



Interview with Arthur Kamin

Under the Auspices of the
Monmouth County Library Headquarters
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator

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Ms. Higgins: Good morning, Art. Thank you for having me over today to record your memories of Monmouth County in the twentieth century.

Mr. Kamin: Happy to have you.

Ms. Higgins: First of all, please tell me how and when you came to Monmouth County.

Mr. Kamin: Sure. I actually came to Monmouth in October of 1954. I had just recently graduated from Rutgers University where I was in the ROTC, which is the Reserve Officers Training Corps. At graduation the previous June, I was commissioned in the Signal Corps and I came to Fort Monmouth in October of 1954 to begin something called the Basic Officers Training Course at Fort Monmouth. And that's how we came here.

Ms. Higgins: Where did your people come from originally?

Mr. Kamin: I was originally from South River, New Jersey, which is not far from New Brunswick. I was born there and have lived in New Jersey all my life.

Ms. Higgins: So Rutgers was a natural choice for you.

Mr. Kamin: Yes. Rutgers had a good school of journalism and it was a place that my family and I could afford. So I went to Rutgers, enjoyed it, and lived on campus.



Art Kamin

Ms. Higgins: You apparently always wanted to be a journalist, and followed that career. How did you do that, after being a soldier at Fort Monmouth?

Mr. Kamin: Well, yes, I did always want to be a journalist. I wrote news and sports for our weekly newspaper in South River which was called the *South River Spokesman*. And then, as I said, I went to Rutgers and studied journalism and while there I was very, very active in *The Targum*, which is the school newspaper. Eventually, I became editor-in-chief of *The Targum*.

Ms. Higgins: Is it still *The Targum*?

Mr. Kamin: It's now called *The Daily Targum*. Interestingly, when I left, we began the conversion of what was then a twice-a-week newspaper into a daily.

Ms. Higgins: That was not your only experience doing that, was it?

Mr. Kamin: You are thinking of *The Red Bank Register*, which we also changed from a weekly into a daily newspaper.

Ms. Higgins: In interview after interview, people tell me how they waited Thursdays for *The Register* to come out so they would know where to shop and where to go to the movies.

Mr. Kamin: I was part of that marvelous experience on the weekly *Register* and, when you're ready, I'll tell you a little bit about that, too.

Ms. Higgins: Please go back to when you had graduated and were working in Fort Monmouth.

Mr. Kamin: So, I came to Fort Monmouth and finished the Basic Officer Course. Interestingly, I had orders for Hawaii after I finished the Basic Officer Course. But--this can only happen in the Army-- a new general came aboard at the Signal School at Fort Monmouth. The General's name was William Hamlin, and he decided that he wanted to make some changes in the Signal School. He decided that he wanted his own information officer. He looked through some of my records and found that I had a background in journalism and, much to my surprise and astonishment, the Department of the Army orders were changed so I stayed at Fort Monmouth. A little sidelight on that. Ginny, the former Ginny Palew, who I had been dating. We met at Rutgers. She was a student at Douglass. I had proposed marriage while I was in the Basic Officer Course, and we thought we'd spend a wonderful vacation in Hawaii while I was serving in the military. But, sure enough, the orders were changed. But, look, it didn't make any difference. We were at Fort Monmouth for two years. We had a wonderful time. The following January--in January of 1955--we were married. Anyway, both Ginny and I had the experience of being at Fort Monmouth for those two years, which we liked.

Ms. Higgins: Tell us about the troubles at Fort Monmouth with the hearings of the McCarthy era.

Mr. Kamin: Actually, that had come a little before. In other words, by the time I got to Fort Monmouth, that trouble had pretty much subsided. But when I was the editor of Targum, at Rutgers and, while I was a student at Rutgers, that whole McCarthy era atmosphere prevailed there because Rutgers had three so called Fifth Amendment professors. They were three professors who decided that they did not want to answer the questions of a Congressional Committee. Much to our unhappiness at the Targum, the University dismissed them. So the Targum took a very, very strong stand in favor of the professors. We felt that they should not have been dismissed, and that there was an academic freedom issue involved. The University took its action. But we were vindicated in years to come because-- I think it might have been in the 1960s-- the three professors were reinstated at Rutgers.

