

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Fred Schaeffer

Date: Wednesday, February 6, 2008

Length: Approximately 50 minutes

Camera man: Quiet on the set, all already.

Interviewer (Nicholas Marshall): Okay could you tell us your name?

Fred Schaeffer: My name is Fred Schaeffer.

Interviewer: And where did you grow up Fred?

Schaeffer: I grew up in Queens on Long Island.

Interviewer: When did you move to the Hudson Valley?

Schaeffer: I moved to Pleasant Valley in Dutchess County in the 1960s and I started at Dutchess Community College in 1961.

Interviewer: Did you go to school at Dutchess?

Schaeffer: Yes, yeah, I am a graduate of Dutchess Community College.

Interviewer: What was your major?

Schaeffer: It was a poli-sci major, political science.

Interviewer: And then you've lived in the Hudson Valley since then?

Schaeffer: Yes my family moved up at that time, we had left Queens and bought a home in Pleasant Valley and we came up here and I have been in Pleasant Valley ever since, I actually live in the same house.

Interviewer: When you say your family did your parents move, so you came up with your parents?

Schaeffer: Yes, yeah my parents left Queens and came up here, we had a long term plan to move in the country which we owned a house before hand and we were coming up on weekends during the 1950s and then we came up permanently when I started at Dutchess Community College.

Interviewer: What did your parents do for a living?

Schaeffer: My parents-my father was retired at the time, they had a store in Queens, which they ran a grocery store and then they sold that and moved up here and started a store in Poughkeepsie.

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Interviewer: What kinds of things were they selling?

Schaeffer: They were selling groceries and mostly food and vegetables and they delivered to local people, food, it was just a very small grocery store.

Interviewer: So as, so when you were in high school they were working in Poughkeepsie and you were living in Pleasant Valley?

Schaeffer: No, actually they were still working in Queens and it wasn't until we decided to leave Queens that they bought the store up here in Poughkeepsie.

Interviewer: And what happened to you after you graduated from Dutchess did you go on to other schools?

Schaeffer: Yeah I went to Hardwick College in Oneonta, New York and I went there for two years and finished up and went to Albany Law School in Albany for three years.

Interviewer: Right from college you knew you wanted to be a lawyer?

Schaeffer: Yes, actually Dutchess Community College was a great school to go to and a lot of interesting professors there, you know whenever we talked a little bit and said I would like to be a lawyer and so and I went on right from there with that goal in mind.

Interviewer: Did you have some experience at Dutchess that convinced you that you wanted to stay in the Hudson Valley or were you thinking at that point law school or who knows?

Schaeffer: No, I actually growing up in Queens when I came up to Dutchess County, I just love Dutchess County, my family loved it and it was just a great change and for the years I fell in love with the Hudson River and thought you know its a great location, its close to New York City its also, you know, you can go to other places from here very easily but yet you feel like your in the country all the time its just a good living style.

Interviewer: So after you graduated law school, you were thinking start practicing law near the home town?

Schaeffer: Yes, Actually my parents had made connections with some lawyers in Poughkeepsie and when I was in law school I would come home during the summers and I worked for a law firm in Poughkeepsie both summers I was at law school.

Interviewer: So what was your first job out of law school?

Schaeffer: I was actually an associate with a firm called Corbally, Raoppelyea and Gartland in Poughkeepsie, at the time I was just Corbally and Gartland and the firm grew over the years and I was actually with the same firm for a number of years.

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Interviewer: Was this John Gartland who contributed greatly to Marist?

Schaeffer: Yes John Gartland was my first partner I was partners with him.

Interviewer: What kind of law did you practice?

Schaeffer: We had a general practice after a while we ended up doing real estate law and that's what I continue to do, today I represent people buying and selling homes and the wills and trusts all the civil type of law no criminal work.

Interviewer: No corporate work either?

Schaeffer: Very small corporate work but mostly we have small corporations in Dutchess County a little bit of that.

Interviewer: And as you developed in the profession you were still living in Pleasant Valley?

Schaeffer: Yes, I actually built my own house, I got married, I built a house on the same piece of property we owned in Pleasant Valley my parents owned and we split it up into small parcels and other family members did the same thing I did so the whole family settled in Pleasant Valley.

Interviewer: And I know you have some interest in cycling and bicycling was that something that happened as part of growing up or was it a later development?

