

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Ted Baker

Date: Saturday, April 26, 2008

Length: Approximately 7 minutes

Interviewer (Jess Boyle): Could you please state your full name and spell it?

Ted Baker: Sure, my name is Ted Baker B-A-K-E-R.

Interviewer: Okay.

Baker: I live in Wappingers Falls. I've been a resident here since 1964. I worked for IBM for about thirty-five years. I was a builder for about ten years and now I'm retired.

Interviewer: Did you grow up in Wappingers?

Baker: No, I grew up in the Bronx.

Interviewer: You did say that before, that's right where did you go to school, around here or in the Bronx?

Baker: Well in the Bronx I went to the Bronx School of Science and then I went to Clarkson College in Potsdam, New York and did some graduate work in Northeastern University.

Interviewer: Your parents, are either one of them still alive?

Baker: No, no my father came from England, he was an attorney and my mother was born in New York City.

Interviewer: Okay. So what did they do for a living?

Baker: My father worked in the court system and my mother was a bookkeeper.

Interviewer: What was your first job, either in the Bronx or in this area?

Baker: Well my first professional job, I worked in the [signaling core] in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.

Interviewer: What did you do?

Baker: I was an engineer, an associate engineer. I worked on environmental testing.

Interviewer: And your profession has been an engineer from most of your life?

Baker: I was a physicist at IBM.

Interviewer: You were? So did you work on anything specifically?

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Ted Baker

Baker: Well micro processors, designed chips, manufacture chips, develop chips.

Interviewer: Now you've said you've been in the Hudson Valley since 1964, correct?

Baker: Yes.

Interviewer: Could you; is there anything that brought you here?

Baker: IBM.

Interviewer: IBM?

Baker: I was working for Sylvania in Massachusetts and then I had a job offer here when they were building the Fishkill facility.

Interviewer: Okay, now specifically about the bridge, those were some question about you. We were wondering what role do you think the bridge has had in the community as long as you've been here? What impact has the bridge had on your time in the Hudson Valley, for you, and just the community at large?

Baker: Well, I think the bridge just sat here for many many years, before that it was useful to the railroad but it's just been sort of an eyesore, up to current plans.

Interviewer: Before the current plans came about as far as converting it into a walkway, how did you feel about the bridge, did you feel it should stay or should it be removed?

Baker: Well, you now, just to analyze the situation, its huge structure; it's a unique structure, and it has potential. The only thing that was necessary were for the politicians to put some in place to get the bridge useful.

Interviewer: Now as far as where we are right now, obviously it is in the process of being converted into a walkway. How do feel (about) the conversion and what will come about (with) that? How do you feel it will affect this region and community and you would feel it was positive or negative?

Baker: I'm very positive on the fact that money has been appropriated to make the bridge into a walkway. This is a unique bridge, not just unique in our area; it's unique in our country, and perhaps even in the world and the bridge will draw people here by the thousands. Here's a situation where we are, you know, less than an hour or two from a large population center. This is going to be a unique bridge with beautiful views. It's going to be attached to loads of trails and people are going to flock here. It's going to be a boom for the area and the economy.

Interviewer: Do you feel that with the bridge, tourism will become, like, the main stay of Poughkeepsie?

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Ted Baker

Baker: I don't know if it will become the main stay of Poughkeepsie but it will bring a lot of people here that never considered coming here before. This something that you could get on the train and be up here in an hour or two from New York City and you could bring your hiking gear and go back in the evening.

Interviewer: Do you plan to use the walkway itself?

Baker: Oh yes, I plan to buy a bike and use the trails and go over the bridge and I really haven't done that before but I think it's a wonderful opportunity once the bridge is finished.

Interviewer: Now what developments as far as the conversion of the bridge (is required)? I know you've been following it very closely, is there anything about the development you would like to share with us over your time with, as this has been going on?

Baker: Well it's unfortunate, you know, in our democratic system things take a long time to happen and I guess it's a necessary [evil], but it took a long time get the establishment convinced that this was the way to go. Although it seemed obvious twenty years ago, it was cheaper to convert it into a walkway than to rip it down but it took a long time to get through the establishment.

Interviewer: Have you had any direct involvement with Walkway Over the Hudson at all?

Baker: No, I really haven't.

Interviewer: Okay.

Baker: Just an observer.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you would like to share, even memories about the bridge or about what do you look forward to as far as the conversion of the bridge?

Baker: I'm looking forward to the beautiful scenes that will be seen on the bridge once it's opened for pedestrian traffic.

Interviewer: This is actually is a good question because this is something we've been asking people. One thing, our former Governor Spitzer, when he allocated or at least assisted in the allocation of money for the bridge, that one of things discussed was converting it into a New York State park which may happen and it looks like it will happen. Do you have any ideas or suggestions about maybe a name for that park or do you feel there is anyone in the area that should be honored because of their work and possibly name the park after them?

Baker: No I really haven't given that any consideration.

Interviewer: Okay.

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Ted Baker

Baker: But I think the fact that New York State will pick up the role of managing the overall park will be another benefit.

Interviewer: Do you, in your time here do you recall trains going over the bridge before the fire?

Baker: Yes, yeah I saw (that). I remember trains going over the bridge and it was interesting but nothing we really participated in; mainly freight trains.

Interviewer: Do you have any specific memories at all, anything that sticks out to you or just kind of a regular? [cuts off]

Baker: Just kind of a normal everyday thing, to see a train going over the bridge.

Interviewer: Of course. Did you have [cuts off] The one area that I've been focusing on is the military history of the bridge, actually the defense of the bridge during World War II. When you were in the army did you have any involvement at all with the bridge at all, was there any kind of connection at all did you know of anyone who might have traversed the bridge at any point?

Baker: No, no.

Interviewer: Okay.

Baker: Sorry I can't help you.

Interviewer: No that's okay. Just a question, is there anything else? [Cut of by Baker]

Baker: No that's all, thank you for this opportunity.

Interviewer: Anytime, thank you, we apologize for any wait.

Baker: No problem, thank you.

Interviewer: Thank you.

Baker: Take care, good luck on your project.

Interviewer: You too, thanks so much.

[End of Interview 6:55]