

1996

06 Interview with Charles and Nancy Carey

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Recommended Citation

Jones, J. (1996). 06 Interview with Charles and Nancy Carey. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/hist_wchest/13

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Interview with Charles and Nancy Carey

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Reference: Charles Carey and Nancy Carey, interview by James A. Jones (Downingtown, PA, September 9, 1996).

Charles Carey was born West Chester in 1926 and lived at 502 E. Nields St. until he moved out in 1952. Nancy Carey was born elsewhere, but met Charles in West Chester and married him in 1949. The interview took place in a rustic picnic house/storage shed on their property near Downingtown. Charles R. Carey (CC) and his wife, "Nancy" (NC), were present. They had a collection of loose photos and documents from their family history.

CC: A lot of Riggtowners served in WWII. The Davis and Gincley families each had 5 sons in WWII, making them "gold star mothers." Of all the Riggtowners who served, only Jerry Davis died during the war, maybe from a heart attack. (JJ: At the second interview, CC corrected himself. A "gold star" family was one that had lost someone in the war, not one with five members in uniform. The Davises received a "gold star flag" even though their son was not killed in combat.)

CC was in Navy on LSD-13 "Casa Grande" in the Pacific at Okinawa. (JJ: An "LSD" was a "Landing ship--dock" which serviced 20 LCMs, their tanks and soldiers. CC showed me a photo and explained that the stern was a large dry dock. Using pumps, the LSD could pump out or flood the dry dock as needed.)

According to CC, the RR was a boundary against "the outsiders on the other side of the railroad tracks." Riggtowners also kept out the people who lived "over the bridge."

From 1937-1944, 500 East Nields Street was owned by William E. (Jr), Florence and Gertrude Carey.

Charles Carey's wife's real name was Eleanor Ellis, but she was known as "Nancy" to avoid confusion with her mother.

In 1942, the cannery next to Goose Creek (present-day Ralph Smith Company) paid their workers 45¢/hour, while Schramm's paid 50¢/hr.

The kids in Riggtown used to scavenge things from along the railroad tracks, especially bottles from the dump near the roundhouse. Large deposit soda bottles were worth 5¢, while milk bottles were worth 1¢ and soda bottles were worth 2¢.

Billy Scott lived at 200 E. Niels St. He was known as "Senator Scott" and was an enormous baseball fan.

INTERVIEW

JJ: Where did your nickname come from?

CC: My uncle (William E. Jr) used to carry Chiclets in his pocket, but I couldn't say that. I used to call them "chockums," and it stuck.

[JJ told story of Cie Gincley's nickname]

JJ: [refers to the Carey family genealogy] If I have this correctly, your father inherited the property at 502 E. Niels St. in 1937 when your grandfather (William E. Sr) died.

CC: No, he bought it. The house was left to several of us, and he had to buy out their shares.

JJ: Then your father held it until 1952, until they moved up here. That's when they sold the house to Anne Gincley and her husband.

CC: They sold it for just enough money to pay for the house that they put up there [on Poorhouse Road, across from CC's house]. It was a pre-fab house. I had bought the land--not quite ten acres--and then I gave them two acres to put the house on. My wife and I lived up there with them until we built this house.

JJ: What year did you build this house?

CC: 1955.

NC: Yes, we moved in here in '55.

JJ: Did you have other brothers and sisters?

CC: My sister, Kay.

JJ: What year was she born? Is she still alive?

CC: She was five years younger than me, so she was born in 1930. She is still alive.

JJ: Okay. I've got your two daughters here [on this list]. What year was Joann born?

NC: 1952.

JJ: So she is a bunch older than Tina Marie. [14 years]

NC: Yes. Tina was born in 1966.

JJ: While we are on the subject [of the immediate family], your maiden name was Ellis, wasn't it? Where did you grow up?

NC: West Goshen.

JJ: What year were you born?

NC: 1931.

JJ: [introduce more Carey family questions] Where was your [CC] grandfather, William E. Carey, born? It was over on E. Linden Street. Do you know which house?

CC: [He didn't.]

[The conversation moved to clippings that the Carey's had obtained from Dorothy Parker, a relative who also volunteers at the Chester County Historical Society. All were from the CCHS newspaper clipping file. We spoke about the two Careys killed by lightning at Sconnelltown, because they were listed in the newspaper as living at 200 E. Linden Street. We also speculated that Sarge Clark's house (220 E. Linden St.) was formerly 200 E. Linden St.]

JJ: Was Dottie (Parker) the daughter of Harry [Carey]?

CC: No. Her name is Work. My father's sister Gertrude married a fellow named Work.

JJ: Did Dottie wind up growing up on E. Niolds St. too?