Schaeffer: Well it was, as a young child I used to bicycle around quite a bit on Long Island and I always enjoyed it. I loved the outdoors and I was always very athletic and I liked athletics getting around I thought was a good way to get some exercise and see the world at the same time. So I continually did that for many years so in law school there was a small period of time when I did not get out much but once I settled down in Dutchess County and Dutchess County is a great place to bicycle around.

Interviewer: Was your first exposure to the bridge, just simply to the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge, just as this thing sitting out there?

Schaeffer: Exactly, uh yeah, I had no particular knowledge of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge but if you live in Dutchess County you see it quite a bit and I had a small interest in trains, a little bit of a hobbyist I had my own trains and I thought railroads were great and I liked the history of railroading in this country. So I had a little interest in it but I really didn't I spent a lot of time looking into this bridge or the railroad line around this area.

Interviewer: You think [clear throat] people in the area in Poughkeepsie over the last twenty or thirty years have had a similar experience where they know that this bridge exists but it's on the periphery or feel more connected to it?

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Schaeffer: Yeah I think everybody knew it was there. Everybody assumed it was just an ordinary railroad bridge, I don't think anyone realized what a great structure it is and was and what a great role it played in the history of this area and the country I use the expression sometime peoples assumed it was a rickety old railroad bridge and that could be no further from the truth.

Interviewer: Can you tell us how that transformation happened for you from this rickety old railroad bridge in the periphery of your mind to something more significant?

Schaeffer: Yeah as I did a lot of bicycling in Dutchess County about the 1980s or I guess the beginning of the 1990s IBM downsized and people were looking for other ways to economically support the community and they were thinking about bringing in businesses into the area and I thought that the tourism business would be great for Dutchess County because it is such a beautiful county. So I wrote a small article in the Poughkeepsie Journal, actually responded to a column they had about what do you think should happen to Dutchess County and I said that we should promote bicycling as a county and bring people into the area who would spend their money in way that would jump start the economy. It would be something I heard other politicians mention that, but I wrote it from a bicyclist perspective and that I had spent time bicycling around Dutchess County and I thought it would be very easy to track people into the area and that we should do is promote putting shoulders on the roads so its safer for bicycling we should take up railroad bed which had now ceased to operate which is the old Maybrook line and create a bike path out of it and should do other things with it, create maps so people would know where the bicycle route of Dutchess County it was just a response to a questionnaire they had which then the paper asked me if they could make it into an opt-ed article in the paper and they asked me to come down and take my picture which I did and it appeared as separate story in the newspaper.

Interviewer: And when you were thinking about those options for the.. in terms of Dutchess County tourism and bicycling, did you realize that those railroad beds that people were riding on could be connected to that bridge or? [cut off]

Schaeffer: Actually I think, when I first wrote the article I did not think about the railroad bridge at the time I was mainly thinking of the old line where it continued through Dutchess County and that was, my guess would be around the early 1900s, the 1990s and separately I had heard the bridge mentioned as a purposed walkway and bike path by a fellow named Bill Sepe who had talked about it and there were some articles in the paper and so after that I wrote the article and I put two and two together and said maybe I should look into this a little further.

Interviewer: And [clears his throat] that's when you contacted Walkway Over the Hudson?

Schaeffer: Right, yeah, at that time it wasn't Walkway Over the Hudson it was just Bill Sepe had been talking about it, I think it was 1993 maybe 1992 when I met Bill Sepe and he was just starting to talk about it and I think he hadn't formed Walkway Over the Hudson yet but it was in the initial stages of conversations of potential for making it into a walkway.

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Interviewer: Was your interest more in line with the bicycling as opposed to the walkway or did you put these two together, though you could have? [cut off]

Schaeffer: Yeah, my interest was definitely in bicycling, I know he talked about a walkway, I presumed that there would be no problem also making it a bike path and that I was also an amateur photographer at the time and I loved the Hudson River, so I was always trying to get photographs of the Hudson River and my first goal was first to get up there and take some pictures and to get pictures up from up on the railway. I've bicycled along the river for many years and driven cars. I have pictures of the river all the way from the Adirondacks to New York City. I had actually done some photo exhibits of the Hudson River.

Interviewer: What was it like the first time you went up there on the bridge?

