

Hudson River Valley Institute  
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories  
Dick Coller

**Camera man:** All ready to go.

**Interviewer (Nick Marshall):** Alright, my name is Nick.

**Dick Coller:** Good morning Nick.

**Interviewer:** Good morning, we are going to be interviewing you about the bridge and if you could do me a favor and spell your name on camera.

**Coller:** My last name is Coller C-O-L-L-E-R.

**Interviewer:** Alright, thank you, I do believe that was important, right? Um, alright, where did you grow up?

**Coller:** Well in central eastern Pennsylvania, Shenandoah, Pottsville, anthracite coal mining area.

**Interviewer:** Sorry well take that, the Coal mining trains used the bridge?

**Coller:** Oh yes, [clears throat] I'm sure coal from that area was transported to Boston over the bridge the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge.

**Interviewer:** I hope you don't mind but I'd just like to dig into that, is that alright?

**Coller:** Oh sure.

**Interviewer:** Because I know that they had some basic questions, I am excited about history, in your research for the book *Bridging the Hudson* did you find that the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge was an important facet of industrial transportation?

**Coller:** Very much so, it certainly [sighs] you know lessened the expense if transporting goods back and forth from the New England States to the rest of the United States. Prior to the construction of the Bridge, the Hudson River constituted an impediment to transportation, we... normally you think of rivers as aiding transportation and they do and the Hudson was a great north-south artery of commerce but it constituted an impediment of the east-west direction. The coal I referred to, the anthracite coal used to be prior to the bridge was transported by D&H that Delaware and Hudson Canal who at Roundout in Kingston and then some of those boats went across the Hudson River and were off loaded in the Rhinecliff area and the coal distributed from there and other boats, well some of the canal boats were loaded from the river barges and the coal went down to New York and other places, very inefficient process whereas once the bridge was constructed, well what happened, the canal went out of business, but coal became cheaper on the east side of the Hudson River.

**Interviewer:** Now how did you conduct your research for the book *Bridging the Hudson*, like where did you find your sources mostly?

**Coller:** Well I became aware that Carleton Mabee was researching a book on the Hudson and we had been dealing with Conrail in Philadelphia, Conrail had headquarters in Philadelphia about records referring to the bridge and the various back and forth, they found a small letter file that they sent to us to Bill Sepe I believe and then one day a box arrived that contained what I believe were 241 aperture cards which were IBM cards containing a bit of film which is a reduced sized photograph of a drawing one of the original drawings used to construct the bridge. I thought very interesting [clears throat] more later after what we did with those aperture cards, but subsequently the office in Philadelphia let us know that they found a file cabinet with the records of the bridge. So Carleton Mabee and I went down there to Philadelphia and picked up all those records and brought them back. Carleton went through every piece of paper in those three or four file cabinet draws and used a lot of that information in addition to a great deal of other research that he conducted to write his book.

**Interviewer:** Had you met Carleton Mabee before?

**Coller:** No I think, yeah my introduction to Carleton came through Bill Sepe, who Carleton had been dealing with at the time and I knew Bill Sepe too at that time.

**Interviewer:** When did you first move to the Poughkeepsie area?

**Coller:** Oh thirty years ago, the town of Clinton, which is fifteen miles north of Poughkeepsie.

**Interviewer:** And when did you get involved with the Walkway Over the Hudson project?

**Coller:** Oh probably 1992 when I met Bill Sepe at the Dutchess County Fair and talked to him at length about his dream to open this bridge as a walkway. [a pause] Bill had actually rented a booth at the Dutchess County Fair to advertise his intent to [cuts off] and he sat there alone without any material and spoke to people who came by, well historic recon- what, reconstruction is one of my interests which, of course, I talked to him and chatted with him and for quite a long time and from there you know, I became a member of the fledging organization and time went on.

