 392 East Niels Street to Alonzo Harvey in 1920. They were puzzled when I named the Townsends (1922-1943), but both recognized Eva Fulton (1943-1957), but referred to "the Fultons."]

MS: ... and what was that Townsend?

JJ: William and Eleanor.

MS: William and Eleanor Townsend. That was Honey's uncle, Bill Townsend.

AG: Oh yeah, Wacky's brother. Old Wacky. (Harry A. Townsend, father of Harry Jr, who lives at 400 East Niels Street). [more names including the Lusky's who sold their house to Helen Gincley, and the Baer's, who bought it after she left.]

MS: We had to put mom in a nursing home so he sold it (her brother, Harry Gincley).

JJ: There's still a whole string of names from there before you get down to me and Ester.

AG: I didn't even know some of the names of the people who lived there.

MS: I didn't either. I was away by then.

AG: Who was the last ones? Who did you buy it off of?

JJ: Martin and Jane Brice.

AG: Brice. Who was before them?

JJ: Norsoph. N-O-R-S-O-P-H. Kim and Paula.

AG: They moved to Downingtown.

MS: I didn't know them.

AG: You didn't know them. She was Italian. [Her family name was] Porco.

MS: Oh, Porco.

[**NOTE:** A Norsoph family member sent two corrections. The Norsophs moved to West Goshen, not Downingtown, and Mrs. Norsoph's maiden name was Promiscuo, not Porco.]

JJ: ... and they got from the Veteran's Administration. I don't know what that was about. They got it from Shirley and Harry Hoopes ... of course, the Hoopes name is all over this town, but I never ran into Shirley and Harry before.

AG: I just got to know her a little bit. She was friends with me.

JJ: So they actually did live in the house. [I suggested more names from my list, but all were unknown.]

JJ: I heard a rumor that a number of people from this neighborhood all worked for the railroad. Do you know anything about that?

MS: [unintelligible] Hamilton worked for the railroad.

AG: He lived back on Franklin Street ...

MS: ... but he lived here ...

AG: ... oh yeah, he lived in Wallace's house. He worked for the railroad.

MS: Yes, he worked for the railroad.

JJ: Do you remember what kind of work he did?

Both: No.

JJ: It sounds like the railroad was not as big a deal [as an employer] by the time you lived here.

Both: No.

AG: Because that man, Mr. Thomson ...

MS: Mr. Dougherty worked for the railroad, because Mrs. Dougherty could go anywhere she wanted on a pass.

AG: Oh, that's right. She had a pass. [They continued to list names, including ...]

AG: ... Johnny Regan over here, on Adams Street.

JJ: If I understand this map [gestures toward photocopy of 1933 WC map], South Adams Street used to go across the railroad tracks.

MS: Right. We took shortcuts that way.

JJ: Okay. Who lived on the other side of the railroad tracks?

MS: [in a quiet voice] Coloreds. It was an all-colored section. We called it Georgetown. JJ: [speculation on the origin of the name "Georgetown."] So you didn't go over there much. Did they ever come over here?

MS: No.

JJ: Was there ever trouble?

Both: No ... no.

MS: A lot of them used to walk through when they had the Brandywine Mushroom. A lot of them worked at the factory on South Matlack Street. It was the colored mushrooms. But my father worked there; whites worked there too.

JJ: So people used to walk through the neighborhood, but there wasn't any trouble.

Both: No.

JJ: What do you remember about Brandywine Mushrooms, and about your father working there. Jack told me about your father, and I guess he was a big man, and used to haul ice?

MS: Well, he was an ice man. He worked there for years, but he lost his job because he drank a lot. [laughter] I guess that's when he went to the mushrooms.

AG: That was still called the Brandywine down there?

MS: When daddy worked there.

AG: Then Mabel worked at ...

MS: Mabel worked at the Jacob's Cannery. Then it changed to Grocery Store Products.

JJ: That was up near Hoffman's Lumber?

Both: Uh-uh [affirmative].

JJ: Did anyone in the neighborhood ever have anything to do with the State Normal School? Did anyone work there, or go to school there, or was the school just something that was over there across High Street.

MS: Oh, I went to the Demonstration School. It was Model School, and then Demonstration School, and belonged to the college or something.

AG: That was where your mother worked.

MS: Yes, mom worked there, cleaning. And then there was High Street School, where the Burger King is. This end of town mostly went to Demonst ... Model School.