Schaeffer: It was just awesome, breathtaking. It was a little scary because in those days you had to walk on the ties. The wooden walkways existed but were in no condition, so we walked down the center of the tracks on the ties and in between the ties, there was a 6 inch gap between the ties. The first time you do it, its almost a terrifying situation because you don't know if you can actually complete going out on the river. As you walk, the ground falls out from under you initially because you are walking, and then you get out about 800 feet on the bridge and all of a sudden the ground falls out completely and your 212 feet above the Hudson River and I was interested in doing it. I didn't care how scared I was and I actually wanted to do it. It was just the two of us, Bill Sepe and myself, and we walked out on the ties about 1800 feet. Its not a deck... an outcropping of the bridge itself. There was no deck there at the time and it was an unbelievable breath-taking view. It was the middle of winter, January of 1993 and I couldn't believed just the great view was to overlook the Hudson Bridge as far south as Mount Beacon. It was a clear day and was about ten to fifteen degrees and looking north you could see past Hyde Park up in that area and it was a gorgeous view. The ice was white, had the snow on it, but there were cracks in the ice where you could see the blue river and the terrain was just unbelievable.

Interviewer: Did you take some pictures?

Schaeffer: Yes I did and I still have those pictures that I look back at and it was a great experience.

Interviewer: Did you think, actually getting up there was the key moment in transforming you from somebody that was marginally interested in it to somebody who wanted to do something?

Schaeffer: Definitely yeah, I know... I then saw the potential for it to be a tourist attraction and like everybody else and then I didn't realize that it was so much higher than the Mid-Hudson Bridge and that it was such a spectacular view, you know I thought of it as a way to get from Ulster County to Dutchess County on a bike without being in traffic but I didn't realize that this was, you know, a once in a life time experience of being so high above the Hudson River and yet being peaceful. So you could walk across the Mid-Hudson Bridge but the cars are very noisy and it was so quiet and peaceful and you could hear the ice cracking in the river and banging up against the piers down below. So everybody's got to see this view and people would not believe the way it is.

Interviewer: What was the next step after that? You had met him and you knew that this was a possibility and you actually went up there, with this wonderful experience, what?

Schaeffer: Yeah I asked him. He needed help with the project and he was seeking help and kind of knew the answer would be yes to that. So I told him I would be willing to whatever I could to help with the project and the first thing I did was to help get the insurance, the liability insurance, so more people could go on the bridge and get to see what it was like That was the reason, the particular reason why I went up that day and he had asked me a few things on how to get insurance and I said I would really like to see the bridge so he took me up in exchange for me helping to pick him up.

Interviewer: So was the original vision he had just to get people up there who wanted to get up there so to get some insurance would be the first step?

Schaeffer: Right yeah to be able to take people up there and if he got ownership of the bridge, it would be a liability issue if somebody got hurt or if something fell off the bridge onto someone.

Interviewer: And how did the idea about the complex walkway, that would include the bike path and places, where people could walk the dog, to get a view connecting both side... how did that develop?

Schaeffer: It developed over the years but actually the idea of making it into a full park with a lot of amenities, benches and things, were fairly recent and mainly because we would like to do that but we didn't think there would be enough money to make as wide as it should be for that and I think because we had trouble convincing people to get behind the project before so maybe it would have to be a narrow walkway and bike path to begin with and widen it over the years. So we started to focus on just creating a bike path that would get people out on the bridge with the idea that then the demand would grow to make it wider and more accessible to the people.

Interviewer: Where did the resistance come from? Why weren't people excited about this?

Schaeffer: Well a lot of people thought it was a rickety old railroad bridge that should be torn down. People did not know the history of the bridge and what a great structure it was and how large it was and how big it was. Also, no one knew what the cost would be to do the project. So it wasn't much resistance as people not realizing the potential for the bridge and because there were some sections of the bridge deteriorated and was falling off, somebody would see a piece fall off and say the bridge is falling down. So it was greatly exaggerated by a few people who wrote newspaper articles, maybe wrote letters to the editor. I think a lot of people thought news reports not just letters to the editor and people believed that the best thing for this bridge was to tear it down and eliminate it and not save it and the hardest part of this project in the beginning was making people understand that it's a great structure and shouldn't be torn down and that it is a doable project.

Interviewer: So your, the problem you were facing was educating the community about this bridge?

