Michael Kline: Tell me your full name.

Frances Simmons: My name is Frances Chase Simmons, Mrs. C. Jackson Simmons of Irvington.

MK: We never ask people their age, but we wonder if you could tell us your birthdate just so we can put all this in perspective.

FS: August 27, 1927. [laughter]

MK: Tell us about your path to Irvington, when and how you happened to come here.

FS: Well, I actually was born between White Stone and Kilmarnock on a farm named Public View. I moved to Irvington when I married my husband in 1951. But I have been familiar with Irvington all my life because my great-great-grandfather, Peter Chase, came from Newport, Rhode Island, in 1819, and settled here and owned much of Irvington. He was one of the first people – at that time, Irvington had about a hundred people in it and he was one of the first people to start developing the area. There was a hotel down there called the Irvington Beach Hotel. When the steamboats started coming, they had a close connection with Baltimore. As you know, we weren't able to go up by land. So, water was our transportation in this area. My father was the first county agent here in Lancaster County. He had the duty of trying to help all the farmers during the Depression to try to get themselves back on their feet. At that point, everybody had their own pigs, horses, cows, and raised almost everything they ate. I grew up in a family of four children. We had to walk 2.5 miles from my farm to White Stone because there were no school buses to school. But there were Black school buses here in Lancaster County, but no white school buses for us. Do you want to know a little bit about my childhood? I don't know, but…

MK: Please. Please.

FS: Growing up on a farm, you had your duties, no matter how – from the time you could walk, right on. Each one of us had our projects. We were grading 4-H Club. My father and mother helped establish the 4-H Club, and each one of us had one project. My sister, who was the older one, had the laying hens. I had the young baby chickens and I guess we were one of the biggest chicken farmers around here at that time. We're talking about in the [19]30s. We grew truck crops, tomatoes, cucumbers, sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, and all this was done with horses. You naturally had one or two farm hands that helped out, but my brother, for instance, took care of all the pigs. I even helped milk cows and we would have to do all that before we went to school. We were lucky enough, as I got a little older, we got a pony and a pony cot. So, we had to harness the pony up and we could go by pony cot to the White Stone school. Then we'd have to unharness the pony, tie him out, and then go to school and come back, harness him back up. [laughter] So, you can see it kept us out of trouble. I mean, people want to know what you did as a child. You had a few moments that you could swing in the swing onto the ash tree, but most of your time, you were busy. We did have electricity and we had the old crank telephones, but we had one call in the family, and besides the other transportation. So…

[phone ringing].

William Rowe: Hello? Oh, yes. Fine. How are you?

MK: This is incredible.

FS: [laughter]

MK: I wanted to ask you to tell us a little more about the crank up phones. [laughter]

FS: Well, we had a central operator in Kilmarnock. You rang one ring with the crank and you got the operator. Then your close neighbors, like my uncle Flex who lived next door, you would ring two long rings and a shot and he would answer over there. Otherwise, you had to go through the operator in Kilmarnock.

MK: Was the phone in the kitchen? Can you describe your mother's kitchen?

FS: No. My phone was right inside the front door. It was a big wooden phone on the wall that a child could have to get a step stool or something to reach it. You took off the earpiece and put it to your ear and spoke into the mouthpiece. Well, as I said, most people walked to most places. I mean, a lot of people. You would see people walk to and from Irvington. Of course, here in Irvington, many people went by rowboat. For instance, Billy lived across the cove as Irvington has lots of coves. People would get in their rowboat and row across to get the mail, for instance, and then row back. They would row across to the stores, to pick up the grocery stores. Here, in Irvington, for instance, there were at least three country stores within three or four blocks of each other because of all the groceries, of course. The staples came in on the steamboat, like the sugar and well, all the dry goods. Each one of these stores would carry their clothes, toys for the children, and everything like that. When I was going through my husband's things – Billy Rowe's things – I found that each one of them had similar toy. I mean, same toys. I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, when they came down on the steamboat, everybody bought at the same store, and there was no variety. [laughter] You just got the same truck or the same car that your neighbor had because that was it." But many people didn't have transportation. That's the reason the country stores were so close by. For instance, they were within five or six blocks here in Irvington of each other because everybody brought, by hand, back and forth, their groceries from the stores, anything they didn't raise. Billy Rowe, when he lived here, right where the Chesapeake Academy was, he used to have – what did you have? Goats and chickens, and…

WR: Yes. Pigs.

FS: Pigs, and that's right here in Irvington.

WR: Horses.

FS: In fact, they cut their lawn with a lawnmower pulled by a horse. They had quite a large lawn. My father helped put in a lot of the ideas that today seemed so far. We were talking the other day about the oysters, what was the downfall of the oysters besides the MSX disease and the dermo. They said, "Well, one of the things was, in the 1930s, the farmers found out that they

could burn oyster shells and make lime for their fields." So, my father, of course, built a great big log oat line, and had truckloads of oyster shells brought in. In between each truckload, they would put brush and wood and things of that sort that they needed to burn up. We would have a grand bonfire there for days to burn all of those oyster shells down into lime. Then he would distribute it to the farmers to put it on their fields. Of course, all done by horse [laughter] and wagon. The same thing about killing hogs, for instance. There was a man named – what was the man's name?

WR: (Bolson?)

FS: Bolson, Mr. Bolson. He had a team of horses and a big wagon. On it, had these great, big barrels and these piles of heavy chains. He would make appointment with the different farmers to go around to kill hogs. It was a several-days operation at each farm. They would build these huge fires and heat the water in these great oil drums.

WR: They'd heat the chains. Throw the chains in the valve –

FS: Yes, to heat the water.

WR: – and when red hot and then throw them in the water rack.

FS: They buried the barrel sort of halfway leaning in the ground. Then they had these hot fires with the chains. They would heat them until they were red hot and they'd take them with a pitchfork and stick them in the water to heat the water. Of course, after they cut the jugular vein of the pig and let him bleed, they would slide him into this barrel of hot water, and then they would scrape all of the hair off of it. Then they would hang them up, usually on a tree nearby. This all had to be done in December when the weather had gotten cold. They would, of course, cut them open and clean them all out. But every piece of that pig was used. Mother would have the local-colored people come and they would set up sawhorses with boards on them to cut the pigs. They would use every piece of that pig, from the chitlins right on down to the tail and everything else. My favorite piece was the tail. I always got it and roasted it in the wood stove in the kitchen and gnawed on that as a child. Being the third child in the family, I didn't have [laughter] as much as the older two, but nevertheless – but even the bladders, we used the bladders of the pigs and blew up for balloons. But the colored people who worked with us would get pieces of the pig. One of them particularly wanted the head of the hog, and he would take the head hog. Some of them would particularly like the feet, and that type of thing, and the chine bone down the middle. Then for several days after that, we would be cutting out the hams and the shoulders and getting them all ready to be put up in the meat house and to be smoked. We always had hickory smoked and we would keep a fire going. The other thing was to render the sausage – well, render the lard, get the sausage, and cut that up and grind it and stuffed it in these cloth socks. They had a machine that you would grind it. As it grinded, it went into a cotton cloth sock. Then you covered it with grease on the outside and you hung it up in the meat house and smoked it along with the hams. Of course, the hams had to be cut out. The hams and the shoulders were cut out, and then they had to be cured. They used all sorts of spices, but mainly, black pepper and red pepper and brown sugar and what else?

