

Hudson River Valley Institute  
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories  
Nancy Cozean

**Date:** Saturday, April 26, 2008  
**Length:** Approximately 31 ½ minutes

[Background Laughter]

**Interviewer:** Where did you grow up?

**Cozean:** I grew up in a place in southern Missouri called Farmington, Missouri.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Cozean:** And it's in Saint Genevieve Missouri and that's the oldest county in Missouri.

[Door slams in the background]

**Interviewer:** Where did you go to school?

**Cozean:** I went to school in college we'll do the graduate, I went to school in Farmington, you know for my public school education but I graduated with an M.A. from the University of Missouri School of Journalism, [MA to J] and also a B.A. from Stephens College in Missouri.

**Interviewer:** When did you move to the Hudson Valley?

**Cozean:** I, we moved here about 1980 and just a little bit of a difference in terms of the [cuts off], at that time Poughkeepsie was in very bad shape there was not many people living downtown, not many retail stores and so at that time we were living at Roosevelt Island in New York and just found it strange because we thought it was beautiful community and the houses we saw we thought were just really charming. So when we came it was probably at one of the low points and economically but as you can see its growing.

**Interviewer:** What drew you to the Hudson Valley what was your reason for moving?

**Cozean:** Because quite frankly the prices in New York City were pretty high [laughs] and also we had a child and we wanted to have a more residential, you know, setting to live in. But I had also just taken the job of an anchorwoman for NBC in the city of Albany. So my husband was working at Pfizer and Poughkeepsie as it usually is you know is right in the middle of upstate and downstate.

**Interviewer:** What did you parents do for a living?

**Cozean:** They were morticians and our family has been in the undertaking business since before Lincoln was president as we say, [laughs] long time.

**Interviewer:** Why did you decide not to continue that?

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**Cozean:** In terms of mortician? My brother is in it. [Laughs as well as interviewer] somebody has to do it, he's doing it.

**Interviewer:** Was NBC your first job or what was your first job?

**Cozean:** No, I have actually worked, I first worked in Evansville, Indiana at ABC and then I worked at Satin Louis Missouri at ABC, Washington DC, I worked for metro media which is now FOX and my last job was, no it actually wasn't then I worked for NBC in Albany and then I helped start WTZA which became RNN.

**Interviewer:** What kinds of work did you do while you were at NBC?

**Cozean:** I was an anchorwoman and I also had my own program.

**Interviewer:** What was that called?

**Cozean:** I'm trying to think of what it was, it was like a, it was kind of a news show and I can't; you know I'm thinking of, I have to think about what it was. It was a news program and we did different feature types of items and what was happening around the capital district at the time. Oh it's Special Edition, it was called Special Edition.

**Interviewer:** Did you report on anything south of the capital district or [cuts off]?

**Cozean:** Yes, many times because I was in this area so I drove to work everyday to Albany. And so we did a number of stories down in this area but this area at the time I was an anchorwoman was considered pretty quiet and rather boring and I hate to say it not much, you know occasionally they had a story down here but when I was with RNN, I mean WTZA we began, in our first month we had a case called Tawana Broli and then after that we had a number of big cases, you know, stories of we kind of got out of the shoots you know pretty quickly. And the broadcast career after, then I worked for the Hospital Association for Northern Metropolitan Association, then I got a phone call from I Love NY asking if I wanted to do that so I helped them do Woodstock II in Saugerties, after that I got a phone call asking if I wanted to help start News 12 New Jersey which I did. Then I came back here.

**Interviewer:** Did you ever do as one of your features for your show Special Edition; did you ever do a feature on the bridge?

**Cozean:** We did and we didn't we began to collect archival film on the bridge and as I said to my, the person I'm supposed to be editing right now with, we have to get the shot of the bridge before, you know it goes into its transformation. We'll probably be doing more on the bridge now, it's a great view.

[Door slams in the back ground]

**Interviewer:** And lastly, for the Hudson River Valley questions, how long have you lived in this area since [cuts off]?

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**Cozean:** About twenty eight years now, yeah.