Ms. Higgins: Do you remember their names?

Mr. Kamin: Their names were Finley, Heimlich, and Abe Glasser. It might have been Moses Finley. I don't remember Heimlich's first name. There was another issue that we championed at Rutgers that I really am very proud of. I consider this issue to be one of the highlights of my journalistic career. We helped to eliminate fraternity discrimination at Rutgers. Those were the days, you may remember, when you had a Jewish fraternity, a Catholic fraternity. Minorities were not welcome in some houses. This was something that could never happen today. So The Targum-- as only The Targum could do-- managed to come up with the names of the fraternities that discriminated and had discriminatory clauses in their bylaws. We ran the names of the fraternities in an editorial and in a news story. Needless to say, the fraternity men were very, very unhappy. And, to make a long story short, that was really the start to eliminate fraternity discrimination at Rutgers, I'm happy to say.

Ms. Higgins: In the 1950s this was very avant garde, wasn't it?

Mr. Kamin: No question.

Ms. Higgins: How did you come to work at The Register?

Mr. Kamin: While I was at Fort Monmouth I started to moonlight at The Register. While I was there as a Signal Corps Information officer, I decided I wanted to get some more newspaper experience. The Register had an opening, so I applied and was hired. I would go out in those days, even while I was in the Army, and cover meetings for The Register: Rumson Council, Fair Haven Council, and some boards of education. And then, of course, I was lucky when I was discharged in October of 1956, that The Register had a permanent job vacancy. I was hired as a fulltime reporter at that particular time. I think my salary

was ninety-six dollars a week and, occasionally, a little bit of overtime, which was at the discretion of the editor at that time--for maybe covering an extra meeting. Listen, that was really "big money" in those days so we managed. Ginny was a teacher then -- and still is, in Fair Haven.

Ms. Higgins: Was that called a stringer?

Mr. Kamin: That was the first job, yes. A stringer is a person who is not on staff and a person who is usually paid by meetings. So that's when I began my career at The Register.

Ms. Higgins: Who was the editor there then and why did The Register appeal to you?

Mr. Kamin: The Register editor was a guy by the name Jim Hogan. You've probably heard that name before: James J. Hogan. A very, very good editor. He knew the county. He knew Red Bank. He was a stickler for accuracy and objectivity. He wanted all the facts in a news story. The Register, at that time, was said to have the largest circulation of any weekly in the country. We had about eighteen thousand circulation. And we'd print as many as eighty pages which was really very, very big. And I liked the fact that there was a great deal of integrity at The Register. It served the community well. At the same time, both Ginny and I liked living in Monmouth County. We thought it would be a place where I would get a few years of experience and then, perhaps, I could go on to a larger paper. But as you know, I stayed here my entire career.



**The Register newsroom
on Broad Street, Red Bank**

Ms. Higgins: Can you think of any causes you championed as president and editor of The Register?

Ms. Kamin: One accomplishment at The Register that comes to mind immediately is the expansion of the Monmouth County Library system. It was The Register that championed, and championed very, very strongly the new facility in Shrewsbury. There was some hesitation, I think, on the Board of Freeholders at that time, as to whether or not they should go ahead with it. We took a very, very strong stand and emphasized how we think it would bring great benefits to the county. And, sure enough, the library expansion became a reality. Back in the 1960s, it was The Register that also saw the need for a community college and championed that cause through news stories and through editorials. The Freeholder Director of Monmouth County at that time was Joseph C. Irwin, -- a very, very dedicated Freeholder Director. He and the other Freeholders had selected the first Board of Trustees for the college. We thought it was a very

political board. We were unhappy with it. We thought that the board was not, in all due respect to the members-- the board to lead the college at the critical outset of the college. So The Register, in a responsible way, selected, for the Board of Freeholders, a list of county residents we thought would make an outstanding board.

Ms. Higgins: Who were some of them?

Mr. Kamin: I do not remember all of them. But one was Jim Greene, who is a banker and who lives in Fair Haven. He was also a trustee of Hamilton College at that time. That is an example of the caliber of individuals we proposed. There were several others. Their names will come to me. We said we thought they would really make for the best board at that time. And, to our happiness, Joe Irwin agreed that many of these people should be on the board. The library and the community college--two important institutions in the county. They raised the quality of life in our region.