WR: Molasses.

FS: Molasses. They would coat them with that and put them in the smokehouse and let them smoke. When they got to a certain stage, they would put them in – mother would make a feed bag – take cloth feed bags and make bags for the hams. They would hang them up in the smokehouse and they would keep – and that's what we ate all during the winter. Of course, you had your slabs of bacon like this. You'd hang up and smoke that too and cut that off. Then, of course, when you got through all the little tidbits that still had fat on it, they rendered the fat and cooked it on the wood stoves until they got the cracklings, is what they made out of it. But this lard, they strained it out and put the lard in big – what? Five-gallon lard tins.

WR: Yes.

FS: Then what they strained out of it were the little pieces of sinews and pieces of skin and everything. They pressed those in a crackling machine and made crackling cakes out of them. They made lard tins full of crackling cakes that we used all winter. We would get those and we'd – what would we use – we made pancakes and things like that with them.

WR: Yes.

FS: Put them in pancakes. But we didn't worry about cholesterol back in those days. [laughter] But mother canned almost everything we ate. I can see those half gallon jars of tomatoes right now sitting on the pantry shelf.

WR: Yes. They would can the sausage too.

FS: Yes. Sometimes they would put…

WR: They would make up the cakes and then put them in glass jars and with a lot of grease and stuff like that and put them in the pantry.

FS: That's right. Yes. Of course, it was before the days of freezers and things of that sort. So, everything had to be canned. But butter beans and string beans and peaches – we had peach trees. I used to sit on the side of the road and sell peaches by the bushel. [laughter] I don't know. I'm sort of wondering beside [laughter] the –

MK: What were your parents' names and who were they?

FS: Charles Carter Chase, and his wife was Elizabeth Landon Constable. She grew up in Warsaw. He grew up down here at Bunker Hill Farm between, White Stone and Kilmarnock. Actually, when he was at VPI in school, is when he met mother who was gone up there to be the organist for one of the churches. So, they went [laughter] three hundred miles away when they lived forty miles away [laughter], but to meet. But he was the first county agent, as I said, here in Lancaster County. He worked closely with the Agriculture Extension Service from VPI. He used to do veterinarian work as a county agent. He was sort of like the old country doctor, but he was for the animals. I mean, many a time, I would go with him to hold a pig. He would put a

noose around the pig's nose and tie him to one of the posts of the pig pen. I would hold the rope while he rubbed the ear with a corncob dipped in creolin in water to sterilize the back of the pig's ear so he could give him a collar shot. That was a great privilege to be able to go with daddy [laughter] around all these different places because sometimes, when you tied a pig to a post to the pen, the pig pulled the post up [laughter] and you were in trouble. But it was still quite an experience as a child. But the…

[phone ringing]

Oh, take that thing off the hook.

WR: Hello?

FS: Oh, gosh.

WR: No. Who is this?

FS: [laughter]

MK: Well, now, you were about five years old when the storm of [19]33 struck.

FS: Yes. I was.

MK: In those first five years, do you have any recollections of the steamers yourself? Did you go with your daddy to the wharf at all?

FS: Yes. I think the very first wharf I ever went to was one down at what we call Westland, which was Windmill Point. My great uncle, who was in England and he was one of Queen Victoria's Royal engineers, he was in the process of helping lay out the first railroad from Bombay to Calcutta. He came over to visit his sister in Baltimore to get the used railroad ties from the Pennsylvania railroad that were being taken up to be shipped to India. He decided he wanted to make a trip down to [laughter] this area. So, he came down from Baltimore by steamboat and he stayed with us there at Public View for several days. Then my father took me back to the steamboat to put him back on the steamboat. When I got down there and saw the length of that wharf as a five-year-old, it was the longest wharf I think I've ever walked on. You can imagine it was sort of a windy, cold day, and to walk out that wharf, I thought I never would get to the end of it. That wharf was extremely long. It had a great big warehouse out on the end.

Carrie Kline: Great what?

FS: Warehouse where they stored all of the goods that were being shipped on the boat. Even the cows and the calves and things like that would have to be taken out to the end of that wharf, usually by one of these trolley carts that pushes things. I remember the sound of the whistle as she came in and the sound when she left. It really sort of makes you tingle with the sounds. Of course, down there, there was not any village like here in Irvington. Billy can tell you a little bit more about what the reaction of the town was when the steamboat came here to Irvington

because it was a daily thing and it was very much looked forward to. But I wasn't allowed to go on the steamboat that visit. But I just was amazed, I guess because of my size, how huge it was. But they were big and they were, as you can see from these pictures, quite awesome in their size.

MK: In retrospect, did you determine what boat that was?

FS: Well, let me see in that period. I don't know. I would be guessing. I could get it out of there for the (eight?) times. I don't think it was the *Lancaster*. But Billy, what were the names of the ones that came here when you were very young.

WR: *Potomac* and *Anne Arundel*.

FS: Yes.

WR: One-side wheeler. What is it? I can't think of a name of that.

FS: Well, Jack lists in here all the different boats and all of the dates and things on them, but they're all in there. But I can't remember the name of it.

MK: Well, it must have been really noisy on that wharf. You are talking about farm animals and wagons rolling back and forth.

FS: Of course, there were loose planks, the wagons going across it, and the calves – they would take calves, twist their tails to make them go [laughter] and that. Of course, you got the stevedores, mostly Black, had their little songs that they were singing as they were pushing out. Sort of like the chants that the menhaden fishermen did. But they all had a jargon that I couldn't understand that they had between themselves – terms and terminology that they used in storing the things away. But the steamboat would be carrying, well, barrels of peas and vegetables and, of course, oysters, shucked oysters.

WR: I've seen them load fifteen barrels of oysters at the time.

FS: You what?

WR: I've seen them load fifteen barrels of oysters.

FS: Fifteen thousand oysters? You mean barrels?

WR: Barrels.

FS: Shucked or unshucked?

WR: No, unshucked.

FS: Unshucked. Also, I have a container that's about this big round for the shucked oysters, and it was put in a big barrel of ice and sent up. But besides peas and all sorts of vegetables, they

would send them in barrels. One of the things that my husband used to be surprised at was robins. They used to send barrels of robins that were eaten like quail in Baltimore. I think if you know that robins flock in the woods in the wintertime and they don't migrate. They stay in this area. Apparently, there was somebody who was making a living. Also, they would send up skins off the muskrats. You used to do that, didn't you? Then what other things, Billy? Of course, we got our staples on the steamboat. We always got our molasses and sugar besides all of our clothes, our furniture, and everything like that. For instance, that piano in there, that belonged at Beulah, which was an old George Washington's cousin's home, came down in 1820 on a steamboat from Baltimore. All the furniture was brought down from Baltimore on…

WR: Even a house.