CC: Yes, because he left her, so my aunt Gert had to work over at the Purple and Gold, and she worked down in Wilmington some place. She used to stay there, and Dotty lived there [next door]. My aunt Gert used to come home on weekends. She used to make us these great big pots of vegetable soup. [CC smiled]

JJ: You had another aunt named Florence who stayed at home. Was she kind of sickly?

CC: She was crippled. She had arthritis and she couldn't get around.

JJ: Did Dotty wind up taking care of her?

CC: No, she pretty much took care of herself. She did the cooking ...

NC: Dotty lived there with Poppop Carey, and uncle Willie, who was a bachelor, and aunt Florence, who was a spinster.

JJ: What about Walter? Have you ever heard of uncle Walter?

[NC had heard of him, but neither person had anything specific to report. NC excused herself to make a phone call.]

JJ: Of all your father's brothers and sisters, who was the oldest? In other words, in what order were they born?

CC: My father was the youngest. [We listed all of the other siblings--Willie, Harry, Gert, Florence, Isabelle, Mary, and Walter [plus CC's father, Richard].

JJ: [turning to NC] Who are you trying to call? Dorothy?

NC: No, his mother. [she gestured towards CC].

JJ: His mother? [surprised] She's still alive?

NC: Oh yes. She lives in the Wentworth Home on (117 South) Church Street.

JJ: Was she [Rebecca Gibson] related to Jack Gibson and all of the other [Matlack Street] Gibsons?

NC: No. The rest of her family, other than aunt Emily Stafford who lives on Matlack Street ... the rest of the family lived in Sea Isle City, New Jersey.

CC: But they did live in West Chester at one time.

JJ: Okay, let's make sure I got this straight. Emily Stafford lives on Matlack Street ...

NC: She was the sister of Rebecca [Gibson, CC's mother].

JJ: You smiled when I said Jack Gibson.

NC: She had a brother named Jack Gibson, but he lived down in Sea Isle City.

[discussion of Jack Gibson's family followed. Jack's brother was Chip Gibson.]

CC: Their sister was Jean. She married Bob Ayers.

JJ: Oh, okay. I know Bob Ayers and I've talked to him a few times.

[questions about other Riggtown residents including Jack Harvey, Anne Gincley, etc.]

JJ: Your grandfather was William E. Carey, and one of his brothers was Robert L.

NC: At one time, he owned 502 E. Niels Street.

JJ: Right. Now somewhere, I got the idea that Robert was the guy who built the houses at 500-502 E. Niels Street. Does that sound right? [neither NC or CC were sure]

[tape contains my muttering as I reviewed the names on the Carey genealogy and compared them to a list given me by CC]

JJ: [reading information from a transcription of an obituary for John Carey] John Carey was born in 1829 in Ireland; married Eliza Shields on April 23, 1850-something [illegible]; died March 3, 1904 in West Chester. He arrived in West Chester 50 years ago, so that would be in 1854, right around the time when he married Eliza Shields. He belonged to the Episcopal Church in Ireland and attended the Church of the Holy Trinity. He worked for Henry Guss tearing down the old Washington Hotel, and he helped to build the West Chester gas works. He was called to substitute at the roundhouse on the railroad, and stayed there for 20 years. Here is a quotation: "In those days, Mr. Carey was a fine-looking man, being of admirable proportions and upright in his bearing. His physique was often compared to that of a Roman soldier." Eliza Shields was the sister of John Shields and Mrs. James Stark. John Shields was already dead by 1904. The rest of the transcript describes different children.

NC: [reporting from her telephone call to CC's mother] Walter Carey was Richard's oldest brother. He was killed in an automobile accident. The only thing she knows was that Walter was the oldest and Richard was the youngest.

JJ: [looking at the certificate of death for William E. Carey Sr] He lived at 500 East Niels Street. He died aged 79, 5 months and 25 days. His occupation was wood-turner. His father was John Carey, born in Ireland. His mother was Eliza Shields, also born in Ireland. His birthdate was July 4, 1857. His date of death was December 29, 1936. Cause of death was "hemiplegia" and "cerebral hemorrhage" aggravated by

arteriosclerosis. The doctor was Frank H. Wells and he's buried in Greenmount Cemetery.

JJ: [looking at a photo of CC's grandmother] This must be Katherine May Truitt Carey. Is it a wedding picture, you think?

CC: I don't know. I never met either of my grandmothers.

JJ: She got married in 1883, when she would have been around 25 years old, so that might be her wedding picture. She looks about the right age.

[discussion about NC's upcoming cataract operation]

NC: How do you like living in Riggtown?

JJ: It's pretty much the kind of place I've always wanted to live. I was living two blocks away over on Magnolia Street, just renting, when I first came to West Chester. [discussion about my job, search for a house, marriage, etc.]

NC: I'm sure you heard that a bunch of the old-timers over there aren't crazy over the college students.