Ms. Higgins: Monmouth County has been so consistently Republican that perhaps many of these boards were a little political.

Mr. Kamin: Yes.

Ms. Higgins: Did The Register have any feedback from that?

Mr. Kamin: I think what you're asking is, were we an independent paper?

Ms. Higgins: Yes.

Mr. Kamin: Yes, we certainly were. We, in supporting candidates--not only Freeholders but also at the state level, exercised great independence and care. The Register was independent and we would support candidates of both parties. We always tried to endorse the best people. Yes, that was one of the strong points of the paper. And I think politicians probably respected us for it, or did not like it, perhaps. But when it came to an election or another issue, we supported who we thought were the best candidates - both Democrats and Republicans.

Ms. Higgins: Monmouth County is obviously well run, having been voted the third most desirable place to live, but do you think it might have been even better had there been a more energetic two party system?

Mr. Kamin: That is a very, very good question, Flora, and the answer to that is yes. I think that a good system of checks and balances is important at the county level, the local level, or the state level. Very often I think there is a complacency that sort of creeps in when you have the one-party system. I think that for the good of all citizens and for the good of taxpayers, it's really, in my opinion, much better to have both parties represented. But, in the absence of that, I think a good

free and vigorous and independent newspaper, or newspapers, can play an important watchdog role over the government.

Ms. Higgins: You said newspapers; did you have any competition at The Register? Does the Asbury Park Press have any competition now?

Mr. Kamin: Well, at the time--and this is what I think fired us up so at The Register, and this is what made the newspaper, in all modesty, as good and as aggressive as it was-- was the fact that it was a very competitive time for the press in Monmouth County. We also had very thorough coverage of everything that went on in the northern and western areas of the county. We were the newspaper of record. The Bible. You always learned new and different things by reading The Register. At the time I joined the paper, the Long Branch Record was still in existence as a daily newspaper and the Asbury Park Press, of course, The Register became a daily in 1959. And, in the northern fringes of the county in places like Matawan and Aberdeen and Keyport, we were competing against what at that time was the Perth Amboy Evening News and a host of weekly newspapers as well. So it was good competition. We always had a great desire among reporters and editors to get the story first and to beat the competition. That atmosphere and that culture, I think, benefits the readers. With all due respect to the Asbury Park Press-- which I think is a good newspaper-- I think they've lost that fire in their belly a little bit, so to speak. They don't have the competition they once did in the county. Of course, they think of themselves now as something of a regional, and even statewide, newspaper. They are part of The Gannet Organization. So now they look upon the Star Ledger as their big competitor. But, in my time at The Register, we not only competed against them but also the Newark News, as well as The Star Ledger, and the dailies and weeklies in Monmouth County. And it was a good time for journalism. Really.

Ms. Higgins: What do you see as the future of print media in Monmouth County?

Mr. Kamin: I think it will be healthy. The Press will continue to grow. What was the Perth Amboy Evening News is now the Home News Tribune. It will grow. There are a number of weeklies that have sprung up: the Two River Times, the Atlanticville, the Hub in Red Bank, an excellent weekly in Manasquan and others. They try to give some local coverage as best as they can. Business is tough. But they are succeeding. I think the future looks okay.

Ms. Higgins: How do you stand on the developments in Red Bank? There's been a lot of conversation about the riverfront development. Would you care to comment on that?

Mr. Kamin: Sure. I think that Red Bank is a vibrant community today and it has a history of being a vibrant community. Red Bank has been blessed by location; it's a place where people have to go in and out of. It has the hospital. It has law offices. The town continues to grow and, in some respects, is being reinvented.

It's a new population and there's a whole new set of business dynamics. Some concerns have been raised about the so-called River Center, its role in the municipality, and whether it is a quasi-governmental agency or not. Is all of its business being done in the public interest? Does the public have a say in what it does? I don't think the public has really had a first hand knowledge of everything that is going on there. Still, I would say, by and large, what has been going on in Red Bank looks okay. But, here again, I think it needs a closer look to make certain that everything really is the way it should be. That is very often the danger of so-called "quasi-governmental" groups.