FS: Oh, yes. I was going to say the Sears and Roebuck. There's several here. There's one I know of, a Sears and Roebuck house here in Irvington, that was brought down like matchsticks, [laughter] what they call now – were they ready built or…

WR: Yes.

FS: But it wasn't all put together. It was like a jigsaw puzzle. But it was all just in stacks and marketed and sent down on the steamboat. They called it the Sears and Roebuck house. One of the distinction things, they had numbers cut on the beams and everything. So, you can identify them today. The other thing was a little recess in the wall for the telephone. That was one of the special designs of all Sears and Roebuck houses. But well…

MK: This is wonderful. We are just right on the money here. [laughter]

FS: [laughter] I could go into more of the farming part of it when the threshing machine came and where we cut all of that wheat and made it into bundles and stacked it in the fields. Then we had appointments for the threshing machine to come by. A whole crew of men would come with…

MK: A threshing machine?

FS: – threshing machine to thresh the wheat out.

MK: What did that look like?

FS: Well, it looked pretty much like a small combine that you see today. But it had belts run by – what…

WR: By a tractor.

FS: No, this was before tractors. They had a steam engine.

WR: Oh, steam engine. Yes.

FS: A little steam engine with belts that would run it. It had all of these things in it. We would bundle the wheat up when it was cut – and all this was done by hand – bundle it up in sheaves of wheat and stack it in the fields up with the heads up so that the heads wouldn't get wet. It was sort of a shed like a thatched roof. Then you would go by horse and wagon out and put them on the wagon as the threshing machine had arrived and set up. He had all of these belts with a steam engine that would run it. All this machinery would go back and forth and they would cut the binder twine on the sheaves of wheat and put them in one at a time on these belts that would carry it through the machine. At the other end of the machine, there was a man standing with a bag. The straw and the shaft would go at one place, and then the wheat would come out a chute into bags. A man would stand there and tie up each bag and put one chute to the other so that he could just tie it up. There'd be another person that would take that to the grainer and put it in the grain room. Then the straw would be stacked up on a pole in the fields to be used for bedding for the cows and the livestock. Another thing we used for bedding were pine straw or pine needles. I used to drive down with a colored man and a horse and wagon and go down. We'd do nothing but rake up pine needles in the woods and just bring a load of pine needles back to use for bedding for the horses and the cows. So, we used everything. We never threw anything away. [laughter] It was recycled, recycle. Consequently, you can tell by my house that I've never thrown anything away in my life. [laughter] It's completely jammed with everything having lived here for thirty-five years. I've got the first letter I think [laughter] I ever wrote in his life. But that's what you have a tendency to do when you come up in the Depression. [laughter]

MK: Are you an engineer? You gave the best description I have ever heard of a – [laughter]

FS: Oh, no. [laughter]

MK: – machine.

FS: No. [laughter]

MK: Well, how would a woman know about such things? Were you around the thrasher machine yourself?

WR: Yes.

FS: Oh, my lands. I used to help tie the bags up and that type of thing. When you live on a farm and participate – for instance, I used to churn butter. We made all of that butter. We had a big barrel churn that was on a stand that you would turn it with a handle, and you put cream in there. You would separate your cream by letting the milk stand and the cream would rise to the top of the milk. You would take a ladle and you would ladle off the cream. That's what you would make your butter out of. You had a little glass window that you could look into the churn and see the milk. I would stand there because children would [laughter] love to turn this. It was a stand like this with a barrel on it, really, with a top on it, and you would turn it with a handle. At first, you just saw the cream sloshing around on in the window. Then you would gradually see the little particles of butter beginning to form. It was very exciting to see it. You'd have to know, and your mother, of course, was watching over your shoulder to make sure you did it right so that you'd get the right turns to go and make the butter come together. Then you would have

to take your butter paddle. My father made a butter paddle – I have it in the kitchen – just a carved, wooden paddle. I've forgotten what kind of wood it is, cherry wood, I think it is. Anyway, then you would take the paddle and press the butter. The butter was sort of dispersed through the buttermilk at that point. So, she would…

CK: Through the what?

FS: Buttermilk. See, you'd get buttermilk and butter. The butter would be the yellow chunks that would form. You would take the paddle and you'd press that all together and begin to squeeze the milk. Then you'd take it out and put it in a bowl, and you would work the butter. If you wanted to add a little salt to it, well, you would. Otherwise, you'd have the unsalted butter and then make it up into pats. We had these little molds that you would put it in. Some of them had fancy sheaves of wheat or something like that on them. Then you would put it in your refrigerator or what your refrigerator consisted of a wooden refrigerator with a cake of ice in it. There was a big ice plant. There were two ice plants here in Irvington. One over here, [unintelligible], right here on Carters Creek. Then there was one down in West Irvington. The iceman would come by with blocks of ice. You'd get fifty to a hundred-pound blocks of ice. You would put them in these wooden refrigerators that had shelves on them and a drip pan because the ice, of course, would be melting all the time. But that's how you kept your milk and your butter. Of course, most of the houses back then had basements, so they were cooler. That's where we kept the canned goods and things of that sort. My aunty up in Warsaw had a basement in her barn, for instance. They had stone walls and everything. She kept all of her vegetables and fruits in that. You would pick the apples off the trees and put them in baskets with layers of straw in between them and they would last all winter. You would go down there every time you would – and sweet potatoes and Irish potatoes.

WR: Yes. They used to cut the ice out the mill ponds and stuff.

FS: Yes. That's right.

WR: – and carry on the ice horses. They'd pack the ice in sawdust. They had a hole in the ground and put the ice down and saw it out the mill pond and drag it up the hill. Then they would put saw dust all over it and that would keep it and they'd use it all summer.

MK: Great. We are going to turn this thing on you in just a little bit here and get you to run it down for us. So, teams of workhorses, did you have mules on the farm at all?

FS: No. We didn't have mules. That was a North Carolina thing, but my father tried to introduce one mule thinking they were a little bit more disease resistant than horses. They couldn't get the people of Lancaster County to accept mules. [laughter] That was too North Carolina [unintelligible]. But I was trying to think – but as I said, the hog killing and the threshing and businesses like that. The other thing was a tomato factory. We had several tomato cannery factories around. The truck crops were a big thing in Lancaster County at that period of time. We would plant acres of tomatoes and we would haul them by horse and wagon down to Palmer. These were the types of things we worked for rewards as children, was to have the privilege of riding with the colored man on the tomato wagon all the way down to Palmer and

back, [laughter] which was a half a day's journey by horse and wagon. [laughter] So, all you had to do was sit and enjoy the ride. You didn't have to do any work. But we would plant tomatoes. You would ride on a little wagon behind a horse and you would have buckets of tomato plants. You would drop one in each hole as you went along. You had somebody making the holes, walking down the road. Then you would drop them in and then somebody would come, everything was teamwork. The other thing we used to raise a lot were cucumbers because there was a pickle factory up in Fredericksburg. We used to cut all of this. Of course, it had to be harvested by hand and worked by horse and wagon. We –

MK: You did not take a wagon of cucumbers to Fredericksburg, did you?