**Interviewer:** Okay.

**Cozean:** Yeah.

**Interviewer:** We're going to switch places now.

**Interviewer 2:** We know you were the mayor of Poughkeepsie how long were you mayor of Poughkeepsie?

**Cozean:** I was mayor for four years.

**Interviewer 2:** What time frame was that are we talking?

**Cozean:** To '04 to about '07.

**Interviewer 2:** Okay, what caused to get into that, I mean your field was in journalism, what caused you to get into the? [cut off by Cozean]

**Cozean:** Actually I was asked to do it.

**Interviewer 2:** Really?

**Cozean:** Yeah, I had my own company and I have my own company still but I was asked if I would run for mayor because nobody seemed particularly interested and [laughing] I have to say things have changed, haven't they? And I thought you know it's a [cuts off]. I had run for assembly seat before and lost by about a point and I thought, you know it would be nice to see Poughkeepsie change in terms of the Queen City again. So I ran on a rejuvenation platform in terms of wanting to see the city move forward. So with [cuts off], and within the first ninety days, we had legislation on changing the waterfront to what it is today, you know in terms of moving the waterfront in Albany. We began major revitalizations efforts in terms of downtown, including; we had to deal with the collapsing Lucky Platt there was about three or four buildings collapsing on Main Street which we had to quickly resolve. We, the Main Street your seeing now, a lot of it was the restaurants we brought in the you know just the psychical changes that you are seeing and it's been thrilling. One of the phone calls I got, I think the most interesting one was a call from Congressman Hinchey's office and they said, you have fifteen minutes to make up your mind would like to become the lead municipality for the railroad bridge and it was quite and I said well it wouldn't take me fifteen minutes it will take me fifteen seconds and I said yes we would. Because the bridge was [cuts off] one of the mayors was one of my favorite mayors, Mayor Eastmen who really helped promote the bridge and its usage. It actually started earlier than that but Eastmen was just a very vigorous mayor, one who was with Eastmen Business Institute, saw a lot of transformation just like me, a very pro-building type of mayor. And so for him the walkway or the bridge was actually two fold, it was primarily for a commercial and commerce but it would also be used for transporting troops across and it was at

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the time it was built just an engineering feat. And when you think of how deep the Hudson River is, it's really a fiord that was quite a feat in of itself. Looking at pictures, if you ever see them [door slams in the background] of the bridge not being there it's just strange because it's just open and so I've seen the bridge on many occasions on the other part of it, I was working for I Love NY. I got a phone call from Fred Schaeffer and Bill Sepe asking if I would come and see the bridge. And so a number of occasions I've been up on the bridge and just as a lover of the Hudson Valley there's nothing more spectacular than to see what I call the prehistoric, you know geological formations along the coast of the Hudson Valley it's very distinctive and you see that from that bridge it's really a wonderful view so all of those thing were going through my mind and I thought if this doesn't happen now I don't know how the other mayors will feel about it because there was always kind of this controversy in terms of what was going to happen with the bridge. Many people like, [cuts off] wanted to tear it down. I thought that would have been an absolute total waste, for three reasons from a mayor's perspective. One you'll never have steel opportunities like this, the use of steel now is very dear, it's very expensive and they're just not making bridges this high because of insurance issues among others or liabilities. Secondly the idea of using trail systems across water was one that was also being explored by other states including Rochester and so they showed that there was a real opportunity for doing something along that line. And the third one was it is just a phenomenal bridge. Anyway that you come into the City of Poughkeepsie or on 9W there is just an outstanding bridge. And it's been a hug asset to the city in the past and to this region on many different levels and not see the bridge flourish again was something I thought would have been just a real waste. So it took me fifteen seconds to say yeah. Then I went over to the court council, the cooperation council and said, I think we just bought a bridge can we do that? [Laughs] So they assured me that we'd work together with walkway, the people at that time were just starting to organize as a walkway group, but I thought it was just going to be a great opportunity.

**Interviewer 2:** What kind of evolution did you see regarding the bridge during your time as mayor not only from your own perspective of actually being there but also from the community itself? How did they see the bridge?