**Interviewer:** When did you get into the restoration of significant structures, had you worked previously on any?

**Coller:** Oh yes, I live in a house that dates from probably about 1740 and has taken a lot of rework. I been involved with the reconstruction of, the rehabilitation, I'd say of older structures by the Clinton Historical Society, that sort of thing, dealing with people who restore barns, Old Dutch barns there's a lot of those around here.

**Interviewer:** So can you explain anything about Walkway Over the Hudson as you encountered it right there in 1992 with Bill Sepe, the impression you got of the organization was [cut off by Coller]

**Coller:** Oh Okay.

**Interviewer:** How things were conducted?

**Coller:** Sure, we were really a group of boots on the ground people, you know involved going out on Saturdays in our work clothes with our own tools and doing repairs on the bridge itself, particularly at the Highland end of the bridge, moving around timbers, and reconstructing the fence, and just making the bridge safe and secure [clears throat]. I think we acted as if we owned the bridge, many years before we actually came into ownership of it but yeah it was essentially as I said, a group of guys and women who you know did the boots on the ground work involved with rehabbing the bridge.

**Interviewer:** Now was the bridge significantly damaged by the fire in 1974?

**Coller:** No, no a very small section of it over Poughkeepsie side had some twisted steel, the deck had burned the old creosol saturated timbers had burned quite a few of those, but the basic structure, the track sits on top of the bridge, it's not an integral part of the bridge structure itself. So the track was damaged, very little of the structural steel was damaged, subsequently by the way, that track, the entire deck was removed from the bridge, all the way from Washington Street in Poughkeepsie to the Poughkeepsie shoreline, that happened probably oh, '88 or '89 that had happened before Walkway Over the Hudson organization was formed.

**Interviewer:** Are there still the twisted train tracks on the bridge?

**Coller:** No that was all removed, any of the damaged track was taken out in the late 1980s was taken away, what remained, the track that remained, extends from the Poughkeepsie shoreline westwards all the way until the end of the bridge in the Town of Highland [clears throat].

**Interviewer:** Are there plans in the existing Walkway Organization, with restoration or the establishment of walkway to keep the tracks visible or perhaps [cuts off].

**Coller:** No it is necessary to remove the tracks, I do not know of any rail trail or any bridge restoration that has been successful in leaving the tracks and then trying to create a walkway as a part of- the track constitutes a safety hazard, and just a general impediment, makes it more difficult to do a walkway and of course there is no intention whatever to run trains or trolleys, over the remaining track, so what's there now has to be removed as part of the upgrade of the bridge.

[Short pause]

**Interviewer:** As Walkway Over the Hudson moved toward the current organization were you involved at all in the process of obtaining a title to the bridge or [cuts off]?

**Coller:** Yes [pause] I know I was there when we asked Ann Alfonso who was the majority leader in the Ulster County Legislator, we met in his office one day and asked him to sell us the bridge and he said yes. Now what this represented was the tax reverses on the Ulster County portion bridge and they sold this to us, I think \$1,000 dollars which was a pittance and then we,

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well now dispense, now by doing that we dispensed, the tax reverses problem on that other side of the river, the tax reverses on the Poughkeepsie side were only forgiven recently by the city of Poughkeepsie but that was done with, I guess, \$1 dollar so we got a bargain in that case. In each case the reverses were on the order of a quarter of a million dollars so we [pause] obtained the, obtained the, well those impediments quite inexpensively. The title to the bridge which is a different matter entirely came to us I believe in 1998 for \$1 dollar when Bill Sepe obtained that from the gentlemen who was the owner of the record.

**Interviewer:** The forgiveness of the reverses on the Highland side I would imagine was most of the reason your focus on that early in the project, with the Walkway efforts.

**Coller:** It was one of several things that had to be done in order to obtain a clear title to the bridge and what I say clear, unencumbered tax free title to the bridge.

**Interviewer:** Before the tax reverses and the title worked out was it hard to conduct Walkway work on the bridge were there issues regarding that?

**Coller:** No we had very good relations there with the property owner whose property we had to traverse and with the Town of Highland up to a point and then a disagreement arose and the town of Highland ordered us to cease and desist on the bridge.