FS: No. They usually had a truck that they would send down. The same thing on the sweet potatoes and the Irish potatoes. They used to have an old-fashioned, sort of a delivery truck that would come down – a model A truck that would come down and take them up to the factory.

WR: They had old chain drive trucks.

FS: That's right. They did. Yes. It was a chain-driven, was the earlier ones. Well, there again, the cucumbers and potatoes and things went up to Fredericksburg, you see, by steamboat. You'd have to get them to the steamboat wharves. But those are the types of things that would go.

MK: How far was it from your farm then to the nearest wharf?

WR: I guess one [unintelligible].

FS: Well, there was one at Chase's Wharf too.

WR: Who?

FS: Chase's Wharf on Dymer's Creek.

WR: Oh, there was?

FS: The steamboat came in there. In the early years, the steamboat would come into Chase's Wharf, which is between Kilmarnock and White Stone on Dymer's Creek. We were about five miles from that. The tomato factory was probably about twelve miles down that you'd go by horse and wagon.

CK: So, what happened once you got to the wharf?

FS: To the wharf?

CK: With your…

FS: With the barrels? You would just unload them and of course, they would have labels on them. The shipping clerk would just check them off and get a receipt or however they – I don't

really know how they paid for them, but I'm sure they must – they used checks in those days because there were banks. But they had a wharf agent on each one of these wharves that checked the goods in and out, just like you would in a business today. Actually, they would return the tomato baskets and the potato boxes and things of that sort. They would bring the empty ones down because they were a commodity that cost money. [laughter] You would just recycle them. The same thing with the barrels for the oysters and things of that sort.

CK: So, you are saying that there would be a rate of pay for the privilege of loading your barrels onto the steamboat and…

FS: Oh, well, I'm sure that there was a freight charge, a minimal charge. I mean, back in the days, a Coca-Cola was five cents. So, you can imagine what it was like. [laughter] The boys in Irvington used to run down to carry off people's luggage and carry water and things of that sort, and they would do it for a nickel. [laughter] I mean, each freight wharf had – for instance, Lacy Spriggs was the one at the White Stone wharf at Taft, wasn't it, Billy? They always kept track of the freight. Of course, the fees for traveling on the steamboat were so little. I mean, your meals were twenty-five or fifty cents apiece for the meals. State room for Baltimore and back was $3 or something like that.

MK: Baltimore and back? A return?

FS: Yes. A lot of the weddings were planned according to the steamboat rivals and departures. If the steamboat came in at 3:00 a.m. in Irvington, well, you'd plan your wedding, say about 2:00 a.m. so that you could get on the steamboat and go. Many of your friends would make arrangements of somebody to pick them up. They would get on the steamboat with you and go to the next wharf or two [laughter] so that they can party with you on the way. But many weddings were planned during the late ridiculous hours of the night and day whenever the steamboat came in.

MK: So interesting.

CK: The steamboat coming in to take you off on your trip after?

FS: On your honeymoon, yes. They had a honeymoon suite. The pictures of it are in Jack's book here of the honeymoon suite and everything. They had a regular state room.

WR: A lot of men from Irvington would get there on a steamboat when a steamboat would come and he had about 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. and eat supper. It was good food. Good food on a steamboat and they would see the steamboat would stay here about two hours or something like that. Then it would go down to Weems and stay there about a couple hours. So, they'd get on the boat and eat supper on the boat and then get some of them to meet them in Weems, take them home. [laughter] A lot of them did that. I remember that. I would go down there. I didn't have an adult with me. How old was I? I was five or six years old. I'd go down there by myself. Had all a bunch of boys would go down there and we'd take the luggage for the passengers on the boat and pick up five or ten cents. [laughter] Then we would go to, let's say to Weems, and then it would go to Weems to North End, I believe. North End and we'll often end in Westland.

FS: He crisscrossed the river.

WR: He zigzagged back and forth across the river going to Baltimore. So, I talk about a trip I made?

FS: Yes.

WR: All right.

FS: You want him to tell you some of his experiences or no?

MK: Well, why do we not finish with you and then we will swing it around and…

WR: Okay.

CK: You are both such good talkers.

FS: [laughter] Well, I don't know. I think I've sort of rambled, but…

MK: Oh, no. It is just perfect. What did you say, Dianne?

Dianne Jordan: Oh, yes.

CK: Have you ever…

DJ: You are giving us a lot of details that we have not gotten from anyone else.

MK: From anybody else.

CK: Have you yourself ridden the steamboats?

FS: Oh, no, actually. I haven't. No. I didn't actually.

MK: Just in her dreams.

FS: Yes. [laughter] It was just so exciting. I mean, you have to realize, back in those days, we didn't have all the entertainment and everything. We had a radio when we had electricity. Now, very few people had electricity. They had electric producing station here in Irvington, but a lot of people didn't have electricity. Telephone was the greatest communication, but we always felt that the operator was listening on the other end. So, we couldn't have any secrets that [laughter] we would tell. Well, let's touch a bit on the medical thing. Doctors, we had, of course, the country doctor and Dr. B.H.B. Hubbard down here in White Stone, his great grandsons are still here and quite a lot of members of his family. But he took care of all of us. He delivered me as a baby at Public View, pronounced me dead. In fact, I've died twice and I'm still going. [laughter] I'm thinking I'm like a cat. But he told mother that I was still born. Well, the nurse

turned me over, but the – what do they call them? Midwives [laughter] turned me over and I cried. So, I came back to life. [laughter] But all of the children were born in the homes around here at that point and all of the medical services were provided by Dr. Hubbard, who was in White Stone. He covered the whole area. Now, there was a Black doctor, Dr. Morgan E. Norris, who lived between White Stone and Kilmarnock. My mother always said to my father, "If Dr. Hubbard can't come to me in an emergency, call Dr. Norris." [laughter] Because mother worked very closely with Dr. Norris with the Red Cross. There were a lot of homeless colored people and children and people like that. I remember the colored girl that we had in our kitchen was named Flossy. She was monstrous. She could hardly get through the door. She was so big that mother had to make her clothes out of feed bags because they were the only materials she could get that was wide enough to go around Flossy. [laughter] But she just ran the kitchen. We had wood stoves and she had kept the wood fires going and did all the cooking that we had. We always had a main meal in the middle of the day. That was, I guess, mainly – well, they say that's the best time to eat anyway. But we'd have the people that would work on the farm, all of them would come in and sit around the dining room table at 12:00 p.m.

MK: Black and white?

FS: Black and white. Yes. They…

MK: What did Flossy cook?