Schaeffer: Exactly right, yeah it was making everybody understand the potential for it not only to be a bikeway and walkway to begin with because people thought the bridge would fall over the river unless it was rebuilt, but I mentioned this briefly, this bridge when it was built was one of the greatest structures built in the nineteenth century and it was literally built to last forever and it was overbuilt actually not the ordinary type of bridge that is built today. Nowadays you have to constantly repair and replace it and do a lot of structural work and it's a great structure and it was educating the public to that and also to the fact that it is a great thing to be up there to be able to walk out over the river and enjoy the view. People just couldn't understand that concept until they were shown pictures of other bridges, or until now, we have a rendering of what it will look like and it's an eye opener for most people.

Interviewer: What was it that transpired from an idea into what is now a reality? Do you think there were some key moments along the way?

Schaeffer: Yeah, there were some key financial assistance that we picked up. You know getting Congressman Hinchey to put a grant into the transportation bill which totaled to about \$1 million dollars was the turning point, now people said here's a congressman who believes this can be done and should be done. I think it opened the public eyes to the possibility that maybe there was something to this vision of making it into a walkway or a bicycle path. It gave the organization itself a lot of credibility over the years. This organization had a problem with credibility because of some initial plans to do it as a volunteer project and a lot of people felt which turned out to be true that you really could not do this with volunteers. It has to be done by professionals and done right. So a lot of people felt even if it was a good idea that it's not going to get done because it's too big a project to be done with volunteers and the organization. Some work was done on the bridge which people felt was unsafe and there were some proceedings, you know to stop the work being done because the original organization did not get building permits and things... so the project did come to a stand still and people felt that there was no way that this was going to get done.

Interviewer: What was your role in changing the focus of the organization from this volunteer piecemeal approach to a much more ambitious project?

Schaeffer: Yeah, from 1995 to about 2004 there was a board of directors and chairman Bill Sepe who felt that it should not be done with state money or federal funds, that it should be a local project with funds raised by the community through bake sales and booths and selling t-shirts and membership dues. The idea was that Walkway Over the Hudson was a membership organization that had a couple of hundred members and that they could also have volunteers work on doing the construction part of the project and unfortunately there was a volunteer who did get hurt. At this point I did step back for a number of reasons when I was busy with some family activities children and college and Bill Sepe has spent a lot of time on the project and he was spending a lot of time so was the volunteers and I was not the type of person who could right then spend time on weekends putting nails into wood and tacking down planks. So I was still a member but I didn't participate and that went on for about eight years until it came to a stand still because the town got a court order to stop the volunteer construction work on the project and literally nobody was allowed to do any work on the bridge at that time and a group of us got

together and talked and thought that maybe the organization should change its focus and direction from a volunteer project to a professional and along with that we thought its going to be more expensive to do this project and perhaps we should really look at getting federal aid, state aid and also get the business community behind it and that was a key factor was this was going to be a great tourist attraction. The business community should support it, the state should support it and the federal government should support it. We did meet with some resistance from the existing board of directors and the existing chairman Mr. Sepe who felt that they did not want to go in that direction. So Walkway Over the Hudson, being a membership organization, is governed by the not-for-profit law of New York State which requires the membership to elect the board of directors in an annual election every year and to have an annual meeting. So we met and we annual, and much like an ordinary political election for president, we decided to come up with a strategy to elect a new board of directors who then elected new officers and change the direction of the organization. We met quite often. We contacted the members and we got the membership listing, purposed having an election, a different slate of offices, as most not-for-profit have a nominating committee, and legislative offices. So we talked it out with the board of the directors and they agreed. Let's have a fair election and we wrote all the members of the organization. We presented our platform and we presented a different slate of eight directors. There were eight directors at the time that were on the organization who supported Mr. Sepe and the way he was going and we had eight new directors including myself who wanted to change the direction of the project.

Interviewer: Did, was it ugly was it a -?

Schaeffer: No it wasn't ugly, actually you know it was quite civil. There were different opinions but I think presidential elections are probably uglier. It wasn't any name calling, there wasn't, just another opinion that the bridge should be done by volunteers and there should be no state aid no federal aid to it and there was the other opinion that the bridge be done by professionals and we should get all the help from state, federal government and business community and the other opinion was that it should be a tourist attraction and something that would bring money into the area as opposed to just being a local path where just the local residents would use it, and that you see it , the organization as being something we all would hopefully get world wide exposure to and that people come from all over to visit the Hudson Valley to enjoy going up on the railroad bridge.

Interviewer: Was it close? Was the election close?