**Cozean:** I still think there was still some skepticism from some people in terms of the bridge. They looked at bridge designs and you know thought of them in terms of condominiums and restaurants and different you know ideas along that line, but I didn't think that as practical. many people thought in terms of just tearing it down but when they looked at the cost of tearing it down versus keeping it and restoring it and I think many people didn't think of the bridge as particularly sturdy which it truly is. When I was working for the economic developing team in Wash- I mean in Albany that was one of the questions and although there had been feasibility studies it was considered this was probably going to be very long term, you know the bridge was going to be standing for a while. And we had actually considered ways we could look at the bridge on and economic development basis but what the Walkway people actually did was really help in terms of envisioning how it could be used. And so I think that was important, their commitment was important, their wanting to reach out to government agencies which had not been really explored very much before looking in terms of other cooperate partners which was very necessary and working with our legal team. One of the things that had to happen was as a lead municipality it basically means this, in order for you to get federal funding you have to have a municipality agree to be a pass through agency, so that money can reach the organization

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because they can't reach it directly. And so in doing that what happened was our legal team, our administrative team helped to organize the grants helped to organize how that process was going to happen but a third thing also began to make a difference. When I was mayor I was called by W, by W [cuts off] MIT Massachusetts Institute of Technology to take a look on how I thought the city should develop and that was the second component of it as we started moving along with the Walkway people and the project that I thought would be great is to actually use the bridge as means of developing an economic developing core in the northern part of the city. We call it the [Enderprise] Corridor but when I took it up to MIT, I was with about seven other cities. They took a look at the other cities in terms of what their project was but as I said to them this is really the industrial to me an opportunity for America to take a look at manufacturing and industrialization all over again. And this bridge is kind of a pathway for people to look at that I mean it's a solid if you want kind a logo for the industrial part of when America has seen its heyday and when the City of Poughkeepsie became a queen city and so when they looked at the bridge, the walkway, and the extension of that corridor for new prototyping and [fab] as we call them companies and manufacturing and they said boy this is just a natural and so they were actually very helpful in terms of planning for the future of Poughkeepsie including that walkway. They think it's a great project.

**Interviewer 2:** In terms of the city itself though the bridge had served so many purposes over the years, how do you see it serving the community itself with the revival of it with the project itself?

**Cozean:** I think it's going to bring many people, because it will never be done again it will just be very hard for a government of any kind of a government to justify spending that much money on steel. I think you're going to find it harder and harder to find the materials that was put into the bridge originally to be done again unless it's on a, it will be by that time millions of dollars much more than it was in terms of it. But again I mean, I think it was Carnegie that donated the steel and that was just the best steel. I think the other part, so that [13:55] is going to have I think an attraction on three different levels and MIT and I discussed this as well. One I think you're going to find Americans much more sensitive about their environment overall. So I think any kind of impact ecotourism, any kind of anything having to do with tourism and the outdoors is going to be beneficial to any community and because Poughkeepsie is the oldest Tree USA continual in the State of New York it's just a natural partnership. Secondly, I think just on what I MIT and I were discussing and what the council and city government that is using it as a corridor to lead people to another part of the city and that's manufacturing, industrial, and enterprise corridor. It's quite attractive and it's going to be a wonderful resource in terms of seeing another part of our city flourish again. And the third of it, the third part of it, I just think it's going to be a phenomenal and this is what the National Park Service told me. There are, when you look at The National Corridor, Heritage Corridor, you look for major pieces that kind of have a profound impact and nationally I think this going to be a huge attraction just in terms of it being able to combine many different things certainly the east and the west banks of the Hudson that's a natural but I think also a reconnection of different trail systems which likely, very, very likely are happening. And the third part of it is, is just a unique perspective of the Hudson, the historic Hudson River and so on different levels I think you're just going to find that rediscovery and of course the last part of it is just the bridge itself it is just a tremendous structure and engineering feat during its time and you'll see it again. And I think they'll be many uses that you'll see in the

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future that we haven't even conceived of yet and so having it there I think it's going to be, well it's going to be most likely a fulcrum for us to move into the future. So it's not just a bridge connecting banks it's also a bridge connecting the past and future.