FS: Flossy cooked – it's the best fried chicken you've ever seen in your life. [laughter] We had plenty of chickens to cook. But we also had an old man down here named Ira Grimes. He had one hand. He just had a nub on the other hand. He had a little old car that was cut down with a truck sort of body on its back. He would come by once a week and he would have five-gallon buckets of shucked oysters. Then he would have all sorts of crabs, soft crabs, hard crabs, and about five different kinds of fish, speckled Trojan and crocus and flounder and all of those. But all of them fresh that he had just gotten from some of the local boats. He would peddle them from house to house. So, he would come around. Mother would always go out with her big dish pan and load up with things when Ira arrived [laughter] because we always knew we were going to eat well that night. But let's see. Flossy loved to make pancakes, and she loved to use the chitlins – not the chitlins, but the crackling bread in the pancakes, which was that dried up remnants of when they rendered the lard that they made these pressed cakes to use in the – well, I guess in place of the shortening in pancakes. But we always had vegetables on the table, lots of vegetables. Three or four vegetables you'd always have, not necessarily mashed potatoes or baked potatoes that you have today. But you would have baked sweet potatoes or baked – see, in a wood stove, you had an oven that was always hot. So, you used your oven a lot. But corn pudding and stewed tomatoes and black-eyed peas and butter beans, string beans and things of that sort. As I said, in the wintertime, my mother had all those canned – she'd can them in half gallon jars and keep them in the pantry and, of course…

WR: Warming them up above the stove.

FS: Yes. That's right. Yes. They had warming ovens up there on top of the stove. That's where you kept your sweet potatoes after you baked them in the oven while you'd put them up there.

They'd stay warm all day long. We had a wonderful, old, colored lady who lived next door, Sadie (Ward?). As a child, I would love to sneak through the hedgerow and go visit Sadie because I would sit on her back steps and talk to Sadie. She would say, "Ms. Frances, wouldn't you like a sweet potato?" She'd go and get a warm sweet potato out of her warming oven for me. I'd sit there and I thought that was heaven because Sadie, being the third child, as I said, Sadie sort of spoiled me when I went over there. But her grandson still lives there. But we had a very close relationship with the colored people because they all lived between just below us. There were a number of families that lived there for several generations.

MK: Your mother was involved in Red Cross work that kept her in touch with them.

FS: Flossy, as I mentioned, had no – no one even knew Flossy's last name. She was just a lost person that Dr. Norris asked mother to find a home for. So, mother said, "Well, I've got four children, but I'll take her in if she will put up with what I can offer," and she did. She made her home with us. But that's the way we did in those days. As I said, Dr. Norris was a godsend to all of those colored people around here because he was a local man that grew up here and went down to Tuskegee and got his medical degree. One of his children is a noted doctor now. Most of them, I think, have moved away from here. But they all had done very well in the world. But, as I said, when integration came, well, I didn't even know what integration was because I'd had it all my life. I played just as much with – in fact, the only children I played with were the colored people who lived next door because they were next door neighbors. But that's the way it was on the farm. They would come over and help with some chores just to get some food to eat and things of that sort. But Dr. Hubbard – to get back to Dr. Hubbard, who was the doctor here in White Stone. He was a remarkable man because he invested in real estate as well as medical, taking care of medical things. He was just a man that, I don't think today, a man could keep up with the things that he kept up with. But he was sort of the head businessman. His home still stands in White Stone just as it was when his widow died, what? Fifty, sixty years ago?

WR: Yes.

FS: Or more than that.

WR: Yes. Yes. More than that.

FS: More than that. I keep forgetting I'm seventy-six. [laughter] Fifty years, but anyway. Well, on the school situation, as I said, we walked to school and later we got a pony cart to ride to school. But we had maydays. On May 1, we always had a mayday program down there. Most of the teachers were local people that had been educated in colleges and come back to teach. We had outdoor facilities where restrooms and things of that sort, but we all survived. That was, I guess, about the time that – we didn't have any fire engines or anything. Billy, when was the first fire engine started in White Stone?

WR: It wasn't in White Stone. It was Kilmarnock.

FS: Kilmarnock was the first one.

WR: Yes.

FS: But they were going back in – when I was a young child, because I remember Bunker Hill house caught on fire. I remember that it was on a Sunday. Everybody came from church with the fire department, and they made a fire brigade – line of buckets from the well to the house, and they saved the house. It was attic fire. But they didn't have any pumping things. It was just a fire brigade that you pass buckets from an upper ladder. [laughter] But the house is still standing. Well, you want to know a little bit about churches?

MK: Churches and maybe some more images of your school or the playground at school or whatever comes to mind.

FS: Well, the playground at school, we had very limited facilities other than a baseball in the back. Baseball was a big favorite around here for years and years. Every town had a baseball team and they were very lively at competition. In fact, they would even go as far as Deltaville. Some of them Urbanna. The places would come across by boat to play baseball with each other. Even right here in Irvington, they had two teams called the –

WR: Wharf Rats and the…

FS: Mudcats.

WR: The Mudcats.

FS: Mudcats and the Wharf Rats. They had two teams, West Irvington and East Irvington. They had great rivalry through the baseball teams. But as I said, the other teams would come from Deltaville and Urbanna and…

WR: Tangier.

FS: Oh, yes. That's right. There was one that came over as far as Tangier by boat, just to play baseball on a Saturday afternoon.

CK: These were the color of the team players?

FS: They were all white at that time. See, we had segregated schools then. A. T. Wright High School in White Stone was one of the better high schools in the Northern Neck. That was one that turned into a lot of good, well-educated, colored people. The White Stone School that's standing down there now, well, my father went to it back in the – well, let me see, graduated 1913, fourteen. The White Stone School, the brick building is still there. It's being used as a community building. Today, they can't build a school that'll last more than twenty years. [laughter] Some of our grades, for instance, we usually had, the first grade was by itself. We didn't have any kindergarten. But sometimes, when you got in the second or third grade, you might have two grades under one teacher depending on the number of students. We had high school and the grade school all in this one building.

MK: There must have been a sense though, too, of knowing all the children.

FS: Oh, yes.

MK: Who all the children were and all their family, where everybody lived.

FS: Yes. Everybody knew everybody else. You were schooled between the schools and the churches, well, you knew everybody. [laughter] In fact, I dare say, my father could've told you just about everybody who lived in everybody's house. Because as a county agent, he traveled around to most everybody's house because they were involved in some sort of agricultural business or else. At one time, at Carters Creek, there might've been seventy or eighty sailboats going out to oyster out of Carters Creek out to the Rappahannock River. I'm talking, maybe it was about 1890 – no, maybe early 1900s. They had that many going out. You can imagine the site of having that many sailboats going out every morning and coming back in. Then they would have what they call buy-boats. The buy boats were the ones that would – the oyster one would get their catch and then they would go to the buy-boats. The buy-boats were much larger boats. They would take the oysters off of the little boats and take them to market to Baltimore or to Norfolk or wherever they…

MK: Were they shoveled off or how did they transfer them? I am wondering.

WR: The oysters?

FS: No. They had booms with tongs on them that came down like that.

WR: A whole bushel of oysters in the basket. They would lower that down and load that up the shovels and hoist it back toward the boat and dump it and back again.

FS: But they did all of that on the water, transferring it from the individual oystermen to the buy-boats. Then they would take them off to the places, shucking houses, oyster houses. But…

MK: Did your father's work as a county agent include maritime activities at all?

FS: No.

MK: Or was it strictly agricultural?