JJ: You said that [as children, you played] in the street.

MS: We didn't have a playground. We played out in the alley next to Jack's (Rigg Alley between East Nields Street and Howe Street). We never went up near the railroad tracks.

AG: [To M] What was over here (501 East Nields Street)? A brickyard? You couldn't play in the brickyard?

MS: Oh no. That used to be a brick yard where they made cinder blocks, but we couldn't play over there. The guy who used to own it, John Doran, ... you'd get chased out of there. We used to play hide-and-seek in there, and he'd come around and chase you.

AG: That [the brickyard] wasn't there when I came here (1941). Well after they tore that down, who owned that?

Both: [discussion without conclusion. A thought that someone had donated the land to the Day Care that presently occupies the site. I contributed some names from my list, including the Ruggiero's of Franklin Street and the United Dairy Company.]

JJ: When they took down this brickyard, do you remember about when that was? Was it before WWII? [M hesitated] How old were you at the time? Were you in high school yet? Were you grown up?

MS: No, I wasn't grown up yet. I was in my teens, 11 or 12 years old. I was only a kid.

JJ: So that would make it in the late 1920s.

AG: But you can't remember the guy that ... had something to do with it, and he gave the land to the Day Care?

MS: I don't. All I remember is that John Doran had a brickyard. [more discussion of deed holders

for 501 East Niels Street]

AG: Everybody was mad at first ... [something to do with the donation of the land to the Day Care]

MS: [to A] Do you remember the big oil and gasoline tanks over here on Franklin Street? [the Atlantic Refining Company] They had great big tanks and we were scared that they would blow up.

JJ: Do you remember a story about a big fire ...

Both: The Goose Creek fire? [laughter] Sure.

JJ: Why don't you tell me what you know about it.

MS: there was this gang of boys up there on the bridge [over Goose Creek], my brother, the Gibsons and all of them. And of course, they didn't know that there was oil in the creek.

JJ: Which brother? The one (Charles) that you (A) married?

AG: Yes.

MS: They were over there smoking and they just threw their cigarette in the creek ...

JJ: ... and WOW! How bad was it?

MS: It had all those houses on Franklin Street on fire in back. It melted the street on Lacey Street where it crossed the creek and you couldn't go up Lacey Street at all. It [the fire] just came to here, to Niels Street, but it didn't burn any further. The oil was came from Bituminous [Service Co., at E. Union St. and the railroad tracks] and it was leaking in the creek, but the boys didn't know it. None of us knew it.

AG: In other words, it was Bituminous' fault that they let the oil into the creek.

MS: But oh boy, that was a terrible fire. [emphasis] I was scared to death.

AG: [laughing] Did those boys get blamed for it?

MS: No. I don't think they knew who did it. The boys didn't know it would happen. The boys all smoked, the Gibsons and all them, and they always used to gang around at night and sit there and talk.

JJ: Was it at nighttime when this happened?

MS: No, it wasn't dark. It was in summertime.

JJ: How old were you when that happened?

MS: I guess I must have been in my teens. [If her brother, one year older, was smoking, then he must have been around 16, so it would have been around 1930.]

JJ: I guess that would have made it the late 1920s or 1930.

MS: Oh yes, because I got married in 1940. I was twenty-five then, so it had to have been when I was in my teens.

JJ: Back then, when you got married at age 25, did people think that was old to get married, or was that normal?

MS: I thought it was normal. My other brothers and sisters, they got married too young. They were only eighteen ...

JJ: How old were you when you got married?

AG: I was 21. I got married in October, and in November, I was 22. My husband was 26 ...

MS: ... and I was 25. And my sister "Bill" was 25, but all the rest of them were in their teens. 18 and 19.

JJ: How did their marriages work out?

Both: Pretty good.

AG: Bob got divorced ...

MS: Yes, well when he was in the service, she was running around, then when he came home, he got rid of her.

AG: And the rest of them were all right.

MS: I guess he was the only one.

JJ: Do you feel like talking about your brother Earl at all? [Earl died in a nasty car accident in 1956.]

MS: It doesn't bother me.

JJ: [reviewed the details from the newspaper story] He was driving a bread truck for Berardi, wasn't it? It sounded like a really bad accident.

Both: It was. [somber]

JJ: Were you two related to the Berardis?

MS: Yes. My sister is married to a Berardi. Betty.

AG: And he worked at their bake shop.

MS: He worked at three jobs ...