**Interviewer:** At what point did that occur?

**Coller:** You know, I'm a little hazy on the dates, I would have to go back and look in Carleton's book and see when that occurred, probably six years ago.

**Interviewer:** Was this a significant retard to progress?

**Coller:** Oh yes, very much so, after we've been ordered to stop work on the bridge and work stopped and we were pretty much left with a what do we do now situation.

**Interviewer:** Where did the organization go from that point?

**Coller:** Well a group of the members, it's a membership organization by the way, dues paying members submitting, well you know, their checks every year to maintain membership status and receive the newsletter and so on. A group of us obtained a membership list and went to that membership with the intent of having an election, a formal election of officers of the bridge organization and [pause] I believe that was 2004. We did that, a new slate of officers was elected, the new slate had a different approach to rehabilitating the bridge by using public money as opposed to guys going out there on Saturdays with their own hammers and nails and rehabbing the bridge. So from there the new board went forth and cleared up the disagreements we had with the neighbors and the town and with the city, went forth.

**Interviewer:** Did the organization have issues of maintaining membership while all this internal rearrangements were occurring?

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**Coller:** I'd say no, the hardcore members stayed, every organization such as ours has people come and go on an annual basis, every year you sign up a bunch of new people and next year half of them are gone and so you have to go out and get additional people. No I don't think we had a difficult time maintaining a viable membership.

[short pause]

**Interviewer:** Alright we're going to switch gears.

**Coller:** Oh you're switching on me [slight chuckle].

**Interviewer:** We're going to change it up a little.

**Interviewer 2:** So clearly you've been on this bridge because of your experience can you share some of those specific experiences with us?

**Coller:** I'm sorry what did you say?

**Interviewer 2:** Some of your experiences on the actual bridge, like working on it?

**Coller:** Oh describe those experiences?

**Interviewer 2:** Yes

**Coller:** Well [laughing] a lot of fun, you know moving the grates around that we moved around, you know just removing the old planks and some of things that were in danger of falling into the river and all getting rid of all that stuff, sure it's a good way to spend Saturdays in the open air and [cuts off].

**Interviewer 2:** Did you ever have any concerns about your own safety while you were on the bridge?

**Coller:** No, never [clears throat] no the bridge is structurally sound, you do have to watch your footing of course when your up there out in the open on the deck or the open steel work, but no, there's no safety problem up there.

**Interviewer:** And how do you feel about the plans, the current purposed plans for the reconstruction of the bridge?

**Coller:** I am ecstatic, I'm thinking, wow our time has come. You know, we do owe a lot of thanks to a lot of different people who have been involved in bringing this to where we are now and I hope we will continue and that you know all the pieces being worked on now will fall into place and come September of '09 we will be out there in force. You know enjoying the view and weather, birds flying around and what have you.

**Interviewer 2:** Do you have any concerns about the proposed project?

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**Coller:** Concerns about what?

**Interviewer 2:** About the purposed plans?

**Coller:** No, nothing other than a few minor details

**Interviewer 2:** Ok I would like to go back to the book. What was your role in the writing or the research of?

**Coller:** Well nothing concerned with writing the book, I did discuss different things with Carleton during the process of writing the book but I had no role in writing the book. It was entirely Carleton's, you know, we tried to keep abreast of the historical aspects whatever we could find that was pertinent to the bridge and you know to keep Carleton informed. In addition to the material we found at the bridge people found, Carleton did a great deal of research on his, apart from us to the point of filling seventy six- loose-leaf binders full of notes and clippings, and various memorabilia he located and all that material here has turned over to us. By the way, in turn contracted with the Clinton Historical Society to be our repository for that material and that's where it is right now.