JJ: Oh yes. That's one of the things I hope to accomplish with all of this [is make students aware and interested in their neighborhood and neighbors]. I'm involved with the neighborhood organization, CASE. But I'm really pleased that the old-timers have been willing to talk to me, and didn't just treat me like some "college professor." I think I made a good impression a couple of winters ago when we had all that snow, and my wife and I went and shoveled sidewalks for Anne [Gincley] and some of the other older people.

[discussion about Jack Harvey and his trapping activities, anti- hunting lobbyists]

JJ: I brought along a couple of pictures that I took in Riggtown or got from some of the old-timers. I thought you might be interested.

NC: [looking at the Gincley family picture] These are the Gincleys ... Yoppy, Kip, Betty, Harvey, Bob, ... this was Mr. Gincley ...

JJ: I've got the whole list somewhere.

CC: [looking at a photo of the back of 300 block] There aren't any garages anymore?

JJ: Not too many of them. A few of them are left, but I know that the one next to me burned in 1962--I found a newspaper story about that [see Daily Local News (April 6, 1962)]. My house never had one as far as I can tell. Did you guys have garages behind your house?

CC: No, we never had a garage at our house.

NC: Anne and Cie [who now lives in 502 E. Niels St.] must have put that up [indicating the garage in the photo].

JJ: [While CC looked at the ESCO Cabinet Company picture] Do you remember the United Dairy Equipment Company?

CC: My dad used to work there.

JJ: Everybody's dad used to work there, it seems. At one point, they bought out the Sharpless Separator Works and the ESCO Cabinet Company. This picture shows a bunch of workers including Cie Gincley when he was about 16 years.

NC: My daughter is thinking about coming over to [your lecture] and she is thinking of making a videotape. Is that OK?

JJ: That's fine with me, but she should check with the Historical Society to make sure they are OK about it.

[change of subject]

JJ: I have a question about your grandfather, Bill Carey [William Carey Sr.]. Did he live in 500 E. Niels St. until he died, or did he go to a home before he died?

CC: He died at home. As a matter of fact, I was in the room when he passed away.

JJ: How old were you?

CC: Ten.

JJ: Was the whole family gathered around?

CC: No, my dad and his brothers took turns watching him, and I was with my dad.

JJ: What was your grandfather like?

CC: He was big and husky, and his hands were all crippled up, his fingers cut off ...

JJ: He was a carpenter, right?

CC: Yes. His fingers were cut off ...

NC: ... He made some beautiful things. ...

CC: ... I don't know if I still have any of those candle holders he made.

JJ: Good. I talked to Jack Harvey about his grandfather [Alonzo Harvey], and it sounded like he was a hard man to get along with. I wondered whether that was just him, or if it was a generational thing?

NC: I don't think so. I think everyone liked Poppop Carey.

CC: He used to make baseball bats for us and stuff like that.

JJ: Did he do this for the Riggtown Terriers?

CC: No, that was for our first softball team after the war. When we got out, we formed the Riggtown Bulldogs.

NC: I thought that was the team that dad sponsored.

CC: No, all we did was send to Sears-Roebuck and got the jerseys. The Terriers were earlier, they were the football team that played before WWII.

JJ: There was a Carey on the Riggtown Terriers. Was it your dad? CC: He didn't play football that I know of. On the football team, there was a Bus Vesper, Johnny, Freddy Vesper, all them guys got together ...

JJ: There were a lot of Careys and not all of them were from your family. [Later, when I checked, I saw that I was wrong. There was no Carey listed in the Riggtown Terrier boxscores.] There were the Linden Street Careys and the South Church Street Careys. The connection goes back to your [Chock's] great-great- grandfather. There were probably other branches as well.

[change of subject]

JJ: You said that your father got the house [502 E. Nields St.] in 1937 after he bought out the shares of your brothers and sisters. Do you remember what happened at 500EN? Your grandfather died in 1937 and in 1944, Earl and Mabel Harvey moved in there. Between 1937 and 1944, I don't know who owned [500 E. Nields St.].

NC: I think Uncle Willie and Gert and Florence owned it. Or was it just Uncle Willie? Dotty can probably set you straight on that.

[change of subject]

JJ: Here is a question about life growing up in Riggtown. All of those houses had front porches, and all of them had back porches.

CC: No, no, no. [laughter] They had back porches, but our two houses, 500 and 502, had closed in back porches. That's where our toilet used to be.

JJ: We garden a lot and we found the foundation where our outhouse used to be. We figured that, if the outhouse was out back, people didn't spend a lot of time hanging out on their back porches. [lots more laughter]

CC: Our porch was enclosed and we had the toilet and a kitchen sink in the back, and that was all. In the winter time, I used to go out on that potty, and it was so cold, I used to stand up on the seat to keep from getting so cold.

