



Interview with Bill Williams

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

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Name of Interviewer: Connie Paul

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Ms. Paul: Bill, when did you come to Monmouth County, and from where did you come?

Mr. Williams: I came to Monmouth County in January of 1970, the result of a job change that brought my wife, Lew, and our small son from Colorado Springs to New Jersey. I took a position with Triangle Publications Inc. as director of labor relations, and that's what got us there.

Ms. Paul: Where were you born and raised?

Mr. Williams: I was born in Birmingham, Alabama, and I was a product of the Depression. I was born there because that was a jumping off spot for my mother and father as they were traveling the country looking for work in the depths of the Depression. I didn't live there long, for we migrated up to Minnesota, then ultimately to Indiana. From there I went to Gulfport, Mississippi, for high school at a military academy. Upon graduation, I joined my mother in Waco, Texas, and lived there for twenty-four years. I married there, had a son there, and buried my mother there. We spent a lot of good time in New Jersey after that.

Ms. Paul: What does Triangle Publications do?

Mr. Williams: Triangle Publications, in those days, was Walter Annenburg, noted publisher in America. He was Richard Nixon's appointee to the Court of St. James as ambassador of the United States. When I joined the company, he owned *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The Trade Division, which I joined, was a

group of racing newspapers flag-shipped by *The Morning Telegraph* in New York City and *The Daily Racing Forms* across the United States and Canada. He owned *TV Guide* and *Seventeen Magazine*. Incidentally, he founded both *TV Guide* and *Seventeen* magazines. He owned WPIX-TV in Philadelphia and several other television stations, a stream of regular broadcast stations, and cable TV systems. He was a very noted publisher in those days.

Ms. Paul: From where did you work?

Mr. Williams: I started out working in *The Morning Telegraph* offices in New York City the first year. But I knew that I wasn't going to work there forever because we were in a process of upgrading technology and going out of the old "hot metal" newspaper mode into computerized typesetting and record keeping for the thoroughbred horse industry. So we were contemplating building a new faculty on our own site somewhere in the central part of New Jersey. We selected Hightstown for our new headquarters. We started our search for our home around Princeton, and ended up in Monmouth County in Freehold Township. Many, many times thereafter I commented that we made the right choice. We never regretted moving to Monmouth County.

Ms. Paul: Why did you pick Freehold Township?



In 1994 Bill and Lew Williams moved from Freehold Township back to Texas. They are shown the day before leaving at the site of the time capsule buried as part of the Tricentennial celebration. The capsule is buried adjacent to the fountain, in back of the Freehold Township Municipal Building.

Mr. Williams: We picked that area because it was centrally located near the office in Hightstown. Freehold Township, way back in 1971 and 1972, would have been about a twelve-minute commute to Hightstown. When I finally left the firm in 1992, it was more like a thirty-minute commute, while still being twelve miles.

Ms. Paul: When did you switch jobs from director of labor relations to being more involved with *The Daily Racing Form*?

Mr. Williams: It was a progression of jobs. I started off as the director of labor relations, and that initial year we negotiated nine labor agreements with all of our New York City unions, with all of them knowing that we were going to move the operation out of New York City. That was a pretty tough year. And during that same period of time those who were responsible for the automation project were floundering, and the publisher asked me to take that project over. So I really had two hats, a labor relations hat, and a project director's hat. We completed the

project and I became regional general manager for *Daily Racing Form*. From that I became national general manager, and then on to publisher.

Ms. Paul: Were you involved in racing before that time?

Mr. Williams: I knew which end of the horse ate the oats, but that's all.

Ms. Paul: But from there you got very involved in racing in the Monmouth County area.

Mr. Williams: It got me involved in racing all over the United States and Canada. I quickly learned about racing and the history of racing in New Jersey and in Monmouth County particularly. Back in the 1970s, there were three thoroughbred tracks in New Jersey, in addition to the harness track in Freehold. There was Monmouth Park, Atlantic City Race Course, and Garden State Parkway back then, all of which were running their meetings and flourishing in those days. I learned quickly of the history and learned of the horse breeding industry in New Jersey. There was a very active horse breeding industry in New Jersey in those days. But our primary focus wasn't just New Jersey, it was thoroughbred racing throughout the United States and Canada.

Ms. Paul: Tell me more about Monmouth Park in particular, since this is a story of Monmouth County in the 20th century.