FS: No. It was strictly agricultural. But because of the small community and everybody knowing everybody, you got involved one way or the other, involved in each person's life. As our churches were very small – little Grace chapel was built in 1850 up in Kilmarnock. It was the first church that was built there. It was built by the Episcopal congregation. But Mr. Addison Hall, who I think was a Methodist, he gave the land for the church because there was not a church in Kilmarnock. He gave the land with the stipulation that as long as it was a church, they could have it, but it would have to go back to his ancestors. I happen to know some of the local people who still think that they're going to inherit it, [laughter] but it's pretty well covered with a huge church now and graveyard. But my family is buried there for four generations there.

But the little church is still standing. It was built in 1850. I had it moved back and saved when they built the New Grace Church there in Kilmarnock. But they've had a great influx, of course, of people here to the area. Most of them have joined what I call the second country club, and that's a great church. [laughter] But all of the churches have grown around here because of the influx of people who've moved in, especially retirees that have come in. The Presbyterian Church, for instance, there was only one in the area, and that was down at Weems. Now, they built one in Kilmarnock, for instance. The Catholic church was very, very small. Now, they have built another church. So, the churches have proliferated. The two, the Baptist and the Methodist Church here in Irvington, were built around the turn of the century. Then there's a Methodist and Baptist church in White Stone and the Methodist and Baptist Church in Kilmarnock.

MK: We have heard some mention of the camp meetings.

FS: Yes, at Wharton Grove? Wharton Grove was the one that was down here in Weems.

MK: Wharton Grove was…

FS: Wharton Grove was the one locally. The camp meeting at Wharton Grove, W-H-A-R-T-O-N, Grove. Dr. Wharton started that. That was when people would come there by a steamboat. There's pictures in Jack's books of the boats arriving to come by. They built what they call tents, but they were little two-story cottages with front porches and double porches. Each – well, not each family, but a family, say the Simmons family, would have a tent, as they called them. You would go down there and spend the revival week down there at your tent and you would have these concentrated camp meetings. My mother used to be the organist at some of those meetings.

WR: They had a tabernacle.

FS: Yes. They had a big outdoor. Well, it was just a covered roof with open signs that they called a tabernacle with wooden benches and things where people – there's one still standing. Marvin – is it Marvin Grove? What's the one still standing outside of Hillsville?

WR: Marvin Grove?

FS: Marvin Grove. Marvin Grove is still standing. Every August, they have a revival there. They have visiting ministers and all the choirs come and everything. It's quite an experience to go to that. It really takes you back. That's where many people met socially. Many a marriage was started by people meeting at these camp meetings in August. I don't know why they chose…

WR: Oh, Kirkland Grove up a little bit further.

FS: Yes. Kirkland Grove, yes. But I don't know why they chose August, except that was the [laughter] hottest month of the year around here. But that was when they would go. Of course, they would dress up just like they would go to church with hats and everything to go to these

revival meetings.

MK: Did your family ever go?

FS: Oh, yes. My mother used to play the organ. She was a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. She went from Warsaw by steamboat to Boston, not knowing a soul, to go to the New England Conservatory of Music back when she was sixteen years old. Can you imagine that?

MK: What year would that have been, roughly?

FS: Let me see. She was born in 1893. Somewhere around 1910 or something like that.

MK: So, she went by a steamer all the way?

FS: Yes.

CK: I cannot imagine that. What did she say about that?

FS: Oh, well, [laughter] I don't know. Right up until her death, she and her roommate were still in contact with – and she was a New England girl. But she made it. Back in my grandmother's day and my mother's day, there weren't any public schools. They went to school in private homes. My mother went from Warsaw to Aylett. I don't know whether you know where Aylett is. It's halfway between Tappahannock and Richmond. But she would go by horse and wagon – a horse and buggy from there, crossing on a ferry at Tappahannock, pulled by ropes with horses on each shore to pull the ferry across and get in another buggy and go by horse and buggy up to Aylett to a little school called Coans, C-O-A-N-S, which was a private home that had a school. She would go up there in September and wouldn't come home until spring. They didn't even get home for – but she told me that she was told where she could drink the water, for instance, when she was on her trip. They would have to change horses and – I don't know whether they'd change buggies, but twice they would have to change and get a fresh team of horses in going to school. But there were certain places, Miller's Tavern was one of them, that if they stopped there, she could drink the water. But one of the other places she couldn't drink the water because they weren't sure about the well. But that's the type of thing that – [laughter] I mean, she left home at nine years old to go off to school.

CK: When you reflect, how do you imagine her steamboat trip was going on?

FS: Well, I don't know. I wouldn't like to think as a young person that I got on a steamboat not knowing a soul and go all the way up to Boston to school. When she came back, as I said, she taught music and she – let me see. That was back in – well, it was during the war. Let me see. 1918, daddy went to the war. They were married in 1922. I guess that was in the end of – I was trying to think. They had a flu epidemic, which reminds me of that, when everybody practically in the Northern Neck had flu. Her sister was a registered nurse who had graduated from the University of Virginia Hospital. She and her sister went around and nursed. I know she went to Reedville and lived with a family that had six sick children [laughter] and nursed them through

this flu epidemic. There was another place she went was Callao. I was going through her Bible the other day and I found these clippings where she and a person who sang were giving concerts for the Red Cross to raise money to help get medical supplies for this flu epidemic that they were having. Of course, all this was horse and buggy days or else, by water. But I don't know. I guess the people were more [laughter] used to going and doing things like that. But I can't imagine. The more I think about it – when my father went to VPI, he left here on a steamboat and went to Norfolk and got on a train and rode a train to Blacksburg to go to college. But he…

CK: You say – I'm sorry.

FS: But he stayed up there for four years. He said some years, it was so cold [laughter] that they didn't have much heat in the dormitories and everything and the windows weren't very well insulated. He said they used to pour water around the windows and let them freeze to cut out the draughts. [laughter] I think the children would put up with that today? [laughter]

MK: Amazing.

CK: I guess those were the years of World War I.

FS: Yes. This was before 1918 because…

MK: Well, the flu you were referring to, was that just routine winter flu or was that the flu of 1918, do you think?

FS: Well, it was the flu of 1918 because my uncle – my father's brother – died of the flu up at VPI. When I say VPI, I guess it's Virginia Tech. I said VPI the other day and they said, "What's that school?" [laughter] I said, "It's Virginia Polytechnic Institute." They said, "Oh, you mean Virginia Tech?" I said, "Yes." [laughter] But, yes. That was the flu of that period of time. Didn't have any flu shots or anything else. No antibiotics. [laughter]

CK: Did you – yes.