JJ: You didn't want to get frozen and stuck to anything. [laughter] I guess that in the summer, it didn't smell too good back there either.

CC: No. After I came out of the service, I painted the house and I put a bathroom in.

JJ: Was that in 1945? 1946?

CC: 1946, right after I got out of the service.

JJ: I'm curious. When did the other houses get a bathroom? Was your house early or late?

CC: I don't really know about the other houses. You'd better ask Dotty [Parker] whether she had to go through the same thing in winter.

[discussed reading in the bathroom; then slight subject change]

CC: All you had to do was look at the outhouse to see how many seats there were. If there were two seats, it was a family. If it was a three-seater, it was a big family. [laughter]

JJ: Then the Gincleys probably had a three-seater, because they had a big family.

NC: So did the Davises. My sister was married to Elmie Davis. He lived between Anne [502 E. Nields St.] and your place [392 E. Nields St.]. [checking through my notes] He bought the house at 386 E. Nields St. in 1951, but all the other Davises were up on Matlack Street.

NC: He was the only one who moved up to Matlack Street.

JJ: Let's see, I've got Martha Davis ...

NC: That's my sister. My real name was Eleanor, but my mother was Eleanor was too, and rather than call us Big Eleanor and Little Eleanor, they called me Nancy.

JJ: How did both you and your sister wind up marrying Riggtown men?

NC: They used to come up to my dad's bar.

JJ: Where was that?

NC: The "Horse and Hound" at 15 North Walnut Street. Now it's called Alibis. We lived up on the third floor over the bar. We'd wait for them to come out of the bar at night and drop notes to them ...

CC: ... or hang a note on a string.

JJ: When was this? Right after the war?

NC: No it was in 1948 or 1949.

[change of subject]

JJ: Assuming that the back porch was not a good place to hang out, did people sit out on the front porches?

CC: Oh yes. We always had rocking chairs out there.

JJ: Did people spend their evenings out there? Did they shout across to each other?

CC: Yes. A lot of times at night, I'd sit out there relaxing, sometimes to midnight.

JJ: Especially in the summertime, I guess that was the coolest place to be, because the houses were not especially cool.

[change of subject]

JJ: What about the backyards? What did people in Riggtown do with their backyards?

CC: Plant. A lot of people had gardens. We had a garden and my dad raised animals ... chickens, he raised turkeys one year in a pen off of the ground. He didn't raise too many turkeys, and then there was an ordinance where you couldn't have pigs, but my dad got pigs anyway.

JJ: Nobody complained? Did he ever let his pig run around back in the swamp before the ball field was finished?

CC: No, he kept it a pen.

JJ: Did anybody else in Riggtown have animals?

CC: No, not that I remember. I only remember my dad.

JJ: You mentioned gardens. Did people grow flowers or vegetables.

CC: Vegetables.

JJ: Did people can the stuff themselves or eat it fresh?

CC: Both. They had the cannery [where the Ralph Smith Trucking Company is now located] and people used to take their stuff over there and they would can it for you.

JJ: In regular tin cans?

CC: Yes. You could walk in with your own stuff and they would can it for you.

JJ: We could sure use that.

[change of subject]

NC: He used to have a horse down there too [at 502 E. Nields St.].

CC: I have a picture of the horse. It shows you the swamp too. I guess Sid [Siddy Stanley] told you about that. We never really dumped that much down there--just tin cans and stuff like that. There was the alley, and it was built up a bit. We had a burning barrel [for burning trash], and there used to be a colored man with a horse and buggy--I think his name was Harmon, but I'm not sure-- and we used to sell paper and rags to him. Iron, copper, brass, lead--we used to take that to the junkyard.

JJ: So you used to look in the swamp, in the dump, and find stuff, and take it to the junkyard or this guy [Harmon] to sell.

CC: There were rats down there in the swamp, and the kids used to catch them. [He demonstrated how to make a rat trap using a box, a stick and a long string.] / ^ / | / /

[end of tape side 1. Our conversation resumed with a discussion of items scavenged along the railroad]

CC: We used to get a penny for a milk bottle, two cents, I think it was, for a soda bottle, and five cents for a big soda bottle.

JJ: Where did you take the bottles?

CC: To Guinta's store up on Matlack Street.

JJ: Did Guinta ever give you trouble [about redeeming bottles] because you didn't buy them there?

CC: No. He knew that we'd spend the money in his store, so he'd get it back anyway. [changes subject slightly] While we're talking about it, you might hear a story about colored people. [People might tell you that] they had to live on the dump.

JJ: I haven't heard that one. Go ahead.

CC: Well, they didn't have to live on the dump. What they did was put a shack up on that dump so they could beat us kids to the bottles, the copper wire ... they built on the dump so they would be there when the trash trucks arrived. That sort of run us off the dump because by the time we got there, it was already picked through.