Mr. Williams: Monmouth Park has a great and glorious history. I believe Monmouth Park is over 100 years old, maybe close to 150 years old. It was a premier East Coast summertime racetrack and people used to flock out of the city to Monmouth Park. They would take ferryboats and sailing boats off Manhattan and the boroughs and come down in the summer to the Jersey Shore and spend much time and money at Monmouth Park. It was a beautiful track -- one of the prettiest racetracks in America. It had a great, glorious history in terms of its racing. It offered some of the best racing during the summer months that you could find anywhere along the East Coast as well as in the United States. And that was evidenced in those days by the crowds, the purse structure, and the type of allowance races and stakes races they ran. They had big purses, they had large crowds, they bet a lot of dollars. They had good horses, and a good tradition. The track is located in Oceanport.

Ms. Paul: Your longest and probably most important affiliation in Monmouth County was with CentraState Medical Center, which started out as Freehold Area Hospital. Tell me how you got involved in that, and about some of the history of that hospital. What did it mean to the Monmouth County area?

Mr. Williams: We moved to Freehold Township in the dead of winter in January, 1970. We had been there a month or whatever, when one day our son got ill, and we began searching for some medical attention. We called a doctor, and he

came to the house and took care of Will. From him we learned that we didn't have a local hospital, the closest being in Neptune. It was kind of unsettling to know that this particular community, with its good schools and central location, and all the other things we thought were ideal, didn't have a hospital facility. So one evening, while sitting in the den, watching television and reading the newspaper, my wife Lew pointed out to me a story in the paper about a meeting that was going to be held in the Borough of Freehold for those who were working to raise money to complete the fundraising campaign for Freehold Area Hospital. She gently suggested that maybe I ought to go down and take a look at that and help them. So I did. I'm a newcomer and all the people looked like, "Who's that guy?" But I was greeted warmly. I learned about their plans and learned the facts, that the people in the western part of the county had to drive to Neptune or Long Branch to get medical attention. As the County was beginning to grow, the community leaders believed that wasn't a very satisfactory way to take care of local medical needs. There really was a need for a hospital. So I said, "Okay, I'll sign up and see if I can help solicit some money." I canvassed our neighborhood and our friends, and Lew and I made a pledge. I went to see my employer, and told him of our plight, and my company threw ten thousand bucks into it., or something like that. So the folks who were putting on that campaign said, "Hey, maybe this guy can be a worker in the vineyard here."

Ms. Paul: Do you remember how much money you were trying to raise at that point initially?

Mr. Williams: I think their goal, if I'm not mistaken, was one and a half to two million dollars to finish the project. Keep in mind that that wasn't just a 1970-71 project, they had been raising money every way conceivable for ten or more years before we got there, with a view toward building a hospital. But in 1970, the hospital wasn't there yet, so shortly after we got involved, they began to construct the hospital. I guess the next thing that Lew and I really got involved in was chairing a hospital charity ball in 1973. We attracted the largest crowd ever to assemble in Freehold Raceway for a charity ball up to that time. We raised the then largest amount of money they had ever raised from a charity ball, which was something close to fifty thousand dollars. The hospital was constructed, and I remember that in order to open it they had to borrow money, because we didn't have enough money left to actually open the doors and pay a staff. There was no cash flow. I think they had a credit line for maybe three to five million dollars. That's how it got started. Shortly thereafter, I was invited to join the Board of Trustees in 1974. I served almost until we left, in various capacities and including every vice president's chair, president of the hospital, president of the parent corporation, also president of one of the health care subsidiaries. We built Applewood Estates, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, child care centers, and so forth. So it was really a labor of love. I enjoyed every minute of it. It was fun to watch it grow from Freehold Area Hospital with 120 beds to what it is today with 240 to 250 beds and with every conceivable medical specialty addressed in

that facility. They now have affiliations all over and all sorts of subsidiaries. They are quite successful. It was a really good service; I enjoyed every minute of it.



From 1970 until 1994 William (Bill) Williams was involved in Freehold Area-Centra State Hospital work. His first major involvement was taking on the chairmanship of the 1973 Charity Ball. Adopting the theme from the "Charlie Brown" of the Peanuts cartoon strip, the ball told the entire Freehold area it was their hospital with signs of "It's Your Hospital, Freehold," "It's Your Hospital, Manalapan," "It's Your Hospital, Marlboro," etc. With Williams in front of a monstrous Snoopy is his wife, Lew, and Marie Rodriguez of Manalapan, who earned the title of Charity Ball Queen by raising the most money in the Queen contest.

Ms. Paul: Who were some of the people involved in the early days of that project?

Mr. Williams: The ones I remember best are Al Goldfine, he's long dead; Evelyn Silvert, who I think is still around, Charlie Miller, Joe Saker, Harold Golberger, Dr. Glen Barkalow, and Marian Friedman.