FS: I was trying to think. I might mention the 4-H Club, which was, of course, sponsored by the Agriculture Department of VPI. That was when my father used to try to get all the young people to choose a project or something that they could keep records on and take animals, fouls, or whatever, to the state fair. We would have meetings at my house. I remember we used to go out and meet on the hay. Somebody would bring a guitar and we'd all sit out there and roast hot dogs. Well, we didn't even have hot dogs. I've forgotten what we roasted, but we had food of some sort, and sit there in the hay loft and sing to a guitar. But those were some of the fun things. But we had to keep records of every – for instance, if we were raising chickens, we had to keep a record of all the food, what time we fed them, if any of them died, and all of that. That was what you – I guess they still do similar things like that. But my brother had calves and I had chickens and he had pigs. Then we would take them up to the fair in Warsaw, which was in Richmond County. Then if we were lucky, we would get to go to the state fair. That was a real tribute. I won a fourth prize on one of my chickens and I thought that was the best ribbon that ever was. [laughter] The idea of coming home with this little pink ribbon like that [laughter]

because I had taken a chicken off to Richmond. Of course, I had spent days grooming that chicken, brushing his feathers, and putting Vaseline on his feet and making sure his beak and his comb and everything was just right. [laughter] There was a camp, and I think it still exists, the 4-H Club Camp down near Jamestown that in the summertime, my mother and father would take a group from here and go down and participate in the camp. It was down on the James River so they could swim. Well, for activities, we went to White Stone Beach – social activities. When Billy and I were growing up, White Stone Beach was an old tomato factory that was turned into a summer pavilion. Then it had beach houses that they rented out to city slickers who would come down to get in the salt water. It had a pier out where the old steamboat pier used to go. Of course, the sea nettles – I don't know whether you know what the sea nettles are. I think most people call them jellyfish. Those things with the stingers on it that we have in the water, we call them sea nettles. They would take a fish net and fence off an area around the wharf and they'd have a sliding board and a diving board. That was where we could go swimming without being stung during the sea nettle season. But they also had a little open – as I said, it was a tomato factory. It had no heat or anything or air conditioning. They had a marble ball that they sold soda pop and ice cream and beer. On Thursday nights and Saturday nights, they had some sort of a band. We would all go down there, when we got a little bit older, [laughter] and get our cars stuck in the sand because the only parking lot was the beach. [laughter] You would wind up having to push somebody out before the night was over because they'd get stuck. But we would go down there and just visit like teenagers. In the summertime, we would go down. It was run by Mr. and Mrs. Carver. There were two generations of Carvers, the old Mr. and Mrs. Carver and young Mr. and Mrs. Carver. They had a dining room. It was connected to the dance hall. They would serve home-cooked meals down there, and the best ham and fried chicken and crab cakes you've ever eaten. Homemade breads and vegetables. That was a real treat to go down there. Before that, the Carvers ran what was called Whitestone Beach Hotel, which was an old Victorian house that they've just recently bulldozed up on the hill. That's where my husband was actually born, there at the old Whitestone Beach Hotel. But that was when the steamboat came in. Some people would get off there at White Stone Beach and stay at the White Stone Beach Hotel. Lacy Spriggs had a little store right on shore of the steamboat wharf. [laughter] I remember one trick he played on. The steamboats came and went anytime, twenty-four hours. They didn't just come at the convenience of daylight. So, a lot of times, people, of course, would come and wait for the steamboat not knowing exactly when they would come. It could be within an hour or so. But they would come and wait in Lacy Springs' store. Well, one night, [laughter] Lacy was getting sort of tired. It was about midnight. He lived up over the store. He wanted to go to bed, but he couldn't get rid of the people because they [laughter] wanted to sit around his store. So, in his back room, he had a steamboat whistle. So, he went in the back room and he blew the steamboat whistle. Well, everybody, of course, thought the steamboat was coming. So, they left the store and ran out on the wharf. He locked the doors and went upstairs and went to bed. [laughter]

He was a great joke to the area.

CK: What did the whistles sound like? [laughter]

FS: Oh gosh. You've never heard a steamboat whistle? I can't really describe it. I had a recording around here. I think the Steamboat Museum has one now. But I had one and I've

misplaced it. I'll find it if I ever clean the house out. Mr. Robert Burgess was a great authority on steamboats. I'm sure you've heard of him. He was a good friend of my husband's. He gave my husband a recording. When Jack would go give some of his speeches, he would start his speech off with a steamboat [laughter] whistle. It's something like, "Woo, woo," but in a distance. You could hear it coming up and as it got closer, it would get a little bit louder. Then, of course, they would blow before they left.

MK: Was there any showboat or any kind of equivalent?

FS: Oh, yes. So, the Adams Showboat came in here.

WR: Yes.

MK: What was that?

FS: Adams Showboat came into Irvington. It had the full regalia of plays and things. Maybe Billy can tell you a little bit more about the Showboat because I wasn't old enough.

[laughter]

But they came in on a regular basis for entertainment. But they were a little bit later, probably about the [19]30s, weren't they?

WR: Yes. I think so.

FS: Well, I think I've rattled on enough, haven't I? [laughter]

CK: Well, you have been wonderful.

FS: Can you think of another subject I haven't touched on?

MK: Well, I wanted to ask you about your husband's book, his research, where this interest in steamboats came from

FS: Well, his interest in steamboats was that his father was a waterman and he lived on…

MK: Who are we talking about now?

FS: I'm talking about Captain Lee Simmons, who was my C. Jackson Simmons' father. He lived here in…

DJ: How do you spell that?

FS: What?

DJ: Lee.

FS: Lee, L-E-E, Simmons.

DJ: Oh, okay. Thank you.

FS: Captain Lee, well, he was born right here on this property and lived here for several generations. The Simmons's have been here for quite a few generations. I'll tell you one incident was, he was an engineer. He went to the University of Virginia and he came home and built here, right here on this property, the first gasoline engine to be put in a boat on Carters Creek. He made the parts out of wood and sent them to Baltimore and had them machined into metal and brought them back. Right over on this hill, he put them into the first boat on Carters Creek to have a gasoline engine. He was a brain with mathematics, but he also built boats. He built us a forty-foot yacht out of Mahogany in our backyard up the street here. He did everything the old-fashioned way with the calipers. He made his model and he took the calipers, the measurements off of the model, and then transferred them to the boards and everything. We sold that boat, as much as I hated to, to make a down payment to build this house. [laughter] But times were tight. In talking about this book on Irvington, the reason he wrote the book was, it was supposed to be an album of the first generation because it was the hundredth anniversary of Irvington having been named Irvington. It was first called Carters Creek Wharf. This area was settled by John Carter, who was Robert King Carter of Christ Church. Do you know old Christ Church out here? John Carter came into this area as the father of Robert King Carter. He bought most of these lands, or he owned most of this land, and all of the area of Irvington at that point were the Glebe fields for old Christ Church. They're still called Glebe fields, and some of the fields are still in cultivation. But he raised the tobacco…

MK: Glebe means?

FS: The fields that supported the church, Christ Church, hence the name of this creek is Carters Creek, named for Robert King Carter. He actually chose a place for his home over in Weems, which is on the other side of Carters Creek, and built a home called Corotoman. But he used this area, Irvington, and it was called Carters Creek Wharf until 1893. Then the post office said – that was the establishment of the first post office, the United States Post Office – said they couldn't keep using the Carters Creek Wharf name because the people on the other side of the Creek, which was Weems that didn't have a name, [laughter] were getting the mail, and they had to have a post office name. So, there was a man that lived here called Captain Lev Irving. There were several others, according to this newspaper, the *Virginia Citizen*, which I was telling you that's on the internet, there was a big contest of what this town would be named after they dropped the Carters Creek Wharf. So, Mr. Irving chose – they chose Irvington. That's how Irvington got its name. That was in 1893. It was the hundredth anniversary that Jack started this book of that naming of its Irvington that the reason he calls it the Album of Its First Generation. But let me see.