**Interviewer 2:** Colonel forgive me if I don't ask about this, regarding the fire of the bridge itself, how did it impact you not only [as a commuter] as well? [cuts off]

**Cozean:** I think, well when I looked at the bridge because I always wanted to see the bridge redeveloped and so this just gave me an opportunity to do that but I think you mean the fire that stopped it?

**Interviewer 2:** Yes.

**Cozean:** I think there was a couple of things happening at the time and so it was an excuse among other things I think the uses of rail traffic was slowing down and so the impact of rail traffic certainly in the City of Poughkeepsie was on the decline. I think there was less and less attention to safety measures with the railroad bridge and I think that was another reason just to you know stop it, halt it, or slow it down. And the third what it had, I think because of the trains themselves it had ignited that you know kind of a precarious situation. So on many levels it was coming to a logical conclusion as part of the chapter but that's [cuts off] there is another chapter that will be spun off of that. The Hoffman House which sits below the bridge which is a historic city property. The evidence that we have is that it dates back to Early Dutch times and it was also the home of one of the Livingstons who donated property to the Revolutionary War shipyards they were all industrialists. And so I foresee that piece of property under the bridge being used perhaps by the Parks Department as an interpretative center and so that history of the rail-, the river that flows underneath that bridge and the road system that developed that was around the Hoffman House and also reconnect the bridge I think that's yet going to be another chapter that we will see opening.

**Interviewer 2:** [I know you've expanded on some of those] but how iconic do you see the bridge itself?

**Cozean:** How what? [Looks for clarification]

**Interviewer 2:** How iconic as a symbol of? [Cut off by Cozean]

**Cozean:** Oh I think the symbol is important, it's very interesting, if you go back to old post cards of Poughkeepsie, the bridge is used repeatedly as an insignia if you will of the city, just its unique shape it's just always going to make it something that's highly unique and it could be futuristic looking or it could be antique looking but that bridge and I have to say this as well, the partnering span bridge, or the FDR bridge, are- make it the twin bridges of the city and for the city that is truly a boom.

[Slight pause]

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**Interviewer 2:** I was going to ask, what is the most interesting thing to you about the bridge? I mean you talked about the beauty before but what truly stands out?

**Cozean:** It has, let me tell you some funny stories.

**Interviewer 2:** Please.

**Cozean:** I think everywhere I go I hear stories from people about the bridge there own experiences. And the last one was a guy who stopped me at church and said let me tell you about the bridge because out of know nowhere they will tell me about the bridge. And he said you know when I was kid we used to hitch a ride on that bridge. And he said I'll never forget we grabbed on to one of the box cars you know heading over to Ulster County and he said that nobody had a clue because it starts over on Parker and it gradually comes up and goes. And he said nobody had a clue what it was like going over the height, you know that bridge and he said we were just bear knuckles hanging on to the side you know that shaking railroad car. And he said, I went over the river and we were like this [Cozean makes a gesture] you know the whole time just hoping we'd make it and he said that wasn't the worse part. The worse part was when we had to call up our mom to come over and the shenanigans you know that they got and apparently mom gave them quite a spanking for doing that as well. But I have heard many people talk about hitchhiking on that bridge. And I think one of the most incredible sights that we want to reintroduce to people is the sight of a locomotive actually crossing the bridge because you realize how big those trains were and how high they were you know crossing that bridge. And the first time I saw that footage of this train coming over the railroad bridge I almost fell out of my seat and to imagine that for years more than a hundred years that train bridge was a very effective use of commerce, of the transporting of troops and even kids hitching a ride.

**Interviewer:** If you had one way to design the bridge yourself how would you do so?

**Cozean:** Exactly as it is now.

**Interviewer:** Yeah.

**Cozean:** I think that's the amazing thing about it, you see the state going through problems with bridges now. That bridge is in pretty good shape that says something about the engineers who put it together.

