

National Canal Museum

Transcript of Oral History Interview of James Magill

Interview Conducted by Albright Zimmerman and Lance Metz

October 24, 1996

Time: 1:03 p.m. ^{James}
Place: Home of Mr. ~~John~~ Magill, 26 N. Main St., New Hope, PA
Date: October 24, 1996
Interviewers: Lance Metz, Albright Zimmerman
Interviewees: Mr. ~~John~~ Magill
^{James}

Mr. Metz: Mr. Magill, do you have any objections to this tape being used for research purposes?

Mr. Magill: None whatsoever.

Mr. Metz: Thank you sir. Would you state your full name for the record.

Mr. Magill: James Lyons Magill

Mr. Metz: So you are a native New Hoper?

Mr. Magill: Yep, born in Carversville, 7 miles up the road. My long term memory, I have to say, is pretty good. I just passed my 84th birthday.

Mr. Metz: You don't look it.
^{If you knew}

Mr. Magill: ^{???} the way I treated myself. I'm a reformed drunk. Anyway I'm enjoying my life now, and I'm doing some worthwhile things.

Mr. Metz: Certainly. What are some of your old memories about the canal?

Mr. Magill: Later on, let's see when was the last boat, 1932?

Mr. Metz: Yes, 1932. I'm glad you used the term boat to because the term barge is historically incorrect.

Mr. Zim^m: Was that Gettis's boat? Wasn't he supposed to be the last one.

Mr. Magill: I don't honestly know because they had names on the back of them.

Mr. Zim: No this was the captain.

Mr. Magill: Oh, I don't know. There are a lot of Pennsylvania Dutchmen up there.

Mr. Metz: Yes, that came down from the Lehigh. Did you ever ride on a canal boat?
^{Where Rabbit Run is}

Mr. Magill: ^{???}, the first bridge, there was an iron bar across there. We'd go out and hang on that sucker and drop on the boat when it went under. Then ride down to New Hope.

Mr. Metz: Did the captains ever mind you doing that?

Mr. Magill: We never got much ^{flak} ~~slack~~, no.

Mr. Metz: About what year would that have been?

Mr. Magill: In the late 20s

Mr. Metz: What year were you born, sir?

Mr. Magill: July 4, 1912

Mr. Metz: So you were an adolescent then when you were doing that?

Mr. Magill: That's right.

Mr. Metz: Did you fish in the canal, and swim in the canal?

Mr. Magill: Well there wasn't much fishing. I can remember there were some big snapping turtles down there. Down towards Washington's Crossing.

Mr. Metz: Yes, we've been hearing about them today.

Mr. Magill: And ^ckarp, mudsuckers. But that's all I can think of.

Mr. Metz: Did you ever ice skate on the canal?

Mr. Magill: My ankles were never good enough to. But my father, he was an M.D. and he could skate. My ankles would just go like that was the end of it. I guess I just didn't persevere enough.

*and he was
a mayor of
New Hope
before
me
3 terms*

that's in McClellan's book

Mr. Metz: You mentioned a story ~~to me~~ ^{to me}! Would you mind repeating the story for the tape.

Mr. Magill: Of course not. There was a pregnant lady who was getting ready to deliver, aboard a canal boat, tied up in New Hope probably near the anthracite coal place, just below the edge of town here. She was getting ready to deliver a baby, so they called my father. He went down, went aboard the boat and delivered the baby. The rest of that story was, she was up at the rudder of the boat two days afterward. Could have been drunk and dreamed it up.

Mr. Metz: When did you first become interested in the history of the area?

Mr. Magill: I'm not telling you a lie when I tell you I can remember little things that happened to me when I was three years old. My long term memory is great. ~~???~~ after breakfast, I don't care. It's not important.

*I don't know what
I had for*

Mr. Metz: What are some of your memories of the canal? Do you ever remember talking to the boatmen as they went by or anything like that?

Mr. Magill: They didn't communicate much. A lot of them had a Pennsylvania Dutch accent.

Mr. Metz: Right. A lot of them came down from the upper part of the Lehigh. Up near Walnutport and places like that.

Mr. Magill: I had a buddy that I went to college in East Stroudsburg with at Lehighton.

Mr. Metz: Do you ever remember Harry Warford's office?

Mr. Magill: Oh, yeah.

Mr. Metz: Tell me a little bit about that.