JJ: Where was the bake shop?

MS: Up there on Chestnut and New [Streets]. He was working three jobs. He was working for the Daily Local News, serving papers. He worked for the bake shop at night. And then he worked for the mushroom house in Kennett.

AG: He had to work, with three kids ...

MS: He had four kids, and he had just built a new home. When he came home from the war, he built a new home. He only lived there two years and he was killed.

JJ: How did the rest of the family make out?

MS: She remarried five years later, to Joseph Frisco, from Phoenixville.

JJ: And moved up there [to Phoenixville]?

MS: No, they're still in that house, on Oakburne Road.

JJ: Oh, that explains why I saw other Gincleys on Oakburne Road.

MS: I have a brother down there too. Frances.

AG: They [M and her husband] built a house down there on Oakburne Road, but they never lived in it. They sold it.

JJ: Where were you living when your mom (Helen Harvey Gincley) came to live with you?

MS: Up in Mayfield Court. Up near the golf course and the country club.

JJ: On a whole different topic, [explained the data from the Register of Deaths] ... It sounds to me like Riggstown wasn't a real poor neighborhood, but it also wasn't a real rich neighborhood.

MS: It was pretty poor. We were poor.

JJ: Did people get sick much? How did people die? Your brother died in an accident ...

MS: My brother died in the accident. He was only 37. Other people died later, of cancer and

other things.

JJ: When you were real young, do you remember anyone who had babies who died after only a few days or weeks?

MS: No. It wasn't like that. There was 10 of us. [laughter] They had big families along here.

JJ: How did ten people live in 390 East Niels Street?

AG: Now you're going to start talking about my husband again. [laughter]

MS: We had three bedrooms. Of course, my oldest brother (Charles, A's husband) had to have things for himself. So he got one room for himself, and we all had to pile in the other two rooms, boys and girls together.

JJ: Which room did you brother get?

MS: The back room.

JJ: The little one. At least he didn't try to get the front one.

MS: We had three double beds in a room. ... But we were happy.

AG: They were happy. On Sundays, they'd bring all of their friends into the living room, watching television. It was full of kids. Oh, I'm telling you, it was something!

MS: My father used to get mad because, when he'd come home from work, he wouldn't have any place to sit down because we'd have all these kids.



The Gincley family

JJ: Your house sounds like it was the meeting place for the whole neighborhood.

MS: Oh, it was. We enjoyed it. ... The Davises, they were a big family. Smileys were a big family ...

AG: They had five ...

MS: And Holstons were a big family.

AG: Holstons ... I didn't know them too well, like Haney worked with me down at Keystone Tag.

MS: They were all big families.

JJ: What did you do at Keystone Tag?

AG: I ran a machine making paper tags, like you find on clothes.

MS: I used to string them.

JJ: You worked at Keystone Tag too?

MS: Up at Denny Tag. I worked there thirty and a half years, stringing the tags.

AG: They used to bring the tags in a wagon down here and people would string them to earn some extra money.

MS: They did that until that took the work inside and got them off the street.

JJ: Was there ever any rivalry between Denny Tag and Keystone Tag?

MS: Well, Denny bought Keystone out.

AG: Then I went up there to Denny, but it didn't last long. I quit, because here, we made nice-looking tags. Say I was running the machine and the printing was blurred or whatever. I would shut it off and the pressman would fix that. Up there, I would shut it off and [the pressman would demand] "What's that?" If I told him, he'd say "Run it!" They were more for production, and we were for ...

JJ: ... quality?

AG: Quality. So I didn't last long. I couldn't stand it. So I waited for a while, I guess a year, and then I went over to the college. I started in the laundry, and I was there for twenty years.

JJ: Did anybody else in the neighborhood work for either Denny or for Keystone?

Both: [they gave me the following list of names] Becky Carey (502 East Niels Street), Honey

Hamilton, Ann Regan and her father, Honey's mother, Tommy Woodward (387 East Nields Street).

AG: Didn't the Woodwards live over on Franklin Street before they moved into Jack's house (387 East Nields Street)?

JJ: [refers to list of deed holders without success]

MS: There was Woodwards and then Boyles moved in. And then Pop-pop bought the house for Jack.

JJ: It sounds like most of the women [in the neighborhood] had to work. There was none of this sitting home all day ironing, unless you were doing it for somebody else.

AG: I worked out, but I did washing and ironing for people too. [laughter]

JJ: How about kids, when they were growing up. How old were kids when they started to get jobs?