**Interviewer 2:** So you say you that you were fairly involved with the research of the book?

**Coller:** [looks for clarification of the question] with the?

**Interviewer 2:** With the research like some? [cut off by Coller]

**Coller:** I would say not, no not myself

**Interviewer 2:** Ok, what do you find most interesting about the bridge?

**Coller:** Well it's an amazing structure, every time I go out there I find something new, in the details the way they shaped and fitted the steel members together. The construction method was entirely different from what you'll see today in bridge construction. Today they have the advantage of huge rolled i-beams and various structural shapes. They did not have that in the 1880s. All of those large members were built up from plates and small angles, and millions of rivets, and [clears throat] and the way to details, the detailing of the shapes, the way they were fitted into each other [clears throat], just what they did it with the original bridge is a marvel. Then they came along in 1906, say eighteen years after the original construction and they added a larger truss down the middle of the bridge and looking at it, I don't know how they did, it's just an amazing feat that of the construction, you know, they were able to fit this new assemblage of, whatever, 8,000 thousand tons of steel into the old structure. So I guess you can tell that I am more oriented towards technical aspects of the bridge rather than the glories of the scenery around the Hudson Valley.

**Interviewer 2:** Well it says here that you are a semi-retired engineer. In your studies to become an engineer did ever hear about the bridge?

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**Coller:** No I'm an electrical engineer, actually electrical technology is boring as far as I'm, I really branch out into other things, mechanical and structural.

**Interviewer 2:** And you say you have been living in this area for about thirty years?

**Coller:** Well this side of the river thirty years, I did live in Woodstock for several years also and before that Saint Louis and Seattle and Eastern Pennsylvania.

**Interviewer 2:** What brought you to this area?

**Coller:** The job, I'd been working in the defense industry and I decided to get a real job so [clears throat] I came to IBM in 1964 and well I've been in the area ever since.

**Interviewer 2:** Do you remember the burning of the bridge in 1974?

**Coller:** No, not clearly, I know some of the people, I know that commuted back and forth were very annoyed at the fact that they got home whatever seven hours late that day but that's all I remember about it. Some people claim that you could see the smoke from Kingston but I cannot attest to that.

**Interviewer 2:** So the bridge wasn't a real part of daily life at this point?

**Coller:** Oh no I noticed it crossing the Mid-Hudson Bridge on occasion I would notice this railroad bridge over there to the north, but that's all. I just had no real interest or knowledge you know, how many trains crossed it, when they did, when you know the fact that the trains did stop operation after the fire in '74. No I'd say the bridge became a feature on the horizon for me after I talked to Bill Sepe at the Dutchess County Fair.

**Interviewer 2:** How do you think the people who live in this area perceive the bridge right now?

**Coller:** Today, I cannot guess I imagine the view run the gamut, oh is that a bridge over there?, or where is that bridge? Or you know, yeah I've hear those sort of comments from people all the way to people who are really really interested in seeing it reused for something worthwhile.

**Interviewer 2:** And do you think the bridge is going to get a lot of attention from this whole project, like you think it's going to be an integral part of the area?

**Coller:** If we can get, help that, yeah, it will [clears throat] well the bridge should become an icon, you know of the Hudson Valley. Interestingly enough, you know it's hard to take a photograph in downtown Poughkeepsie without getting the bridge in the background and the news media around here publishes a lot of photographs that report to show something and the caption will identify something but there's the bridge in the background and its an incidental feature that you always pick up, like the sky.

[Short Pause]

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**Interviewer 2:** Have you ever heard of any other ideas to recycle the bridge or to like change it around?

**Coller:** There have been proposals, I believe, to do things with the bridge, make a shopping center out of it, apartment houses or something like that, silly things that just cannot be done [clears throat]

**Interviewer 2:** What are some of the specifics of the plan that's being purposed right now?

**Coller:** I am sorry the first part, the specifics?

**Interviewer 2:** What are some of the specifics, like its actual usage, are there like programs?

**Coller:** Well [clears throat] to take the technical approach right now is to take the existing deck off, and put a new concrete deck on with suitable side rails so people don't fall off [slight laugh] and as far the features other than that I don't think that they've been worked out yet. So today the plan is to essentially put a long, very wide runway, perfectly level which you can roller blade or run, walk or what you care to, enjoy the view, eat your lunch up there, whatever you care to do.