Schaeffer: Yes it was very close, it was actually... We had eight new directors elected. Four were from the old group that were already in office and there were four new directors elected and the election for offices was going to take place a month. Later, at the first meeting of the (new) directors one of the directors from the older group let us know that he agreed with our way of moving forward and that he would vote for the officers we wanted to put in office, the new directors. So we knew we were going to have a five vote majority of the eight members and we had talked about a proposal for me to run as chairman of the organization and he did agree to vote for me as chairman. At that point, Mr. Sepe resigned from the organization and submitted his resignation because he knew that I was going to be elected chairman. So when the meeting

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took place it was actually a civil meeting we had the elections and I became chairman of the organization.

Interviewer: When was that?

Schaeffer: Well that was in January 2005, I might have to correct myself 2004, it's been awhile, I think, it was actually 2004, I'm sorry.

Interviewer: Well here we are in 2008 and we just heard that the governor put a lot of money in to this as a state park, in four years there has been a great change, right, that you have been kind of the spearhead?

Schaeffer: Exactly yeah.

Interviewer: Can you take us through that a little bit on how you went from an election of a 300 member organization to now a possible state park designation and a \$25 million project?

Schaeffer: Yeah I am glad, when the election took place. We, as I said, quickly focused the attention to getting the public behind it and getting the communities on both sides of the river behind the project. There was a lawsuit pending which the bridge was closed to the public, anyone going out on the bridge. We met with the Town of Lloyd and we asked them if they would settle the lawsuit with us and allow us to take very limited numbers of people out on the bridge to experience being out on the bridge and we also apologized for the past history of past lawsuits that were involved and we told them to move forward and we would get building permits and do whatever we had to do to ensure the town that this was going to be done in a safe fashion and manner. One of the prior issues was with volunteers doing it. They did not get building permits and did not take some of what the town felt (were necessary) steps for people to go out on the bridge and people were going out on the bridge without any guidance on the bridge that was opened. So we met with the town, we met with the city of Poughkeepsie and we in general talked to everybody in the community, the business community and explained that we would change the direction the organization. We were going to work with everyone and get the necessary permits and we started tasking small groups of people out on the bridge, mostly on the weekends I would invite people out on up and other board members with people to bring out. We took out small groups, ten to fifteen people out at a time and gradually the word spread (from) some of the VIPs we took out, this is a new organization, or not a new organization but a new leadership of the organization and maybe we should listen to what they have to say and just gradually build it. Where people felt there is potential for this project to take place and that we should pay attention to what the proposal is and then Congressman Hinchey got us the state, federal grant which got us a lot of publicity in the newspapers and now people felt Walkway Over the Hudson had become an organization with some credibility in the community and had a leadership now that would do this project in a safe manner and would do it with the best interest of the community with everybody involved and do it right.

Interviewer: And the money started flowing in did you get the?[cut off]

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Schaeffer: Well the membership increased and people once they were out on this bridge project, they saw the potential for it and I am not really a hard-play person and go out and just say, “donate some money.” I simply take people out and give them brochures and people just started sending in money so we started covering our operating expenses and we were able to publish a brochure out to the community and then we did get some grants from the Dyson Foundation. The Dyson Foundation gave us a small grant to do the underwater inspection of the bridge and the Dutchess County IDA Industrial Development Agency gave us some funds to use for that same inspection and generally some businesses contributed money and now we found ourselves in a position of not having to worry about everyday expenses so we could promote the project with you know taking people out and then we did presentations in the community with a slideshow about the potential, and reasons why the bridge should be saved, its great history, the potential it had for being a great community asset and one of the great, primary arguments was that to take this bridge down and anything with it, the result would be about \$40 million dollars, was my estimate in those days, now it turns out now that we’ve had structural inspections and an engineering firm review it would be \$54 million dollars to tear the bridge down where the renovations will range any where from \$20-\$25 million dollars so why not save and historic icon and make it into something useful rather than just tear it down.