Ms. Higgins: People complain to me about the gentrification of Red Bank, and say that it's impossible to rent an apartment there for an average person, or have a business; and a friend of mine on the West Side is beginning to feel crowded. When you were editor of The Register did you notice any particular friction between Red Bank and the Red Bank West Side?



Art Kamin (far right) with his wife, Ginny, Daniel O'Hern, and Mr. O'Hern's wife

Mr. Kamin: There, indeed, are frictions. I'm sorry to say, they have always existed. The Register tried, as best as it could, to bring the two sides of Red Bank together. When I was president and editor of The Register in the 1960s, we had the so called riots. While Red Bank was not touched as deeply as Asbury Park was, or Newark, there was no question, many frictions were there. Red Bank was fortunate in that Daniel O'Hern was the mayor at that particular time. There were people like Bette Thompson, Stafford Thompson, in the Black community, and the name of Linus McKean of

Rumson comes to mind-- people who were really vital forces in setting people to talk and bringing all sides together to help calm a difficult situation. So there's no question that frictions and the problems have always been there. But at least at that particular time, there were people who were talking to one another and trying to bring peace. But, yes, I think some of these social and educational and economic housing problems continue to exist. Gentrification is a concern. But I think there appears to be an effort to make sure that there is some housing for people who cannot afford some of the prices there. That always has to be looked at.

Ms. Higgins: I want to ask you to comment on the current demise in Asbury Park. And also on the advancement of the Bayshore area?

Mr. Kamin: Oh, sure. Let me talk about the Bayshore first because an interesting thing happened in my career after I left The Register in 1989. I was asked by Governor Kean and Len Coleman, the state community affairs commissioner, to serve as the director of something called The Bayshore

Development Office. It was sort of a partnership between the County and the State and the municipalities to bring about the orderly growth and development of the Bayshore. It was not a job I was looking for at that particular time. We had no idea which way it would go -- whether there should be development there, or whether the emphasis should be on environmental. So I have had a little bit of a hand in the Bayshore and its growth. And I think one of the reasons I was selected is because the governor at that time knew I was familiar with the entire region, having covered it as a reporter and having been involved as an editor. And let me also say this for the record: when I did get that job-- it was a state position--I am an independent and I never made contributions to political parties. So I am proud that I was able to be selected for that position without, in any way, making contributions or being connected to one particular party. And that's what they wanted. Someone independent and not beholden to anyone. I think one of the first things we did was to acquire the old right-of-way - the old railroad right-of-way that went all along the Bayshore. And that has now become the Henry Hudson Trail. I think that was one of our chief accomplishments. There was also, at that particular time, a Bayshore Plan 1 that called for a great deal of housing to be built in the Port Monmouth - Belford area as well as in Keansburg. And, I think, the plan called for the demolition of the old Keansburg amusement area. We explored that. And, as time went on, the amusement park stayed. Thank goodness. I'm glad it stayed, because the place had a character of its own. Actually one of the things that I have taken a position on--very, very strongly--is that I am opposed to the so-called Belford ferry terminal. At one time, it had some possibilities. But an interesting thing happened in the Bayshore in recent years. Highlands and Atlantic Highlands have started to rejuvenate. Their downtowns have started to come back. Ferry services have started there. And the ferries are really serving a very, very good purpose. Now, the need is no longer there in Belford. Private market forces -- without handouts and without subsidies -- are at work. Atlantic Highlands and Highlands ferry services are thriving and expanding. Belford, as a terminal site, is history.

Ms. Higgins: Did Monmouth County sponsor that program?

Mr. Kamin: Yes, the Freeholders have spent millions of dollars to push the Belford ferry project; the main purpose is to bring about development in that area. And, once again, while I say that at one time it might have had some possibilities, today it doesn't, in my opinion. As I said, there is good ferry service in Atlantic Highlands. There is good ferry service in Highlands. Keyport, I'm happy to say, is starting a ferry service. And, I think before too long, there will be a ferry again in Keansburg. And I'm not alone in my opinion. The Belford Citizens Association, as well as the Bayshore commercial fishermen, have said they don't think a ferry is a good idea at Belford. So it's been good to see the Bayshore coming back. It is a very, very unique area. I love it. And we're talking now about places like Aberdeen, Matawan, Keyport, Union Beach, Hazlet, parts of Middletown, Leonardo, Belford, Port Monmouth, North Middletown, and, of course, Atlantic Highlands and Highlands. So it's good to see some of the things that are