**Interviewer 2:** Okay.

**Coller:** Not to mention a lot of work has gone on so far, the underwater piers have been inspected twice now the past year and a half completely gone over by divers and those piers which are incredibly massive, it hard to believe how big they are, what you see above water is a very small part of the pier, perhaps ten percent of it, comparable to an iceberg, you see ten percent of the ice above water and the rest below, well those piers, that definition exactly, they're huge, they weigh 40,000 tons each. When they get hit, occasionally by a barge whatever they're not disturbed at all, they're fine; they're in very good condition. The steel work above has been inspected by climbing inspectors, last fall, bridge inspectors are used to working out of bucket trucks, lifts and on our bridge they had to learn to climb. So it was a lot of fun working with these guys, a claiming schooling came in from Tahoe City, California, to teach them how to climb. They had a ball doing this for ten weeks, they climbed all over the bridge, very hard to see these guys because they're so, compared to the size of the bridge, there's, you know you have a dozen guys out there with white helmets on, you had to go through these little white specks which were their helmets, because they're lost through the magnitude of the bridge. The steel's in great shape, ok that was a conclusion, but working with them and getting clearances for them to cross out neighbor's property and to work over the railroad tracks and everything that was a lot of fun.

**Interviewer 2:** Right now the bridge is, is it black, the actual steel?

**Coller:** Yeah, black with traces of rust, and traces of aluminum, and traces of yellow, you know, basically black.



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**Interviewer 2:** Are there plans to change it or do you want to keep the same?

**Coller:** I don't know of any serious plan to paint the bridge, there's no necessity to paint it [clears throat] So what they call the section loss, that is a reduction in the thickness of the steel is very minor and that's why you would paint to keep the section loss from occurring. Well there's not much section loss, the bridge is in great shape and it will be there for hundreds of years.

[Long pause]

**Interviewer 2:** We're going to switch again

**Coller:** Okay [laughs]

**Interviewer:** Alright, the first question I have for you again, do see the bridge as becoming an important part of perhaps reviving Poughkeepsie and helping the city to grow more, increase the [cuts off]?

**Coller:** That's my hope [laughs] I think [clears throat] it can contribute a great deal to improving the waterfront area of Poughkeepsie and tying Poughkeepsie and its surrounding area into a large trail network used by the bicyclists and runners and walkers, and hikers and what have you in general. This similar, there are some similar programs or projects that I have visited and for example Chattanooga, Tennessee were they have a bridge, an old trolley bridge crossing the Tennessee River and that was instrumental in upgrading the downtown area of Chattanooga and the ended up with a huge aquarium down there in addition to really redoing their water front, and one or two others around the country I visited and but nothing of the grandeur, nothing as stupendous like our Poughkeepsie Bridge. These other bridges are just minor in length and height, and whatever compared with this bridge. This bridge has the potential to out do all the others and hopefully you know bring Poughkeepsie and Highland along with it on both sides of the river are involved in the improvements.

**Interviewer:** Oh is it windy on top the bridge?

**Coller:** Yes only occasionally, there are times when the wind gets quite gusty out there, I've lost one or two caps, there are days when you have to be careful [clears throat]. It can occur you know a can situation occur where you have no wind on the shore, we're out in the middle above of the river it's windy, but that's rare.

[a pause]

**Interviewer:** And what was your impression of the involvement of public officials in the State of New York and in the local area?

**Coller:** Well recently it has been positive all the way, there might have been some reluctance in the past, in the distant past to participate in this wild idea but for the past year or more I'd say I could go further back , I could say we've had in the past three years or so we've had nothing but

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encouragement from the public officials on both sides of the river and that's really accelerated recently.