Interviewer: So what is your vision, how this will operate for the community, you’ve talked about tourism that would be one thing that would help? Do you have other visions of what... [cut off]

Schaeffer: Yeah, part of the tourism, is the great history of the bridge and of railroading in general. So we hope to have a lot of interpretative signs and a history on railroading, museums and things like that but also (to) connect rail trails on both sides of the river so that local residents and tourists can be able to enjoy the Hudson Valley and get this spectacular view of the Hudson River from the bridge at the same time being able to get exercise by traveling around throughout the area in a safe manner and the rail trails historically do improve the property values of the properties that they go through and this particular trail in the bridge portion will become a state park which may not be just a bike and walkway. People will be able to go out on the weekends and read in promenade some events, some concerts, an art show and just a great place where people could be able to enjoy being over the Hudson River like they would go to Central Park or Niagara Falls and just get a lot of you know, quality of life type improvement in their lives and I think it will attract people into the Hudson Valley businesses that will be looking for employees. (It) will help keep employees here, hopefully college students who come to Dutchess County to go to school here will want to stay here because of the great trail system and because of the potential the bridge has to give them, something great to do on the weekends and visitors will come from all over and be able to view it.

Interviewer: Is... do you think what you just mentioned was one of the reasons why the governor has committed money to the project now?

Schaeffer: Yes the governor committed the \$8 million dollars in this year’s budget alone mainly because they see the potential of this to be an investment in the future for the Hudson Valley area and to bring business into the area. Also one particular event that is coming up is 2009 is the 400th anniversary of Hudson having explored the Hudson River and world wide attention will be

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focused on the Hudson Valley at the time the opening of the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge as the world's longest pedestrian bridge which will gather world wide attention and we think will expose the world to a great areas of what the Hudson Valley is in particular the Dutchess and Ulster County areas, a unique area that just has beauty (but also) has great people and great interesting things to do (with) a lot of historic sites. We think this will be the key to bring people into the area at which time they will spend a little money and really enjoy it.

Interviewer: What was your method of getting to the governor?

Schaeffer: The governor had great staff people working for him, we contacted some of his staff people and I didn't take them out bridge but they had talked to other people who had been out on the bridge. I have since taken them out but I think that the first contact they made was part of the discussions of what was going to happen in 2009. We had purposed that the opening of the bridge and its reconstruction become an important part of that celebration and when a particular person Terrance Sullivan who is the governor's regional representative then liked the idea of the restoration of the bridge and the opening of the bridge being a focal point of that celebration. So she presented that in her weekly report to the governor as a potential idea, some meetings were held she followed up with the governor and then we had some other people talk to the governor and mentioned it to anybody who knew that maybe would sit down with the governor. I think he heard it enough times and the governor being, I think, a very smart person was one of a few people that could see the potential for it without having to actually go up there on the bridge. We hope to take him up there shortly and then we will know that he's just not 100 percent behind it but 110 percent behind it.

Interviewer: But in some way was it the connection of the work you were doing and the coming of this 400 year anniversary and the celebration, those things together created this momentum?

Schaeffer: Yeah right, the reason why this project got the momentum was because the stars kind of (fit) into shape. The 2009 celebration had been coming up and we had been pushing that for awhile. We picked up on that probably three years ago and when we heard how big the celebration was in the past, we thought that the state should be doing something so it was a combination of that and the need for the Hudson Valley to have some economic development to, you know, [slight pause] this feel into place.

Interviewer: Do you take some personal pride and satisfaction in what has happened, what you've done, really accomplished something?

Schaeffer: Yeah, I am very happy because I'm a bicyclist and I look forward to being one of the first people to bicycle over the bridge. Maybe they will give me that privilege, but I also think it would be great for the communities on both sides of the river. The Hudson River has always been a barrier to the communities itself even though we have the car bridges but I think when people are able to walk and bike across the river (it) will tie the Dutchess-Ulster country and Highland and Poughkeepsie together and give everybody a great feeling of-, Poughkeepsie was one of the greatest cities in the country back in the old days, in the 1800s because of the river traffic. I think this will bring glory back to Poughkeepsie again and will make Poughkeepsie a

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place where people can feel proud to have come to and college students will come to Poughkeepsie, a number of college students, Marist, Vassar, bring students into the area. They'll have been proud to have been in Poughkeepsie because we have also recreated an historical structure into something useful.

Interviewer: I was going to stop and James?-

[Laughter]

Colonel James Johnson: What about the audience is there anyone, did we miss something?

[Coughing in the back ground]

Someone asks Schaeffer: Did you want some water?

Schaeffer: No
[Background noise]

Student: I have a question. [background noise]

Colonel Johnson: Think of a fast one because were running out of time we've tried Mr. Schaeffer's patience

Schaeffer: That's fine.

Student: Yeah, um I do believe that down stream there is a replica of the Half Moon?

Schaeffer: Yes.