JJ: Have you ever heard the black section [of West Chester] called "Georgetown?"

CC: Oh yes. That was right across the tracks.

NC: [interrupting] Chock [CC] wanted me to ask you who "Rosey Cheeks" and "Turkey Legs" were. [laughter] He said they were probably hookers.

JJ: I don't know.

NC: They were bootleggers.

JJ: They were colored, right? [NC nodded in the affirmative]

[discussion about the origin of the name Georgetown for the black section. No one knew.]

CC: They didn't come through Riggstown. When they walked up, they walked down Matlack Street to work at the cannery. They avoided Riggstown.

JJ: Why?

CC: I don't know.

NC: Dottie [Parker] said it was because they [the boys of Riggstown] protected the girls. They weren't allowed from the bridge to the railroad tracks. That was the only part that they called Riggstown--from the bridge to the railroad tracks [along East Niels Street].

CC: But it spread beyond the bridge. If you went up on Matlack Street and asked people where they were from, they said Riggstown.

JJ: What about that one block of South Franklin Street where Jack Harvey was born [500 block]? Was that part of Riggstown.

CC: Oh yes.

JJ: ... and that little bit of South Adams Street? Was that part of the neighborhood.

CC: Yes it was. It was all part of Riggstown, but mostly, it was on Niels Street.

JJ: When you were growing up, did you know where the name Riggstown came from?

CC: I heard something about a fellow named Rigg who built most of the houses.

JJ: He built the houses on the other side of Niels Street from where you grew up, basically all the houses in the block between E. Niels, S. Adams, S. Franklin and Howe Streets. But he didn't build all of the houses in Riggstown.

[discussion of various builders of houses in Riggstown, including Carey, John Doran, Samuel Braunstein and Patrick J. Barry]

CC: Talking about the brickyard [owned by John Doran], in back they used to have a big conveyor for loading blocks. We kids used to climb up on that.

JJ: Did you ever get in trouble for that?

CC: No ... [thoughtful], no we didn't.

JJ: Because you never got caught? [laughter]

CC: We were too fast for him.

[discussion about John Doran's son who is still alive in September 1996, and living on Oakbourne Road. I listed the people I had already interviewed and took down Doran's telephone number.]

CC: We used to climb that conveyor. We used to sneak inside ... they had pallets loaded with blocks. I remember the plates with the three holes [part of the machine that molded cinder block]. These were metal. They used to just knock them off and reuse them.

JJ: Apparently there was a construction boom in West Chester in the 1890s around the time the brickyard got started.

[change of subject]

JJ: The railroad ... did you ever pay any attention to it when you were growing up?

CC: We used to walk it. Walk the tracks.

JJ: Walk where?

CC: We used to walk to "Big Bend." If you went to the bridge [over Goose Creek at East Niels Street] and looked up the creek on the right hand side. There used to be what they called "Big Bend" and we used to go swimming in there. After that got ruined, we moved on down the creek. There was a dam with water flowing over it, so on the other side, we blocked that up and made a nice swimming hole.

JJ: That would have right near the railroad tracks.

CC: Yes. The colored boys ruined that for us. They threw glass and other crap in it. So then we found another swimming hole. That's where I got run over by a car. Some colored woman, learning how to drive ... we all went down the creek and were out of the way, and she just came heading right for me ...

JJ: ... Where was this swimming hole?

CC: Westtown Road. There was a little creek there. Mr. Peck, he came down and he had me in his arms. He took me to my parents so they could take me to the hospital.

While he was holding me, he gave me a dollar bill, and since I had that dollar bill, my dad couldn't get any money out of them [the colored woman?] for the hospital bill.

NC: He was sorry he took that dollar.

JJ: How badly were you hurt?

CC: She ran over my legs, but there was a little ditch there so she didn't hurt me too bad.

JJ: You were still healthy enough to go in the service [later]?

CC: Oh yes.

JJ: How old were you when this took place?

CC: [thought for a moment] About ten.

JJ: It sounds like swimming holes were pretty important.

CC: [Since] all our swimming holes were ruined by the colored kids--they weren't allowed to swim with us--we used to walk four miles a day [emphasis] down to Westtown Lake. Sometimes we'd go down there in the morning, cooled off, walked back, and then we'd get hot again, walk down again, cool off again. [laughter]

JJ: Back to the railroad, you never thought about working for the railroad?

CC: No.

JJ: Did you ever find anything that fell off of the train? Stuff that you could sell for junk ...

CC: We found a couple of dead bodies, people who got hit by trains. [NC & J both expressed surprise] Well no, I guess there was just one, I just got a glimpse of the other one. Me, like a dumb fool, I grabbed a piece of the skull and brought it home, and dad made me take it back. [laughter]

JJ: Where was this? Right there where Niels Street cross the tracks?