**Interviewer:** Would you say the support of Governor Spitzer is a big plus for the project?

**Coller:** Oh yes definitely, let us not forget that governor Pataki was also a supporter of the bridge. We obtained I believe two governor initiatives grants from the Pataki Administration to the tune I believe of about \$165,000 dollars between the two of them and that was definitely pre-Spitzer. Now with the Spitzer Administration we hope to see a great deal more than that.

**Interviewer:** Have you heard anything about the opening of the bridge are there any plans to coincide it with the 400-year anniversary of Henry Hudson?

**Coller:** Well I believe there's this large organization, a large cadre of people that are hoping to, really well [pause], to have the bridge as the center piece of a very large quadricentennial celebration that I hope it happens. In 1909 the tricentennial I supposed they called it, was quite a major event here in downtown Poughkeepsie. I don't think the bridge was a part of that at least not a major part. Well this time it should be a major part.

**Interviewer:** That's interesting that it wasn't a major part of the tricentennial.

**Coller:** Well you can see from the literature that I have on the 1909 event, I don't think they made it a big deal about the bridge.

**Interviewer:** Did the trains crossing the bridge itself work with the industries in Poughkeepsie anyway when the bridge was in operation?

**Coller:** Well there were sidings that came off that main line, the bridge became the link over Hudson between, the Maybrook Yard which is twenty-five miles west of the bridge and the Hopewell Junction Yard which is fifteen miles south of the bridge. No major yards in Poughkeepsie itself there were sidings that went off to the service the few local industries and delivered coal to the Hudson River Psychiatric, is that the Mid-Hudson or Hudson River?, the Psychiatric Institute that's here, and the service you know, perhaps the lumber yard and a few things in Poughkeepsie. Other than that, the bridge traffic did not do a whole lot for Poughkeepsie. I gather that there was a minor passenger station on Parker Avenue but nothing like the kind of passenger station that you would expect as part of a main line railroad, nothing like the New York Central train station that, off the foot of Main Street in Poughkeepsie. So I'd say the residents of Poughkeepsie watched the trains go by I don't think they benefited a whole lot from the presence of the bridge. The train crews that operated those trains probably all came from Maybrook and from Hopewell Junction. There's really no interchange point or crew change point in Poughkeepsie.

**Interviewer:** Are there any plans to connect the railroad bridge and the train station together to kind of make well access and to make the historical connection between the two railroads?

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**Coller:** You're speaking of the Metro-North Train Station? Yes, the plan is to create an elevator from [clears throat] near Waryas Park near to the Children's Museum to get up to the level of the bridge, Waryas Park essentially being sea level and the bridge deck being 212 feet above sea level, yep perhaps an elevator and a staircase to join the two.

**Interviewer:** Do you see the bridge project, the bridge project, the restoration of the bridge feeding into any other, are there any other buildings in Poughkeepsie or in the area that really need this kind of historical attention as well?

**Coller:** Poughkeepsie has a lot of treasures; yes and really worthwhile structures, most of them I think are in pretty good shape. I'm sure you know, the impetus brought about by rehabbing the bridge could be harnessed to improve other older structures around Poughkeepsie. I'd like to see that happen.

**Interviewer:** Is the, or has the bridge project been able to connect to in anyway the historical centers such as the Franklin Delano Roosevelt House or the Eleanor Roosevelt Mansion?

**Coller:** We do make a point about these tie-ins, the fact that the Roosevelt Library does have photographs, which again here's Franklin and Eleanor, here's on them on the lawn, but oh there's the bridge in the background, it's just an incidental appearance of the bridge and that sort of thing is of interest to the federal parks people and to the people at the Roosevelt Library, they've been helpful in dredging up some of this older material. Yeah the technicals of this bridge, all the historical facts of this area do reach out in all directions, you can't deny it.

**Interviewer:** One second, were going to change again.

**Coller:** Ok [Laughter].

**Interviewer 2:** Earlier, when you were talking, you mentioned that you had been working Saturday mornings or Saturdays on the bridge?