MK: So, it was the hundred-year anniversary?

FS: Yes. The hundred-year anniversary of its being named Irvington and the establishment of the first post office. But Irvington was settled mostly by Anglo-Saxons back in those days. We

don't have much more of a population now than we had a hundred years ago. But some of the names that – and he lists them in this book – that still exist, some of the families still live here, like the Simmons'. I was talking about the Simmons' in the boats, where he had put the first engine in the boat of Carters Creek. But that, of course, sort of revolutionized the oystering, having a gasoline motor to take you out instead of the sails. But at one time, Irvington had – besides the post office, they had an electric power plant. They had a fish factory. They had the commissioner of Fisheries who was (Mr. Mac De Lee?), who was the progenitor of the Stevens family that lived here that built the Tides Inn. Mac De Lee was a great entrepreneur who came here in the mid eighteen hundreds from South Carolina. He got involved in a lot of things. As I said, he had telephone, he was the commissioner of Fisheries of Virginia. He had his headquarters here. He had a boat named the *Commodore Murray*. The family jokingly called it Papas Yacht, but it was a *Commodore Murray*. He had a marine hospital. We had the first National Bank, the Lancaster National Bank was set up. Mr. Rowe Billy's father was one of the first directors on the bank. He helped, with some other businessmen, set up the first insurance company, the Northern Neck Mutual Insurance Company, which is still in existence here in Irvington. Of course, we had the country store. Bernard Willing's store several stores. But Irvington was the center of commerce here in the lower part of the Northern Neck. Everything else was inland, Kilmarnock, White Stone, all the towns that are bigger now or were off the water. But Irvington was the center with everything going for it about then. Well, in 1917, there was a fire. We had an opera house here that seated 600 people. In the basement of that opera house, Billy's father was running the *Virginia Citizen* paper, which was the one that I told you that we have every copy of. But in 1917, when the steamboat left Tappahannock, a fire broke out in Tappahannock and did a great deal of damage. The steamboat came down the river and landed here at Irvington. There was a fire in this opera house that destroyed much of downtown Irvington, including the bank, the opera house, the hospital, the Naval hospital, and all those essential things right there off of the dock of the steamboat. Now, on that ship – now, this is hearsay and nobody proved it. But it was right during the war, and Mr. Lee, who was the editor of the *Virginia Citizen*, was a great one for putting in the world news in his newspapers. He would tell you whose horse died and who got married and that type of thing, but he would also have the world news. This was the only way people knew what was going on in the world, was through this weekly newspaper. But anyway, there were two Germans on that boat, and they were in Tappahannock when that fire started. They were on the boat when the boat docked here at Irvington, and then the Irvington fire came. Nobody was able to prove that those Germans set that fire, but Mr. Lee had written some very hot articles about the Germans in this newspaper the week before. Nobody proved it. It's all hearsay. In fact, the people are dead sure that those two Germans set Tappahannock and Irvington both on fire. But that was 1917. But, I guess, that probably destroyed more of the center of commerce here in Irvington and did us more damage almost than [laughter] the flood. Well, of course, what took away the steamboats was the tidal wave as we called it in the 1930. Was it 1934?

WR: Yes. I think so.

FS: [19]33. We called it the tidal wave. That was what put the end of the steamboats because…

WR: Well, it was trucks too.

FS: Well, I say, the transportation – the roads were improved slightly, but the transportation, we were beginning to get the automobile. Also, all of the wharves got taken away by that storm. Nobody wanted to put them back. They felt it was sort of the end of the steamboat era. I mean, you never can cut it off, right? But there was no place for them to land. So, they resorted to the truck and the other transportation. There was a plan to put a railroad right down the middle of the Northern Neck. The place it was going to be headquartered was Millenbeck, which is way up on started the mouth of the Corotoman off the Rappahannock Dam. The engineers had all the drawings and everything, the surveying done and everything. But the War of 1812 came along. That put the end of the idea of a railroad and it saved the Northern Neck from destruction. [laughter] Because if we had had a railroad, they would not have been the tranquility that we have now. I have a feeling that we are being invaded too much now because the Tides Inn over here has just applied for 470-unit condominiums, which we don't have around here. So, everything has its beginnings and endings, I guess. [laughter] But…

MK: So, if the steamboat era ended in the 1930s, then it had a history of about 110 or 115 years or something like that.

FS: Yes. Jack says in here exactly when the first steamboat came.

CK: The name of the book you are reading from is?

FS: It's, *Irvington: An Album of its First Generation* by C. Jackson Simmons, my husband. In here, it says, "Steamboats began to run from Baltimore through the Rappahannock River to Fredericksburg right around 1828." Steamboat wharf at Carters Creek is mentioned as early as 1834. You see, we have records up here in Lancaster courthouse that go back to 1651, which is the year that this county was formed from Northumberland County. Our records are saved because most of the other counties during the War, when they thought that they were – the gunboats and the Yankee gunboats were all around us. Most of the counties sent their records to Richmond for safekeeping. Well, as you know, Richmond was burned by the Confederates when the Yankees were coming over. All of the records of these county courthouses got burned up, except poor Lancaster and Northumberland, who were too isolated [laughter] to get their records to Richmond. Now, Richmond County sent theirs and they were destroyed. But we have all of these records, and that's where Jack did all the research for these dates and everything because he had such wonderful – and being a lawyer, he spent a lot of time in the clerk's office. But he was able to get – plus these papers, the *Virginia Citizen*, that Mr. Rowe had saved that were published here.

DJ: Michael, we're going on thirty-two.

MK: Okay. But in this hundred year or plus period of the steamboat era, how could you talk about the impact of the steamboat on the Chesapeake region during that period?

FS: Well, I don't think that the Northern Neck would've had much communication with the outer world without the steamboat. That was our communication with the outer world. Everything came and went by the steamboat. For instance, when Billy had needed – he had hit himself in the stomach with an axe. He had to get on a steamboat and go to Baltimore to get to a hospital.

Twenty years ago, we had our first hospital built up here in Kilmarnock. My children were both born in Richmond because there were no hospitals around here. That was the nearest thing, other than the country doctor, was the only thing we had. But we were very healthy people [laughter] probably because we didn't have any McDonald's around to have high fat food from. [laughter] I'm just joking. But we were very isolated by the waters. If we hadn't had the steamboats, we wouldn't have had any connection with the outer world. But as I said, everything we bought and sold came by steamboat up until the demise of the steamboat.

MK: Fascinating. Fascinating.

CK: Can I have a – I'll just turn around.

FS: Could you turn that – [laughter] wait a minute.

CK: Yes.

FS: Can you stop just for a minute?

MK: Yes.

CK: Sure.

[end of transcript]