CC: No, it was up before the crossing. Now, one guy got hit, I think his name was Lindecamp. It dragged his car ...

[I interrupted with the story of the family who was killed at the Niels Street crossing in the late 1950s, but CC maintained that this was a different accident involving just that Lindecamp boy. I added that the accident involving the family led to the installation of crossing gates on Niels Street.]

JJ: It used to be just lights, right? Or was it just a sign?

CC: Yes, "Stop, Look and Listen."

NC: It wasn't too long after they put those gates up that they closed that line down.

JJ: That was in the 1970s, somebody told me.

CC: We even used to walk along the tracks when the train was going by. It made a lot of wind. We walked the bridge.

JJ: Did you ever try to see how close to the train you could stand when it was going by? Kind of like playing "chicken"?

CC: No, we never did that. We used to walk pretty close though, alongside the tracks.

JJ: Did you ever hear of anyone who used to pick up coal, maybe to take home and burn?

CC: Oh yes, we used to pick up coke and bring that home.

JJ: When did your house get an oil heater? Or gas?

CC: Not while I was living there.

JJ: You mentioned putting in a bathroom after the war. Did you put it in over top of the kitchen, where everybody else put theirs?

CC: We put it in the "back room."

JJ: What was in that room before you made it into the bathroom?

CC: It was a bedroom.

NC: They just cut the size of the bedroom down.

JJ: Okay, so that's where you got that really tiny room next to the bathroom? [Note: this arrangement is standard in nearly all Riggstown duplexes today.]

CC: Yes. You got the tiny room back there, and then the two--one in the center and one in the front.

JJ: Okay. I'm still wondering how the Gincley's [neighbors at 390 E. Nields St.] managed to raise ten children in their house.

CC: I wouldn't want you to mention this, but I used to walk over bodies on the kitchen floor [when I went] down there. [laughter]

JJ: Sidy [Stanley, one of the Gincley daughters] told me that the parents had another, Cie got his own room, ...

CC: ... yes, he was kind of spoiled ...

JJ: ... and all of the rest went wherever there was room.

CC: I wouldn't say anything about that.

JJ: It looks to me like the people growing up in Riggtown from the generation before you and your generation were, for the most part, people who worked real hard [CC: Oh yes!], were proud to be part of a neighborhood, and viewed the world as "you're from Riggtown" or "you're from outside of Riggtown."

NC: If you sit and talk to anybody else, you don't hear them talk about where they grew up and what they, like you do the Riggtowners.

JJ: It's a cool thing.

CC: We're proud of it [the sense of community in Riggtown].

JJ: People are talking now about how to get people to feel like they're part of the same community instead of just "me, for myself" and evidently, the people of Riggtown figured it out. If you can figure out what it was, you can sell it or give it away and everybody will want it.

CC: My cousin Dottie [Dorothy Work Parker] is worried that you're going to make Riggtown look bad.

JJ: Well, you can make anything look bad if you want to, but all the people I've met seem like good people. There wasn't much crime there ...

CC: Lots of honesty. You could go to any place, open the door up, and walk right in.

JJ: I've heard stories about how, when the first family got a television, everybody went there over to watch it. It was also the kind of place where people like Anne, Betty, and Jack stayed. Lots of people in this country all moved to the suburbs at some point, but there was enough going on in Riggtown that [some] people stayed. It didn't turn into a ghetto or anything like that. [further discussion about how the history of West Chester's working class has been largely ignored]

NC: Did you see his arm? [gesturing towards CC's tattoo]

JJ: [realizing that the tattoo includes the word Riggtown] Oh, I will [emphasis] want to get a picture of that! [Changing the subject] When you were growing up, were there people moving in and out like rooming houses, or was it pretty much all families?

CC: It was all families.

JJ: That was a big change then from when the houses were built. [I described how the first residents in Riggtown were tenants who rented from investors]

NC: In 433 E. Niels St., where Betty Gincley lived, there was a family next to her by the name of Walton. CC said he thought they lived there when he came out of the service in 1946.

CC: No, I think the one Walton moved out from next to Jack Harvey, and Buzzy McCoombs ... [not clear, but these appear to be the names of people who lived in 431 East Niels Street in 1946]

JJ: You just reminded me of another question. On the list of Carey genealogy that I gave you, can you identify any of the miscellaneous Careys on the last page?

CC: Catherine C.--that's my sister. She married Vernon Ruoss.

JJ: You said she was born in 1931?

NC: 1930, I think.

JJ: Okay, 1930. Now James S. who married Lizette Fitzimmons. You just showed me that list which showed where they fit in. They lived over on Linden Street. He was one of your great uncles [James Stark (1870-1901/03/04), who married Lizette Fitzsimmon on 1947/03/29 and worked as a reporter for the Daily Local News].