AG: Well, Ky (Charles Gincley, A's husband) was 16 when he had to go to work.

MS: And then the war broke out. I had five brothers in the service.

JJ: They all went in? [incredulous]

MS: Ky, he had a murmur and he didn't pass, but I had five in there.

AG: What was it? Two in the navy, wasn't it?

MS: Two in the navy and two in the army and one in the Marines. [A interjected "Alonzo"] The one in the Marines was only 16. He lied about his age.

AG: They took him in. Thank God they all came back.

MS: He wanted to go because his brothers went. They all came back, and Jum, the one who was killed [Earl, 1956 car accident], lived only two years. [sadly] He went all through the war without a scratch. That's the way things go.

JJ: Did everybody belong to St. Agnes Church?

AG: No. I do, she doesn't. She's not Catholic.

MS: I'm a Lutheran.

JJ: Where is there a Lutheran Church around here?

MS: Over on New [Street] by the college {at Rosedale). That's where I was baptized. We were Lutherans.

JJ: If the Gincleys were Lutheran, then Charles married a "foreigner," a Catholic girl from Phoenixville (humorously referring to A).

AG: He turned Catholic for me. I didn't ask him to, but he did.

MS: And Jum turned.

JJ: Can you give me all of the nicknames (of the Gincley children)?

- Charles: *Ky* because when he was small, he once said "Ky" for "Guy" to describe a large man who passed along East Niels Street
- Martha: *Siddy* origin unknown. Her father called her "Bridget." (wife of James Stanley)
- Dorothy: *Bill* because she looked like a boy when she was born, and mom named her Bill (wife of John Snyder of Downingtown)
- Robert: *Bob*
- Harry: *Harvey* his middlename
- Frances: *Kip* Unlike the others, he got that name "from the outside" while playing ball.
- Betty: no nickname (wife of Anthony Berardi)
- Alonzo: *Lonny* within the family, *Yoppy* from playing softball
- Florence: *Flossie* (wife of William Sylvester)
- Earl: *Little Jum*. His uncle, Earl Harvey (Helen Harvey's brother and son of Alonzo Harvey, was *Big Jum* even though he was physically smaller.

JJ: I found a reference to the Riggtown Terriers and the Matlack Street Bums, football teams. Do you know anything about this? There's a Gincley on there. The year is 1925.

MS: It must have been Ky.

AG: Wait a minute, I've got something [produced newspaper clipping from 1976, "50 Years Ago" about an April 1926 baseball game between teams of the same name]. "Charles `Ky' Gincley, manager of the hard-hitting amateur ball club from the southern end of town, ... Jerry Davis pitching, Tommy Delaney catcher, Ray Fox at first, [probably Sarge] Clark at 2nd, Bud Singer at shortstop, and Ky Gincley at 3rd. Outfields Jack Gibson, Charles Gibson and [unknown] Green.

MS: [thinking out loud] There was an Al Green ...

JJ: He played on the team the year before in 1925, but that article doesn't give his first name either. [A showed other articles including photo of Charles Gincley working at Hoopes Brothers & Darlington. Also some newspaper clippings from CCHS that I'd already seen. Plus two old photographs. Later, I copied the two photographs and the clipping from Hoopes Bros. & Darlington.]

JJ: [in reference to the newspaper clipping from Hoopes Bros. & Darlington] How long did he work up there?

MS: Quite a while, and it got a little hard on him, the dust and all, because he had emphysema. So he went over to the college ...

AG: ... to the laundry with me for five years. [conversation about newspaper clippings from CCHS]

JJ: Garrett Gincley was Levi's brother?

MS: Yes ...

JJ: ... [notice that Garrett's address was 205 West Union] Wait a minute! West Union Street? That's on the nice side of town. Where there rich and poor Gincleys? [laughter]

AG: I lived on West Union for ten years, when we first married, in an apartment.

MS: [in reference to 1888 clipping about Martha Malinda Gincley, daughter of Charles and Anna Gincley]. Charles and Anna were my father's parents (Levi Gincley's parents). ... My father was only three weeks old when his father died (1889/04/08). He never knew his father. And then his mother remarried again, to a Ryan, and they had one son, Francis. [Francis Ryan was Levi and Garrett Gincley's half-brother.]

AG: There's uncle George and uncle Eber ...

JJ: How many uncles and aunts did you have?