Ground-Breaking for an early addition to Freehold Area Hospital featured the following trustees, from the left, Harold Golberger, William H (Bill) Williams, Evelyn Silvert, Alex Goldfine, Art Schreiber, Dr. Stan Becker, Marian Freedman, Dr. Sidney Tobias, Dominick Cerrato, and Joseph Saker.

Ms. Paul: What was the toughest job you did for the hospital?

Mr. Williams: I guess the toughest jobs were always the fundraising jobs. And then too, in the early days of serving on the joint credentials committee, ironing out the disputes that inevitably come between medical staff and administration, trying to decide if you had enough dollars to venture off into new medical avenues and medical treatment was always tough. It was a struggle in those early years, but it's not a struggle now. They still deal with heavy issues, but then it was a struggle trying to make something out of nothing.

Ms. Paul: The retirement community, the extended care facility there seems to be very profitable and popular. I remember the days during the nursing shortage there when you were bringing in nurses from the Philippines. Please comment on this.

Mr. Williams: We had doctor shortages, too. We had to reach out and grab doctors and nurses any way we could. We did, in fact, import some from as far away as the Philippines. Yes, those were interesting days. We had all sorts of crusades and we had a lot of crusaders who crusaded against us. A lot of folks who were migrating down from New York and the boroughs thought you couldn't possibly get good medical care out here in the sticks. So they would spend their time, effort, and dollars to go into New York for medical care while being critical

of what we offered. I think those days are long gone. CentraState offers as good medical care as money can buy anywhere.

Ms. Paul: How did you get involved in Freehold Township politics?

Mr. Williams: I was invited by a friend to do so basically because of my many years of service on the hospital board. My friend said there was a vacancy coming up on the Township Committee, and it's the Township Committee's prerogative to appoint a replacement. "If we appoint you," he said, "and you would accept, you've got to do so knowing that you have to run for the remainder of the unexpired term." So Lew and I talked about it, and I thought about it, and I said, "I might want to do that," so I did.

Ms. Paul: When was that?

Mr. Williams: It was 1984 when I accepted the appointment for a few months, and then ran in the November election and won handily. I ran three more times for full terms and won all three of those elections.

Ms. Paul: And you were mayor periodically.

Mr. Williams: I was deputy mayor twice and mayor three times. I served on the Planning Board for five years. We started the first Substance Abuse Task Force the township had. We started its first Human Relations Committee and it was all in the interest of public service. I watched the town grow both from the hospital point of view and the township point of view from about 12,000 when we came to about close to 28,000 when we left.

Ms. Paul: There was a cable TV station that started sometime then, isn't that right?

Mr. Williams: Buried in the bowels of the Township Hall, there was a Channel 33. It was a fits-and-starts operation at first, but I think now it probably does more public service programming than I remember it doing. It sure is a good idea; a way to convey all sorts of community messages and programming to the people in the township.

Ms. Paul: Were you involved in the township when they built the Municipal Building on the corner of Schank and Stillwells?

Mr. Williams: I wasn't on the committee when they made the decision to build it, but that's where I hung my hat for many years. Fred Jahn was the township manager, and he did an absolutely fantastic job. Township manager is really the key employee outside of the law enforcement person. The township manager has a lot of oversight in terms of law enforcement. But if he's not a farsighted person capable of recognizing your strengths and your weaknesses, recognizing

all the pluses and minuses as you grow, preparing the infrastructure needs, helping manage all those things, you are absolutely lost. I don't care how good you are as committeeman, you are lost without a good township manager.

Ms. Paul: Were you on the Township Committee when the Raintree development was started?

Mr. Williams: I was on the committee during phases of the development's construction. The decision to give it final Planning Board approval was made before I joined the township committee, and the first section was under construction. We had a lot of problems with that particular development. Raintree was the first development of its type in Freehold Township. We did not restrain the developers in what they tried to sell those folks in terms of the quality of life. The township had to grapple with some of those problems and help rectify them. When you put that many people in that small an area, you're asking for some problems and you have to try and solve them. As a closed community, the residents say, "We don't want the outsiders in here routinely. But we want the town to take care of certain things, like our streets for example, but we don't want anybody else except us to use those streets. We want the township to come clean those streets when the snow gets on them because we pay our taxes," they say, "but we don't want anybody else to drive in here. Just let the township trucks come in here and clean, but keep the general public out." So there were all sorts of issues that we had to face. I think most of those issues are now squared away, but yes, we dealt with them.