Mr. Magill: He was a toll collector for a section of the canal, down where we called the Sheetz Lock.

Mr. Metz: Tell me why they called it the Sheetz Lock.

Mr. Magill: Well the Sheetz family was known around here and I don't know what they did that was special. But there was a Sheetz in New Hope who was a very good photographer. But he wasn't that one. But he was named Sheetz and they may have been a lock tenders, but I'm not sure. They were right down where you would make a left on 232 and then a right, you're crossing 232 there.

Mr. Metz: How did you feel when the canal closed? Did you have any feelings, one way or the other?

Mr. Magill: Well, I'm sentimental. I don't like to see things leave that have been a part of our history or our background. But I also think I am smart enough to know that it had to go, because that was the end of it. But then when I started to hear these stories of them wanting to make a highway, then I did get ??? snigety

Mr. Metz: Were you involved in the Delaware Protective Association?

Mr. Magill: Does a photographer named Hal Clark ring a bell?

Mr. Metz: Yes, Hal Clark was involved.

Mr. Zim: He was president for many years.

Mr. Magill: Ok, well Hal Clark and my father were very close. But my dad had a medical practice here. What was his wife's name?

was mayor of New Hope and

Mr. Zim: Sarah, Sarah Maynard.

Mr. Magill: Sarah Maynard, that's right. I think Maynard is living.

Mr. Zim: The son.

Mr. Magill: Yes, the son. We got together down at the Mitchner Museum about 3 or 4 years ago, and Hal came down and donated a big bunch of card photographs to the Mitchner. And they're piled up over there. If you ever wanted to look them over, I don't think you'd get into big trouble. They are cooperative.

Mr. Zim: I remember Bruce ^{Katsiff} ~~Catzi~~, he was the director. He and my wife taught together at the community college.

Mr. Metz: Did you ever go into Harry Warford's office and talk to him?

Mr. Magill: I can't swear that I was in that office. But it was a toll collecting. I think I've got a picture of it here.

Mr. Metz: Is there anything we haven't hit on before we go into the pictures? Any standout experiences you've had on the canal, good, bad or indifferent?

Mr. Magill: You know there was a cable across the river.

Mr. Metz: Right, cable 30, ^{to Lambertville to} ~~between~~ the Delaware and the Raritan.

Mr. Magill: I've got a good picture of that.

Mr. Metz: Okay, well is there anything else you'd like to talk about first.

Mr. Zim: Is that the one McQuellan copied?

Mr. Magill: It could have been. Because he did some drawings, which were not too bad.

Mr. Zim: Well he did a drawing of the cable.

Mr. Magill: Yes, well I've got a photograph of him. And what they did, they ^{close hauled} ?? the one side and let the other side out and the current of the river pulled the boat over.

Mr. Zim: Yes, well he's got that diagram. I made a slide and I've used that in talks.

Mr. Metz: I think it would be helpful if we kept the tape going while we go through the slides. Would you mind showing us your slides sir?

Mr. Magill: Now that's a map of New Hope, 1798. It was made through the ^{Parry} ??? family. Those people on the sides were residents. This is a covered bridge which was made in 1814. The ferry is still in existence. My thinking about that is that probably ~~Gonestoga~~ wagoons and allowed a clearance for the top.

^{This is} Woodcut made about 1828

Mr. Metz: Is that from your collection, sir that lithograph?

Mr. Magill: Yes

Mr. Metz: Okay, so you actually have the original.

Mr. Magill: Well I just have the slides.

Mr. Metz: Okay, so you used most of your copying for slide work.

Mr. Magill: Any of them that will help you, I'll have made for you.

Mr. Metz: This will be great. We'll trade you. We'll send you down some books and things in return that will interest you. This is the early wood cut of New Hope.

Mr. Magill: I have a friend, he's a history buff. This is about 1834. ^{Francis Curley.} Yes he's a researcher, and he's accurate.

Mr. Zim: I lectured for him in one of his classes.

Mr. Magill: Now that's one of the boats coming south.

Mr. Metz: This one I want desperately.

Mr. Magill: That is what we call an Anderson photograph. There was a man in New Hope who took pictures better than anyone else around. His name was John Anderson.

Mr. Zim: Supposedly in the Bucks County Historical Society they can't find it. They're closing it for a year. Maybe the new woman will be able to find it.

Bud Ely

Who's the guy with beard. Terry McNealy

↓ ^{tape} continues w/ background noise