**Coller:** Yes generally Saturdays would be the work days.

**Interviewer 2:** And then you mentioned the stop work order that was issued?

**Coller:** Yeah, by the time, the Town of Highland [cuts off].

**Interviewer 2:** What was the reason for that stop work order?

**Coller:** Because we had not taken out a building permit for a structure that we built at the end of the bridge, ok. The town of Highland well regarded what we were doing as coming under their building code and we were not compiling with their requirements, we did not seek approval of our plans, and we just went ahead with it.

**Interviewer 2:** And did they offer any steps you could take so you could continue the work or did they say just stop?

**Coller:** Oh no there was a route that the bridge organization could take to overcome that and we've done that. Today we are in compliance with the building department. If we want to go further with the structure that's there presently we would have to show a couple of things which we haven't quite done yet, but our intent is to tear down that structure, ok so the whole thing becomes moot.

**Interviewer 2:** And then there was a transition in the leadership of this bridge board, could you talk about that, like the leadership before, like the strategies beforehand and then now?

**Coller:** Yeah the former board took the view that we could do this as volunteers with private money, money, contributions from the membership and from the public, the sale of t-shirts and various bridge related memorabilia at block parties and events around the area, [clears throat]. The new board believes that we need public money to do this and I don't think there's any question that in today's environment that's necessary. The cost of what we want to do is so high there is not a chance of ever obtaining those amounts through the sale of t-shirts and apple pies.

**Interviewer 2:** So how did you feel about this transition?

**Coller:** Myself?

**Interviewer 2:** Yes.

**Coller:** I felt it necessary; we had to make this change and go to seek public monies and also private money from foundations.

**Interviewer 2:** So what kind of support have you gotten from the foundations, like local areas or [cuts off].

**Coller:** We received many hundreds of thousands of dollars in awards and grants, from numerous sources, the idea of the industrial development agencies for example here in Dutchess County, Governor Pataki's initiatives came to us a couple of years ago, the Dyson Foundation of course who gave us the grants earlier than the present participation. I am sure there's many, you know, sources out there that don't come to mind at the moment that occurred, well that the new board is here [thinks for a moment] Then of course most recently we've been blessed with the major awards from, well the expectation of awards from parks, the New York State Parks Department, the Department of Environmental Conservation, those are somewhat matching awards, there was the Hinchey earmark, I called that, that is from representative Maurice Hinchey, the earmark in the amount of almost \$900,000 dollars that came to us as a reimbursable match to our \$220,000 some dollars, administered through the Department of Transportation, it's quite a long list of monies that have become available to us once we went out and looked for them and more keep coming. The parks grant that I just mentioned, that's a half million dollars, recently awarded that, very recently, the DEC item is I believe \$40,000 it all adds up. [slight laughter].

**Interviewer 2:** What steps did the organization take to obtain these [kind of monies]?

**Coller:** What did we do?

**Interviewer 2:** Yes.

**Coller:** Oh we had to go and ask for them in the case of, some were easier to obtain than others. In the case of the most two recent grants, DEC and Parks we had to apply for those, actually write do extensive narratives, and meet a lot of their expectations so as far as why we should get those monies for our bridge. It's not an easy route to follow, to write and obtain these grants, there all competitive so you're out there with other worthwhile projects competing for the same monies.

**Interviewer 2:** In along that line, what challenges have you faced as you've tried to obtain money for this and public support?

**Coller:** Everyone loves this project [laughs] we, the detractors have been few and far apart. I'd say no real, you know, objections to what were trying to do. Some grant monies are or initiative monies are harder to get than others, yeah that's certainly true, and it just means that you have to work harder and longer at it, eventually you get it.

