

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Edward Ringwood

Date: Wednesday, June 11, 2008

Length: Approximately 11 minutes

Interviewer (Jason Schaaf): Well let's just start off, could you please state your name?

Edward Ringwood: My name is Edward Ringwood.

Interviewer: And how long have you lived in the Hudson Valley?

Ringwood: As of about a week and a half ago fifty-four years.

Interviewer: So as a life long resident of the Hudson Valley what are some of the things that really stand out in your mind, in your memory about life in the Hudson Valley?

Ringwood: I remember going to Lucky Platt when it was open as a department store, hardwood floors, the elevator in the back, which didn't really seem to be an elevator much as this is where you put, you know all the merchandise and you just bring it up and down. It didn't seem to be one that was really meant for people, unless we were getting on the wrong one. I remember when the main street was still a street; nobody had tried to turn it into the main mall yet and then back into a street. The trolley tracks that were in there and you can still find on certain roads, you've got to look for them and they're still in the bricks, that are below the blacktop that they just put over them. [Pause] There's just so much, it's like where do I start? So if you get a little more specific I could start pulling more things out.

Interviewer: So let's just start with some general questions out there for you. So what's your favorite thing perhaps of the Hudson Valley?

[Slight pause]

Ringwood: Well driving to work driving from work, I get to see the Mid-Hudson Bridge, the railroad bridge. My grandfather built the Mid-Hudson Bridge. I think it was great-great grandfather had worked on the railroad bridge. So it's like, okay those are mine.

Interviewer: The bridges give you a sense of ownership to the Hudson Valley?

Ringwood: Yeah.

Interviewer: Could you tell me about, have you heard any family stories perhaps of, was it your grandfather who worked on the bridge?

Ringwood: Yes and we have some pictures of it being built. The one picture that looks the scariest to me, you see the cables going out like this [makes a gesture] from the sides of the picture going out. Which, and there is no roadway below it yet they hadn't even strung the cables going down and the scary part is, you can see, you know, farther back, planks that laid across [lays one arm on the other] attached like this. So whoever took the picture had walk out

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on a set of those planks, [makes a gesture of taking a picture] take the picture and walk back. Like there's nothing down here until you hit the water.

Interviewer: Have you ever gone up on the bridge yourself?

Ringwood: I haven't been up on either bridge yet. I'm keeping my feet on the ground I just drive across the one, look at the other one.

Interviewer: Could you tell me about growing up in the Hudson Valley, how would you characterize your childhood in the Hudson Valley?

Ringwood: [Pauses for a moment] I liked it, I'd do it again. [laughs] We were close enough to school for us to walk to Saint Peter's grade school. The original grade school until it was about sixth grade for me then they moved it out Hyde Park. And it was still the original building I think they built in the 1870s and I think we were still using the original desks where you had to lift up the [cuts off]. And I remember somebody when we were learning to write with fountain pens, the little cartridge, somebody had put in here, fortunately on the far right row. They forgot it fell into the hinge and they opened it up and sprayed the entire wall with ink. They were lucky they weren't near either door of the cloak room to get everybody's clothes, well their coats.

Interviewer: Could you tell me or tell me what trains meant to you growing up in the Hudson Valley?

Ringwood: Up until I was nine we lived on Bain Avenue right at the back of the yard was the chain link fence right behind that was the train trestle that went by. Never woke me up, well they weren't going that fast anyway so [cuts off]

Interviewer: Did the trains going by give the house a good shake; make a lot of noise kind of a visceral feeling of trains coming by?

Ringwood: Well if my sister Peggy was here she'd probably get into it too. I believe it was the Santa Fe that had the Indian chief head on the side. And we'd wait for those to go by and you know it was big chief Uga Bugga and I was like you know we were all jumping and yelling and every time that went by and there was another and we were jumping and yelling for big chief Uga Bugga again.

Interviewer: Did you ever play on the tracks as a kid?

Ringwood: We were not allowed there was small hole we could have gone under and then gotten to the trestles you know kept the train tracks, I was little I'm guessing like two to three stories above us. But you know we may have snuck under there a couple of times but we never actually got up there on the tracks. We weren't going to try that.

Interviewer: Great [slight chuckle] now I understand your, you have uncles who fought fires on the bridge when it caught fire?

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Ringwood: Yeah on my mother's side my Uncle Mickey was a fireman. On my father's sides my uncle Tommy was acting fire chief at the time. We also had cousins who were firemen at the time and I'm not sure whether they (were) first responders or not but they were up there.

Interviewer: Did they ever share any stories about what it was like fighting those fires up on the bridge?

Ringwood: No specific stories that I can remember but then you know they were firemen. They went out and fought fires, that was it.

Interviewer: All in a days work.

Ringwood: Yeah, all in a days work.

Interviewer: Did you see the fire yourself, do you remember the fire?

Ringwood: Not that much really because it didn't seem to be that big a deal, well to me personally. But you know there it was just a lot of black smoke and you know I wasn't a fireman. I wasn't worried about fighting it.

Interviewer: Have you heard about some of the plans for what they're going to do with the bridge?

Ringwood: The Walkway right?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Ringwood: I would like to see that done. I know they've gotten what to about halfway and there's a flag and alright you want more, you know, please donate. You know, when they say shops on each side I don't know exactly if, [cuts off] how wide the trestle is on top of the bridge and when they say alright we're going to have shops on this side and shops on this side. As far as I can tell, here's the railroad track, maybe two of them and it might be two train tracks wide. And I'm thinking are they like going to have shops hanging over the edge, I don't know how wide this is up there. It would look like, you know they're hanging too much stuff on it there and the thing is going to go off this way.

Interviewer: There have been some wild designs that have gone through for this and that have been discussed with us. Just a final few questions, what kind of an impact do you think. [Cuts off] Well first of all what kind of legacy perhaps do you think that this bridge has given the Hudson Valley and the Poughkeepsie area in particular?

Ringwood: When it was built, I think it may have been one of the highest and longest railroad bridges well iron railroad bridges in the world. A couple of years later I think another slightly longer one got built but we had the first one. The first iron railroad bridge I think it was in the country crossing a span of what is it? over a mile, a mile and a half wide at that point over Hudson.

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Interviewer: What kind of legacy do you think this bridge; if it's completed as a walkway what kind of legacy do you think that will leave to the Hudson Valley?

[Slight pause]

Ringwood: Just getting people here to see the scenery from you know not just down here on the shore, not just driving over the Mid-Hudson Bridge. But being able to get up there and stop in the middle of the bridge and look up and down the Hudson and think whaling ships came up here. You know we're nationally, nationally known crew a regatta going on in the 1890s when they had it.

Interviewer: Great stuff, would you go up there once it's completed?

Ringwood: Yeah, I'd go up there.

Interviewed: Great, anything you want to add, anything you would like to say, anything that may have come to you about the bridge or the Hudson Valley?

[Slight pause]

Ringwood: Well, you know with the two bridges, you know like the school going back 1870 you know family in the area going back to the founding of Poughkeepsie, it's like you know I belong here. It's like this whole place is mine.

Interviewer: Great great, Paul anything comes to mind that you want to [cuts off].

Paul Contarino: No.

Interviewer: Alright Ed. thanks a lot, very good, very good, [Ed proceeds to shake Interviewer's hand] got a lot of stuff out of there, David ready to go?

[End of Interview]

Transcribed by Paul Contarino