**Interviewer:** Your [cuts off] the plans for the walkway, I don't know if you are familiar with the design what is your favorite part of it, or do you have a favorite part?

**Cozean:** Well, I think they're being very smart, to make it a walkway that will carry a lot of people. It's different than a train, I mean the train didn't look to carry people, I mean they were primarily carrying train cars. And so with this you have to think differently, you have to think in terms of precautions but you have to allow that view I mean that's why you'd be up there and so it has to be accommodating on a human basis as well. So I think in looking at it, I think they'll probably be some changes, that's just human nature but you know over all it's a great project.

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The vision is certainly something I wanted to see for a long time and I just think there's going to be all kinds of uses were not even dreaming of yet.

**Interviewer 2:** So after its completion do you see yourself going up there?

**Cozean:** Oh I'm going up there pretty soon because I have to shoot [laughing] I have to get more pictures before they change it [laughing].

**Interviewer 2:** Are you going to be up there on opening day when its? [cuts off]

**Cozean:** Oh you betcha, I wouldn't miss it for the world.

**Interviewer 2:** Is there anything else you would like to add? [to interviewer I]

**Interviewer [to Cozean]:** Is there anything else about the bridge we haven't discussed yet?

**Cozean:** No, no I just think about what I said to people who designed the bridge, I said you know design is a very tricky thing you can design now or you could design for later. And as your looking at this bridge think not only of what you envision but this is inner-generational. This is not just a bridge from bank to bank past and future but it's people to people and this bridge should be able last generations to come. And so when you design anything think about what you think the future is going to look at the bridge as because it really does have a future.

**Interviewer 2:** Professor Schaaf?

[Background noise, Joe Delisle proceeds to ask a question]

**Joe Delisle:** Hello my name is Joe Delisle and I'm a political science major actually.

**Cozean:** How are you doing Joe? [Proceeds to shake his hand]

**Delisle:** I was wondering if you could touch on the bridge as a political issue?

**Cozean:** Yeah, it was a political issue there was you know at first we thought we were going to have, we weren't quite sure how the common council was going to receive this idea that we were going to become a lead agency and it really was a matter of re-convincing people that there was a real future and this is going to be a unique opportunity. When I was mayor there was a fairly conservative you know council and I was a minority mayor at the time. So convincing them took a lot of things, again Congressman Hinchey, when I said you know we're going to need help on this one really helped us in terms of helping them envision what the future should be. But I don't even think the council at that time fully appreciated all the ways this bridge could be symbolic of the restoration and rejuvenation that was going on in the city. Now it has become as a sideline on that when I first became mayor I had visits with Hillary Clinton who helped me in terms of water front development, Congressman Hinchey of course who constantly encouraged us to think broader in terms of the city's future and Senator Chuck Schumer. And when I took the senator down there, Senator Schumer down to the waterfront to show him our vision of a future city was

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going to be, he said stop and we stopped at the railroad bridge and he said you should paint that psychedelic. Now we never went that way [laughs] but he saw the future and he said you know that's going to be a great walkway. And he saw the real potential and that's what I think was so great on a political level is that all my congressional delegation really saw the potential in terms of that. And I think the governor at the time, Governor Pataki and later Spitzer and now Patterson are still seeing and helping really not just envision that but enlivening that process. So that it is moving forward, all of them could easily say, look you know it's too expensive, it's too chancy it's not something were politically looking at right now but they haven't, they've all been very futuristic in terms of their vision and I think they're going get a real pay off, all of them.

**Delisle:** So this hasn't necessarily been something where there's a giant grass roots effort as much as it caught the attention of Congressman Hinchey and then he brought up?

**Cozean:** Well I have to say, I think thankfully more for the railroad group because at that time it wasn't the Walkway group it was the railroad associate- railroad committee, Fred Schaeffer, Bill Sepe even some of the early people Dick Crenson who really continued to push this as an idea that needed to get some kind of audience. And if it hadn't been for a very committed and that's where a good organization pays off, if they hadn't been so committed in seeing this done and certainly Mitch [Morkay] and his wife, then you would not have seen it go to the level that it did in terms of a congressional idea. I remember driving over the FDR Bridge and looking at the railroad bridge with Congressman Hinchey and he said you know I'm going to get that done during my term [thumbs up and laughs] and I know it's going to happen.