**Interviewer 2:** Is there anything else about the bridge that we haven't covered that you would like to discuss?

**Coller:** Oh we could go on you know, a long time probably, you know, just one of the little side aspects this bridge will become a magnet for bird watchers in the seasons, perhaps this time a year you might see eagles up on the bridge, no bald eagles ok, I've watched them several times and peregrine falcons, the red shouldered and red tailed hawks we see around. We don't have any birds nesting on the bridge which is a blessing as far as I'm concerned because we don't have the resulting corrosions that birds nests bring with them and that's probably because of the predatory birds, the hawks and the others we have keeping the seagulls, the... and the others away from the bridge. What the many, many reasons why people want to wander up there eat their lunch or meet with other people, you know a good meeting spot on one end of the bridge or the other, just the way to spend a pleasant day, something that is attractive to many outdoors [cuts of] older outdoors people just the fact that it's level, perfectly level unlike most trails and that helps with a lot of people. The bridge will be handicapped accessible in all regards.

**Interviewer 2:** Who else do you think the bridge, the final project will attract, like what kinds of people, like what kinds of [cuts off]?

**Coller:** Everyone I hope [with slight laughter], no exceptions.

**Interviewer:** And what kinds of activities do you think:

**Coller:** [looks for clarification], what kinds of-?

**Interviewer 2:** What kind of activities, you mentioned bird watching.

**Coller:** Oh well, it's a good place to have a conversation, good place to you know, I don't know if it would be a good spot for picnics or that sort of thing but certainly the trails at the end of the bridge will be available for picnicking, why not have a picnic up there, a thirty-five foot wide deck there's plenty of room to put a blanket down and enjoy your lunch. Oh it's an excellent place for train watching how could I forget, the bridge crosses the CSX tracks on the High- the Town of Lloyd side, the Highland side, and they experience probably twenty-five or more trains a day heading north or south, very long trains, freight trains it's a good spot. The railroad buffs that we've had up there they've taken a lot of photographs, photographing the trains that pass underneath. On the Poughkeepsie side we have Amtrak which runs many trains a day under the bridge and Metro-North of course ends just a short distance south of the bridge but the railroad station and all the tracks, I think there's six bridge tracks that pass underneath the bridge, six tracks that pass underneath the bridge on the Poughkeepsie side and I guess on the other side it's a single track but they got a lot of trains and the boating traffic of course in season a lot of pleasure boating going up and down the river kayaking a lot to see out there.

[Long pause]

**Interviewer 2:** Any final thoughts anything else you would like to share with us?

**Coller:** Just back to the construction of the bridge it was really a stupendous project at the time. It came after the Brooklyn Bridge, of course the Brooklyn Bridge which was opened I believe in 1883. This bridge was built using entirely different methods; there were no compressed air locks where men worked underneath the piers as they did with the Brooklyn Bridge. The giant caissons that were fabricated from millions of board feet of timber and filled with stone and Rosendale cement which was mined from just up the river, truly massive piers which from the water line extend 120 feet down below the water into the muck below, the false work, the tremendous amount of timber that was used to create the false work for this bridge [clears throat] a method that was developed to create this particular bridge and today even shortly after building this bridge they did away with using that much false work meaning I'm talking about the timber work that they were used to using on masonry bridges. I found that they really didn't need that. The fact that they cantilevered the bridge out from well two major piers rather than building straight through trusses saved a lot of time [clears throat] they did not bring the masonry, the original plan for the bridge had the masonry coming all the way up from the water level up to the underside of the tress work. Some smart engineer said why are we doing that and they cut off the masonry thirty feet above the water and used steel, steel columns for the rest of the distance up to the truss work, saved a great deal, by one estimate six months by some estimates in construction time by doing that. A lot of innovative features were demonstrated by the original builders. I'm very impressed by the bridge [slight laughter].

**Interviewer 2:** Anything else you would like to mention before we finish up?

**Coller:** Oh no, I say no at the present time.

**Interviewer 2:** Alright, well thank you very much.

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**Coller:** You're welcome, my pleasure.

**Interviewer:** Thank you

**Coller:** Ok, I hope you guys take an interest in the organization, join as members

**[End of Interview 55:57]**

**Transcribed by Jake Racette**