Student: I don't know if that is a working replica but is there any opportunity that coordinating with Henry Hudson's account of the voyage or working that will include something closer?

Schaeffer: That's a good question because there is a replica called the Half Moon it's up in Albany most of the time. (We were able to) talk to the people who run that organization another, non-for-profit organization and our goal is that on September 16th of 2009 to recreate the sailing of the Half Moon up the river and have the ribbon cutting of the bridge at that time to coordinate those events and that's something we are working on.

Colonel Johnson: Keep going if you have two more.

Student: My other question, cause I squeezed two in there, my other question is did the work under the previous chairman Sepe inhibit or assist progress towards the opening of the bridge in 2009

Schaeffer: It, the work Sepe did, did help us in that he did get titles to the bridge and there are organizations pretty much something he did on his own by pursuing the owner of the bridge who

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had bought it from New Haven Railroad Company. That was a big step. In any project owning the bridge and the land underneath it, so that was Bill Sepe. Also some of the temporary work he did with his volunteers has assisted us in doing tours of the bridge because now we have the deck we can take people to and a metal grate railing walkway that people can go out on. So I mentioned it was scary to walk out on the bridge. It's not as scary anymore because you're on a floor of solid footing when you walk out and there is a solid deck he built over the river that we take people to. So those two things, without those two things I doubt it that we would be at this stage we are at right now. There have been a lot of people (over) the years that have done key things, so there is no one person nor one thing that turned this project. Probably fifteen or twenty things that if (hadn't helped) the project wouldn't be where it is now. So individuals definitely, putting the temporary walkway and deck up even though it was illegal, and was maybe not as safe you would want it to be, made it safe for me to take small groups out... and having a title to the bridge solved the great problem of being able to work on it without having to worry about ownership.

Student: That's all I have.

Schaeffer: Those are two great questions

Student: Thank you

Colonel Johnson: Who else has something did we miss something, for history, Ann?

Ann Panagulias: No

Colonel Johnson: I mean for the history, for Schaeffer's role in it, front role chair

Ann Panagulias: I was just wondering about insurance liability and if you have had to deal with it, if it is really going to be a park, people are going to be quite active.

Schaeffer: No insurance... That's a good question and a good one too, because that has been... for a few years we did not have insurance because when the person on the bridge, the volunteer that got hurt, the insurance I helped obtain, originally was terminated because they had to pay a claim to that person that got hurt. So we lost the insurance. So when we took over the... or not when we took over, I should say we changed direction of the organization, we elected a new board of directors we did not have insurance so for years. We were careful in taking people out on the bridge and it was limited for that reason, but now since six years has gone by since that person got hurt we do have insurance. Now we were able to get the liability insurance and when the bridge is finished, it will meet all state and federal regulations for any other walkway (just like) any other bridge, like the Mid-Hudson Bridge that has a walkway as long as you have shoulder and a height railing. As long as someone can not accidentally get hurt, you're no more exposed than any other walkway or bike path or trail. So in some ways it is an important thing but it can be a manageable thing because now we have insurance which were paying a lot of money for because it is a unique project but when it's opened with a shoulder height railing it will be as safe as any other walkway, like the Mid-Hudson Bridge and the Beacon-Newburgh

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Bridge (which also) has a walkway. So the ultimate cost of insurance although high is not prohibitive.

Ann Panagulias: Cause I didn't see it on the rendering, perhaps that little bit anyway?

Schaeffer: You couldn't see it that much, the railing is about fifty-four inches, it's what is considered an architect standard of safety for a walkway and for a bike path so what I call shoulder height is fifty-four inches, but as long as you maintain that standard you can not get in trouble or be held liable for accidents or that type of thing. But (it) is something we will consider and there might be some areas where you might have it higher over roads so nobody can throw something down. It would be more of a caged effect too it would be eight feet higher and it will curve in so no one can throw something off the bridge. So we... and one reason for using professionals, we hired Bergman and Associates from Albany one of the leading planning firms in the States of New York and the head planner Peter Malouski who is doing this project worked for New York State Bridge Authority for twenty-four years and he was in charge of all their bridges. So he is the one making sure this project is done safely and correctly and that no one can actually get hurt on it.

Ann Panagulias: Thank You

Colonel Johnson: Anybody else? Thank You Fred.

Schaeffer: Great thank you. [applause]

Colonel Johnson: For being the leader's league of this project. [applause]

End of Interview

Transcribed by Paul Contarino