[discussion of other Careys whom CC did not know]

JJ: All right then, that takes care of all my big questions. You said that you had some pictures that you'd like to show, and you had the original petition for Greenfield Park?

[discussion of the meaning of "Gold Star mothers." Dr. Donald Reilly of the West Chester University History department told me that a "Blue Star mother" had a son in the service, and a "Gold Star mother" had a son killed in the service. Each mother received an 8'x12' flag to hang in the window, with the appropriate star. If a mother had more than one son in the service, she received a single flag with multiple stars.]

NC: Jerry Davis was the only one who died, but he didn't die [in combat]. He died during training.

CC: Well, I want to ask you a question.

JJ: Okay. I'll do what I can.

CC: Do they still have stink bomb trees down at the college?

JJ: Well, I don't know anything by that name. How about if you tell me what they are and I'll see if I can identify them.

CC: In back of Phillips Memorial, there were trees that let down these things like that [gestured with his hands] and if you stepped on them, they smelled like [unintelligible].

[discussion of stink bombs, mud bombs, dirt bombs, sycamore "button balls," and other childhood projectiles]

CC: On Halloween for trick-or-treat, if somebody wouldn't come to the door, we'd put some on their porch and when they'd step on them, they'd ... [laughter]. Oh, another question. Tunnels. Are there a lot of tunnels at the university?

JJ: Yes, between the buildings. Students go down in them sometimes and get caught drinking. You're not supposed to go down there.

CC: Well, I used to go to the Demonstration School and we'd take the manhole cover off and jump down in there, pull the manhole cover back on, crawl through the tunnel, and it'd take us out on the next street [discussion to decide that he meant College Avenue], and there used to be a big hole in the ground and we'd come out there. It seemed like we'd use those tunnels to get into a lot of things--Phillips auditorium and so on ... we also had no trouble getting into football games. They'd get tired of us sneaking in, so what we did, we got a little band together-- strings, cans, sticks and

stuff like that--beat them like we were a band, [laughter]. Then they'd let us in the front gate and march around the field.

JJ: The football stadium used to be up by the fieldhouse, not down on South Campus where it is now. So you could walk right over from your house then if you wanted to.

CC: Yes. The girls [in the dormitories] over there used to tease us boys, so we used to climb the rainspouts to get a closer look. [laughter] One day, we overloaded the rainspout and down it came. [more laughter]

JJ: So in other words, if I go through the records of the university and look at all their police calls, I'll find a little bit more about you in there? [laughter]

CC: Oh no, they didn't take names.

JJ: Well how about those university kids, or Normal School kids. Did you ever see them much when you were living in Riggtown?

NC: I think a lot of the kids from the south end started there, didn't they?

JJ: At the Demonstration School?

CC: Right.

JJ: I'm asking about the college kids. Nowadays, you've got them coming around [Riggtown] all the time. I have found some newspaper stories about how, at the beginning of the school year, they used to get off of the train at Niels Street. One story from about 1905 said that people used to carry their luggage for tips. Did you ever do that?

CC: No.

JJ: What else have you got here?

CC: I've got that petition. [offered to let me borrow it and make a photocopy, which I did]

JJ: [excited] This is a real important piece of paper, because it gives the names of everyone living in the neighborhood at that moment [early 1944].

CC: [looking at pictures] This is 502 E. Niels St. You can see part of 500 next door.

JJ: I can see that the porch is different.

NC: Anne (Gincley) had that closed in.

CC: [next picture] This is a picture of my cousin Dotty in the backyard. I think that's me behind there. That's my father, and Uncle Willie.

CC: [next picture] This is 500 too, with the steps coming down [in back] and the open cellar door. In here [CC indicated the enclosed back porch] was our toilet.

JJ: Your houses were the only ones that had an outdoor cellarway down to the basement.

CC: Yes. We had the outside cellar too.

NC: Poppop Carey used to work down there.

CC: [next picture, showing Carey's horse] This is Hamiltons' and Smiley's houses. They had closed-in porches. Here's the swamp, and that's Smiley's garage.

JJ: Whose arm do you figure this is?

CC: That's me. That's a corn-fodder cutter [refers to odd machine in background]. There's the horse and the dog, "Spot."

CC: [next picture, showing three young children in a backyard] That's Judy Smiley, her brother Buddy, and me.

JJ: Where do you figure this is? Is it out in the back?

CC: That's what I'm trying to figure out. I can't figure that out.

JJ: You've got some big vegetation here.

CC: Well, my dad used to love gladiolas.

NC: That's not a gladiola.

JJ: It reminds me of a cactus.

CC: I can't figure that one out.