happening there. I think there has to be great caution in that there can be a tendency there to perhaps make it, or parts of it, into another Hudson River - Jersey City - Hoboken type of waterfront. And while I'm certainly not against that type of development, I think the Bayshore has a unique character unto itself and it just does not call for having all that development there. The emphasis should be on the environment and the recreational, as well as bringing back the downtown business areas. I have written on that subject, too. It's been a little bit controversial. But I have written on it and have tried to get my views across. Now, on to Asbury Park. I think Asbury Park's decline is due, in the long measure, to neglect on the part of government; on the part of citizens there, and on the part of a general economic conditions. I don't think it should have happened. The Freeholders are now realizing that they should have had a more active role in Asbury Park. They are trying now to make some effort to perhaps get some recreation there and to help out in some economic areas. But look, what goes down eventually will come back up. I believe there are some local forces now in Asbury Park that are starting to move forward in changing things around. There's an effort by the state to be involved in redevelopment there. And I really haven't made up my mind -- to be frank -- as to whether that is really the best thing for Asbury Park. Sometimes the state can be a positive force. Other times, unfortunately, politics will get involved and it could affect Asbury Park's comeback. But I think the city will be heading back. I also think, in some respects, it probably will follow Long Branch, which is also making some good, dramatic changes again.

Ms. Higgins: We haven't talked much about the western part of the county; transportation continues to plague Monmouth County as we development so rapidly. When's the last time you were in Freehold?

Mr. Kamin: Last week.

Ms. Higgins: Isn't it becoming such a charming place?

Mr. Kamin: Yes, Freehold is. No question.

Ms. Higgins: But I hear over and over again from people that they actually made it quicker from Red Bank to Freehold in the horse and buggies. There weren't all the red lights and traffic. Other interviewees mentioned the relative ease with which they moved around the County with the trolley and the trains. We're very dependent on cars.

Mr. Kamin: I'm on a State Supreme Court Advisory Committee in Trenton, and I attend meetings there once a month. It's a pro bono thing. I go through Freehold and, frankly, my eyebrows are raised and I shed a tear as I see all that development going on on the corridor to Freehold. The big issue in the west is whether or not there should be the so called MOM, the railroad project that would link Middlesex, Ocean, and Monmouth counties. They're looking to use the old

railroad right of way, I believe, to bring train service that would go through the Western area of Monmouth County. I'm not sure that's the best plan. There's been a lot of opposition to that particular project. Places like Jamesburg and South Brunswick don't want a rail line there. But the western part of Monmouth County is growing, especially in places like Manalapan, Marlboro, and Howell. I wish that some of that growth could be curtailed. No question, suburban sprawl, as it's been labeled, has hit Monmouth County, and I think we're all suffering. We just can't handle all that growth, no matter what the Freeholders say.

Ms. Higgins: What do you see as the significant changes in Monmouth County?

Mr. Kamin: Schools have improved dramatically. The coming of Brookdale has meant a great deal to the county. It's been good to see the diversity that has come in to Monmouth. One of the reasons that Ginny and I moved to Fair Haven back in 1957 is because the schools were good in both the elementary district and at Rumson-Fair Haven Regional High School. We thought that would be a nice place for our kids to grow and flourish. Also, Fair Haven has always been a diverse community, as you know. There's been a minority population here. That goes back many years. And we're happy that we and our kids have been a part of that. Living in Fair Haven has been - and is - a nice and extraordinary experience. It delights us how our kids tell us now how they enjoyed growing up here.

Ms. Higgins: Your children have done very well. Did they go to public schools until they went to college?

Mr. Kamin: That's nice of you to say. We're very proud of them. Our children went to public schools in Fair Haven and also Rumson Fair Haven Regional High School.

Ms. Higgins: And then on to -

Mr. Kamin: Our son went on to Amherst College in Massachusetts and our daughter started at Vassar and then liked Amherst so much that she transferred to Amherst College after taking part in an exchange program there. They both went on to graduate schools -- Brooke at Rutgers, and Blair at Yale.

Ms. Higgins: What do you see as the future of Monmouth County? Give some predictions for people reading or listening to this interview fifty or one hundred years from now.