**Jason Schaaf:** If I could ask a question?

**Cozean:** Yeah.

**Schaaf:** Could you describe the link between the quadrennial celebration, by the way it's nice to see you again.

**Cozean:** You too.

**Schaaf:** And of course the bridge?

**Cozean:** The link between them?

**Schaaf:** And the quadrennial celebration as a large issue?

**Cozean:** Yep, I think the idea in terms of the Hudson-Fulton qudracentennial and the bridge is a natural and actually the National Parks Service kind of made me really think about it. When we looked at, to get any big project done you really have to think in terms of time lines or it just continues to fumble its way into the future. And so when we met with the Walkway people they said well what are you thinking of, and I said I want this done by the qudracentennial which was still kind of meandering around at the time. And I said the reason is very simple it gives us a date by which we really have to push completion and we really have to pull all of our focus to get it done. And that became I think one of the things in terms of just a reality, there was a

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benchmark for what we were going to aim for no matter if it was a grass roots group or a congressional group or the community. And I think the community is finally seeing because you know this is a very skeptical community at times and they're like, I still get people who say, do you think it's going to really happen and I said yes I do. And now I 'm hearing more people who are absolutely on board with it, they really do think it's going to happen and that groups of people who started this who had a love and commitment of it. If they hadn't constantly been out there pushing that message you just weren't going to see this happen. And it's the same thing in terms of the climate for the qudracentennial; you know the City of Poughkeepsie outside of New York was the largest port for years and years and years because it was a deep water port. And so it was a natural for Hudson to come up you know to this area and for Fulton again with the Clermont project. And so it is with that bridge, that bridge, if you take a look at older pictures or newer pictures that bridge has played a common and a very consistent role in terms of being an important link. Now even at the time the people who built it knew it was very iffy and many of them I think actually saw this as a financial failing but again it's the time, the time thing and today it's going to be a payoff. It's too bad some of these people won't see it, the original investors, but I actually have certificates from some of the first shareholders that I got at an auction, [who would buy pieces] of the bridge. And so you know it's always been kind of a very funny political issue, it's been an issue in terms of how it's going to play in history. But I think what the qudracentennial is going to do is, it's going to give it its prominence that is long needed and long been due because on the Hudson-Fulton you could take it for many things, the fact that it was a promotion of progress in New York, a promotion of technology and industrialization in New York, it was a meeting of Europe and the American scene, the natives and the Dutch, you could look at the Hudson-Fulton celebration on many different levels. The bridge to me is kind of bridging all of those different issues, it bridges the past and the future, it bridges the multiculturalism of the Hudson Valley, it bridges a present and a future and on so many different levels you can see that bridge really capturing an imagination of where were going to go in the future. And I think for that reason the inner-generational, a bridge of many generations is what I think it is; will really pay off for a long long time to come.

**Schaaf:** Can you rendition on how it's going to be celebrated on opening day?

**Cozean:** Well I have my own, I'm going to push mine, I actually have some friends who are Native American and what they would like to do is to have a Native American ceremonial prayer it could kind of lead off the ceremonies on what is called [Mehatec]. [Mehatec] is Lenape it means the bridge that, the river that flows both ways and it would be nice to have something that is ceremonial in terms of recognizing our Native Americans who saw the importance of the river itself and the bounty of the river. And I think to have something to start off in terms of a ceremony of prayful thanks is something I would like to see happen. The push will have your dignitaries I'm sure that's already being planned I know and you'll have your ceremonies and your bridge parades and all of the events, but I think we should all be thankful for having an opportunity to rediscover an important part of the Hudson Valley.

**Schaaf:** Thank you very much.

**Cozean:** That's it am I done, I hope I still have an editor. [laughs]

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**[End of interview 31:25]**

**Transcribed by Paul Contarino**