[sounds of J getting ready to make duplicates of some of the photos; discussion of objects that J dug up in the backyard of 392 E. Nields St., including a sledgehammer head]

[There was a pause of several minutes while I took photographs outside. After I returned inside, I explained that I would type up this interview, give CC and NC a copy, and ask them to sign a release. We said our goodbyes and thank-yous, and I shut off the tape, but then the conversation must have returned to WWII, because I turned the tape back on.]

NC: ... they had something at that corner for a while, didn't they.

CC: It was a big board and they put all our names up.

JJ: Where was that?

CC: Guinta's store. I don't know what it is now.

NC: It's not a store now.

JJ: It's a deli on one side and a ... you're talking about where Jake's Bar is [the corner of South Matlack Street and East Niels Street]?

NC: No. The other corner. Down the other corner ...

JJ: Down near where the public works building is, down at that corner? [corner of South Matlack Street and East Lacey Street]?

CC and NC: Yes.

JJ: Okay, there were a couple of stores there. I'm trying to remember ... did Malin have a store down there?

NC: Harvey Gincley had a store down there for a while. In fact, I guess when Harvey sold it, I guess it wasn't a store any more.

JJ: And that was where there was some sort of plaque or roll call was located [listing the names of Riggowners who served in the military]. Can you do this? How people from Riggown served in the military during World War II?

NC: All but Cie [Gincley], I think.

CC: And Izzy.

NC: That's right. Izzy Davis didn't [serve] either. He was already crippled up or something.

CC: If you go from the corner [386 East Niels Street, at the corner with South Franklin Street], Holstons--they were my cousins--Knuckle, Clyde, Buzz, Allie, four out of five. Thompsons--there were two Thompsons, Lou and Ralph [388 E. Niels St.]. Gincleys--five Gincleys [390 E. Niels St.]. The next house [392 E. Niels St.] had no eligibles. Davises had five [394 E. Niels St.]. The next house, no eligibles [396 E. Niels St.]. The next house, no eligibles, well they were older [398 E. Niels St.]. The next house, the boys were two young [400 E. Niels St.]. Then my grandfather's house [500 E. Niels St.]. Our house, there was just me [502 E. Niels St.]. And then Hamiltons [504 E. Niels St.], nobody eligible. Smileys ... Buddy, he went, the only boy. And then you jump across the other side, coming up, you have two Dougherty boys--both of them went [385 E. Niels St.]. And then you had Boyles--Franny, Jack and Jimmy [387 E. Niels St.]. And then the next house [431 E. Niels St.], I think McCoombs lived in there then--there was two of them. Then there was Waltons, Jimmy and Bud, two of them. There was aa younger one that was two young to go. In the next house, there were no eligibles. Then Ferrier's house, there was Wimpy, he was the only ... the oldest one at the time when he went in, and then the other boys went in after the war.

NC: Ears went in after the war?

CC: Dicky, Billy, ...

NC: I'm talking about Ears. Wimpy and Ears were in the Second World War, weren't they?

CC: No, Ears wasn't old enough. Just Wimpy was old enough.

JJ: Of course, you know that they were all Jack's half-brothers? [Jack Harvey]

NC: Sure. Jack was in [the war] too.

CC: But he didn't live on Niels Street. He lived on Franklin Street.

JJ: Was there a big party or anything when everybody got home?

CC: No. When we got home, we never talked about the service. It took us about ... forty years? [looked to NC for confirmation]

NC: In fact, Yoppy [Alonzo Gincley from 392 E. Niels St.] was the only one that was in the Marines, and the first time he talked about the service, he was talking to CC, and Betty [Alonzo's wife] was actually shocked.

CC: Well you see, it just happened that I was at Okinawa, and Yoppy was at Okinawa.

[discussion of war, and how those who talk about it are most likely to be the people who didn't really know what it was about. We agreed that war was a terrible thing.]

CC: It isn't like it used to be. If you didn't have anything good to say about somebody, you didn't say anything. Now, if you haven't got something bad to say about somebody, you don't say anything.

[more talk about scandals, newspapers, etc.]

JJ: Let me ask you about that tattoo. Where did you get that?

CC: I was in Norfolk. That's where we were putting our ship into commission.

NC: Was that boot camp too?

CC: No, that was after boot camp. We commissioned our ship and were getting ready to ship out. There was a fellow who was supposed to be real good by the name of Coleman. This was before we even drank [laughter]. I just went over and got the tattoo and went back to the ship. That's one thing the service did for all of us--taught us how to drink, taught us how to smoke, taught us what women were all about. [tape ends here. The rest is from memory.]

JJ: Well, when you got the tattoo, why did you get the name "Riggtown" in it?

CC: It's got Riggtown, mom and dad. That's what was important.

JJ: Were there other guys from Riggtown with you when you did it? I mean, did you all sit around afterwards and say, "check out Chock's tattoo?"

CC: No, I was alone. I just did it because I was proud of Riggtown.