Mr. Kamin: Just be a little more specific.

Ms. Higgins: All right, do you think high rises will take over the waterfront?

Mr. Kamin: Those dangers are there. And they are lurking at every single moment as developers want to build more - both high rises and housing developments, strip malls and shopping centers. But I think we've been alerted to that. And I think efforts are now being made for greater preservation-- farmland, and open space. But we're getting crowded. There's no question about that. I know that the Freeholders like to pride themselves on that *Money* magazine story of several years ago that cited Monmouth County as the third best place to live in the country. And I agree that it certainly is a great place to live. But, by the same token, we have to be ever vigilant in order to make certain that Monmouth County stays a great place without over-development taking place. Also, it is important that we have population diversity. We should break down housing bias barriers in Monmouth County. I think that would be a great achievement if we can do all that.

Ms. Higgins: Whoever voted for that third place was not out on Route 9 at rush hour.

Mr. Kamin: Good point.

Ms. Higgins: Let's talk a little about culture in Monmouth County. How do you see the development of culture in Monmouth County in the twentieth century?

Mr. Kamin: This has been astounding. Ginny and I remember when a big cultural night out meant going to see the Monmouth Players. Remember them in Navesink? That was culture at its best in Monmouth County. And we always enjoyed their marvelous plays.

Ms. Higgins: Did you attend the theater in Tinton Falls, where the Grist Mill is now?

Mr. Kamin: Yes. Geza DeVegh had a little art gallery there, too. Anyhow, that was culture in those days. So was the theater series at the Carlton in Red Bank. But yet, it's developed beautifully with all the theatrical groups and the musical groups; and the library has just been absolutely extraordinary in many, many ways. And Monmouth University, in its way, does a great job in adding to the cultural aspect of the county. I think there's been tremendous improvements in that area.

Ms. Higgins: As a last question, what advice would you give to future generations? You've already stated that we should guard against overzealous development. But is there any other kind of advice you'd like leave with us?

Mr. Kamin: In that context, I want to go back to the newspaper aspect. At *The Register*, we started out as a weekly. We became a daily. We became a Sunday. And I think we were, in many respects, ever-vigilant, so to speak, which is the role a newspaper should play in municipal government and county government

and state government. We were watchdogs in the public interest. I sometimes have a concern that that same vigilance is not being applied as it once was. In some respects, we served as the conscience of the community. We talked a little about the competitive aspect of newspapers and what that meant to different communities and citizens in our county. And I believe that office holders had a certain concern that what they did would get the exposure of good reporting and editorials. Now you don't see as much of that. I'm happy that a paper such as the Asbury Park Press, and of course some of the weekly papers, are continuing that vigilance--and that the best interests of the public are served in all respects. Let me also say that citizens have an obligation and a responsibility to keep an eye on government at all times.

Ms. Higgins: Everybody who has been in the county a long time remembers The Register as being once a week, and then suddenly it was there everyday, and you shepherded that change. Would you tell us about that?

Mr. Kamin: Sure. This, once again, is an example of the growth of the county. The parkway was constructed. The Monmouth Mall in Eatontown was going to be built. We saw, at that particular time, that the county as we knew it was changing. The weekly Register also was starting to change. And we knew that if we did not go ahead and begin a daily operation, that somebody else would do it. So that was when we made our change in 1959 from being a weekly newspaper to a daily. It was an enormous risk. Harold Kelly was the publisher at that time. I was the editor. We did not know how it would go. Would the advertising and the readers be there? And, sure enough, we lost about half of our readership--only because people did not want a daily newspaper. They were unsure of it. It was a change. Eventually, we began winning back our readers and, at the time that I left The Register in 1989, our circulation was about thirty five, thirty six, thirty seven thousand, somewhere in that area. So it was a difficult time. But, with a good staff and acceptance by the public, we managed to keep it going. It was quite an undertaking, but we succeeded.



Art Kamin (left) editor of The Register; Eleanor Marko, women's page editor; Harold Kelly, publisher of The Register.

Ms. Higgins: Well it certainly was an institution during most of the twentieth century. I really appreciate this opportunity to talk to you.

Mr. Kamin: Wonderful to chat with you.