MS: [smiling, too many] Don't ask me. [I read off items from my notes on the Gincley family. M knew that her grandfather was an inventor, and when I mentioned the carpet stretcher, she thought "carpet" seemed familiar. However, she volunteered no other details.]

JJ: In 1913, Levi Gincley married Helen Harvey. Now, I'm gonna ask you this question and you can tell me its none of my business, but I notice that they got married in Elkton, Maryland.

MS: Yes, they ran away and got married. [more on clippings. George Gincley of Pottstown was M's cousin and the son of her Uncle Eber.]

JJ: So I can assume that anywhere I see a Gincley, they're related.

Both: Uh-uh [affirmative]

MS: [studying a clipping about Garrett Gincley] Garrett Gincley ... that must have been Uncle Eber ...

AG: That's right. Eber Garrett Gincley, here it is. [found it in another clipping about a birthday

party for Marian Gincley]

MS: We called him Eber. My daddy always called him Eber.

JJ: Then Marian Gincley is a cousin.

MS: Yes, she was my father's niece.

JJ: And if she was four in 1914, then she was about five years older than you.

MS: Uh-uh [affirmative]. It was a large family.

AG: Uncle Eber had a lot of kids.

MS: It was a large family like dad. And the Nichols, that was another big family, daddy's sister's family. [So Levi Gincley had a sister who married into the Nichols family.]

JJ: [new subject] Was there any more crime in Riggtown than anywhere else? [Earlier,] you said it was a "bad neighborhood" ...

MS: That's what people said ...

AG: That's what people thought, but it wasn't. None of them got into any trouble. Not even for the fire ... [laughter]

JJ: Wait a minute. Wasn't there something with that Gibson boy ...

MS: Jack? No, he didn't get into any trouble.

AG: What was his brother's name? Chip? ...

MS: No, I don't think so. They live over here on Matlack Street. I don't think they got into any trouble ... that I know of. They were just up on the bridge [during the Goose Creek fire].

JJ: But nothing serious. Nobody ever went to jail or anything?

Both: Oh, no.

JJ: [new subject] Where did you go for food? When you went food shopping, where was the store?

MS: We had corner stores. Up there [gestured towards Matlack Street], old Leb Brown, and Eagle Store. There weren't any chain stores around. [referring to the Eagle store] Giunta's at one time had it.

AG: Ky used to talk about how he'd go in there to buy one cigarette.

MS: I stole candy out of his window. We used to go up there, and he had his window open, and I'd reach in and get a piece of candy.

JJ: On the corner of Matlack and Lacey Street, there's a house that used to be a store. Do you remember it?

MS: That was Snyder's. That's where we used to go for groceries. That's where my grandmother and my grandfather always did their shopping. Over catty-cornered from that, used to be Quillen's. It was just a small store, with candy and soda, in the front of their house. [Eddie Snyder was succeeded by owners whose names sounded like Doginson and Harvey's brother.]

JJ: When did people start getting cars in this neighborhood?

MS: We had a Model T Ford. [laughter] Him and my uncle had it together, Big Jum. They didn't have it too long though.

AG: Ky had his first car in 1937. He bought a Ford ... a '36 [not 1937].

MS: The rest of the boys didn't get cars until they came out of the service, because they didn't have any money. They all went in the service when they were 17 and 18.

JJ: ... probably did it just to get some room for themselves. [general laughter]

JJ: [new subject] Did the trains ever used to stop at Nields Street?

Both: Oh yes!

AG: I used to take that train to go down to Philadelphia to visit my mother. [After I stopped recording, A explained that her mother lived in Phoenixville and took the train to Center City where she met A for lunch.]

MS: And the students rode it.

JJ: So they would come walking through the neighborhood.

MS: They used to get off every morning, and then you'd see them go by, and get on at night.

JJ: What did you think about the students? Did you ever think about them?

MS: No, because there wasn't that many of them. Only over at the college, because that's where they stayed. Now, they're all over [the neighborhood].

AG: They fixed up [the crossing] and then they closed the railroad. I guess they're not going to

start it up again.

MS: There used to be electric trains. There used to be the old-time engines, and then they changed it to electric. And there were so many accidents, and people who got killed there ...

JJ: I saw some photos in the newspaper, about an accident where the car got dragged for 300 yards ...

Both: Yes, yes, terrible.

JJ: Can you remember back to when this street (East Niels Street) wasn't paved? [They shook their heads to say no.]

MS: They used to tar it every summer. We used to put rocks out so you could get across [without getting full of tar]. We weren't supposed to, but we did it anyway.

AG: How about the Guthries, who lived in that house ...

MS: That house used to be across the street. You know where the Day Care is, that's where the house used to be. Then they moved it across the street and that's where the Guthries lived. Then they tore it down. She died and her daughters sold it. That's when they put those apartments up.

JJ: Was the house in bad shape?

AG: No! It was a nice house. Everybody was sick. She probably wanted a mint for it, and couldn't get it, so she sold it to whoever ... it was a nice house. It had a kitchen down in the basement. It had a big garden and she kept it nice.

MS: The daughter that was left lived over here on Adams Street, but then she moved to Downingtown.

JJ: Do you remember much about when they filled in the park behind the house?

MS: I remember that it was a dump and they filled it in. That's where we used to throw all of our trash.

AG: There were rats and everything.

MS: They would come

up in your yard.

AG: People would go and shoot them. Not when I lived her, but ...

MS: ... but then the borough got rid of that, and they made the field down there.



A 1930s view of the alley behind East Niels Street with the former dump off to the right.

JJ: Have you ever heard of Green Field? That's who they named the field after?

Both: I don't know.

JJ: I was surprised they didn't name it Riggtown Field. [laughter]

MS: I don't know. Maybe they just made it up.

JJ: I saw something about a real estate agent named Harry A. Taylor [both: murmurs of name recognition] who donated the land to the borough on the condition that they name the park after the Green family.

MS: It wasn't someone from around here.

JJ: [asked if they'd heard of Joseph Cotter/Carter who supervised the filling in of the swamp. No.]

Both: [amusement at reference to local vandals who threatened Joseph Cotter's shack at the landfill site]

JJ: [story of arson at Patrick King house on South Franklin Street in 1901. After discussion, both agreed that this must have been around where Eddie Wilson lived.]

AG: [Eddie Wilson] He worked with me at Keystone.

JJ: [new subject] We already talked about how you didn't go across the railroad tracks onto South Franklin Street. How about Matlack Street? Did you go up there, or was Matlack Street like Riggtown: don't cross the creek!

MS: There weren't many up there who came down. Only the Gibson boys, that I know of.

AG: Well, what about your cousins, Nichols and [unintelligible]?

MS: Yes, but they didn't come down here. Joey Nichols? They didn't bother.

AG: Barrys?

MS: Barrys, they stayed to themselves. There was just 2 girls and a boy.

AG: The Singers?

MS: The Singers up there on Niels Street (must be 200-block East Niels Street), but they didn't bother.

AG: How about the other old guy that lived there with the fat girl, there was something wrong with her?

MS: The Lintons? Nobody bothered them. They stayed to themselves.

AG: He worked at the cannery too.

MS: Then there was the Marleys. [discussion of businesses along Matlack Street that have all closed. Mostly mushroom houses, but also Rosenberg's dairy]

MS: That's where the coloreds worked, in the cannery.

JJ: Did you eat a lot of mushrooms when you were growing up?

AG: You didn't like them when you were younger, right?

MS: No. My father used to bring home the bent cans.

AG: Oh, they were good. And when this one [gestures towards Grocery Store Products near Hoffman's Lumber] went out of business, they were selling cases of the little cans. I bought them for my family and for everybody.

MS: B&B [brand] [stuff deleted about brand names]

MS: Oh, I eat mushrooms now.

AG: She didn't eat them when she could get them.

MS: Daddy would get them free. [more stuff about mushroom preferences]

JJ: It sounds like Riggstown was a good place to grow up.

MS: It was. I hated to move out of there.

AG: So did her mother. [She moved out and she moved back.]

MS: She spent all her life here.

AG: She had her sister across the street, Aunt Gert.

MS: Well, I lived up on Matlack Street until 1959. It was almost like Riggstown, you could come down to visit.

JJ: When you went to St. Agnes Church, how did you go? Did you walk or drive?

AG: We drove. Now I go with friends. We got Saturday night.

The tape ended here

From my recollection, this was nearly the end of the interview. I said something about walking from Riggstown to the center of West Chester for errands, and they both said that it was common when they were younger. Afterwards, I gave Martha a ride home and Anne came along. They pointed out the location of the old Gay Street School where black students below eight grade went. Nowadays, it is the borough hall. -- Jim Jones (early April 1996)