Ms. Paul: What about Freehold Raceway Mall, which is a big financial entity in the township now? Were you there when that was being planned?

Mr. Williams: I was there when it was being planned. It went before the Planning Board and I was there when the final approvals were given to it, and during its construction, and its dedication. I had an opportunity to watch it grow. That was a major decision too, because what we really were creating was a new center of commerce for western Monmouth County. We were saying, in effect, that the Borough of Freehold was no longer going to be the center of commerce and a new center of commerce was going to be at the corner of Route 33 and Highway 9 in Freehold Township. And it's just not that easy to do. You have to think in terms of the total impact on the community. Sure there's a positive impact in terms of taxes, but there's also a negative impact in terms of traffic and people and all the demands that happen in law enforcement and so forth. We dealt with those issues. In retrospect, I think it was a good addition to Freehold Township. The Freehold Township Committee and the Planning Board extracted something like seventeen million dollars worth of infrastructure improvements out of that developer, who said they said they had never before had to do that in any other encounter with a town. Our response for that was, "Too bad. This is Freehold Township, and this is what we want, if you want to do business here." They did, and I don't think they ever looked back on it either.

Ms. Paul: Why is it called Freehold Raceway Mall?

Mr. Williams: Because the property was purchased from Freehold Raceway. It was split off from the original raceway property by the then owners of Freehold Raceway. I forget now who that was. Freehold Raceway got into a situation where it could no longer support a huge stable area behind the track. That was where the owners and trainers would bring in truck loads of horses, stable them there, take care of them, and race them. So they began a different program. If you were going to race your horse at Freehold Raceway, you brought it in the day of the racing, so all they really needed then were holding stables. All that property behind the racetrack, which would have been on the west side of Highway 9, was available. And the mall developers found that out and purchased it. And that's where the mall property came from, and that's why they named it Freehold Raceway Mall.

Ms. Paul: Who are some of the memorable characters you remember and/or other people who were most influential to you while living in Monmouth County?

Mr. Williams: We had a lot of memorable characters on those original hospital boards. We had some great entrepreneurs like the Saker family, for example. The Silverts were memorable people. Charlie Miller was a good friend and he was quite memorable. Joe McLoone ran Freehold Raceway for years and years, and he was an interesting fellow. My colleagues, and the fellow I replaced on the Freehold Township Committee, Arthur Kondrup, were colorful individuals. Another couple comes to mind now, Dante and Spats Federici, owners of Federici's Pizzeria. When I first met Dante, I thought, that is an ugly old man with a very gruff exterior, and he's mean spirited, and he's going to be ugly to me. Well, Dante was just the opposite. He had a gruff exterior all right, but he had a heart as big as a house. He was gentle, he was kind, he was generous, and he was an all-around good fellow. He was on the hospital board when I first joined the board. His brother was Frank. Everybody knew him then by Spats. There was a reason for that, because he used to wear spats when he was a very young man, and everybody would say, "Boy, look at those spats go down the street." Good guys, both of them. I have a lot of fond memories of Dante. I can remember when he gave me ten pizzas for the auction at the Freehold Raceway Hospital Charity Ball, and those ten pizzas were large pies with all the bells and whistles on them. They sold for \$4.95 a piece. I think those days are gone. Albert Gibson also became a very close personal friend. He was the pastor of Hope Lutheran Church -- interesting fellow, great pastor, great shepherd. He loved life, he put a lot into life, and he gave a lot of himself to a lot of people. Not only did he serve his community through the ministry of his church, he served it many, many other ways as well. Can't say enough about Albert. I found an interesting old fellow named Mack Clark, who used to be a county extension agent when we first arrived. He was a member of the Methodist Church. I remember coming out one Sunday morning and I guess we were feeling like the proverbial outsiders, and in passing I said, "Mack, how long do you have to be

here in this town before people stop calling you a newcomer?" He said, "I don't know, brother, I've only been here forty years." Other personal friends are still there or partially there, Pete and Rochelle McCloskey come to mind. Rochelle is a kindred spirit from Texas, and Pete, he's a kindred spirit, too, because he became a want-to-be Texan. He met and married Rochelle in El Paso while he was in the army. We did many, many good things with them. They're still there hanging on. I think of Gerry Kelly and his wife Noreen. Gerry is one of the first people I solicited for funds for Freehold Area Hospital. Also Jerry and Sue Gilbert. I believe their sons still live in the area.

Ms. Paul: Kelly was your neighbor on Kettle Creek, wasn't he?

Mr. Williams: He was my neighbor on Kettle Creek, two houses down. He and Noreen had some little girls about the same age as our Will. To start my hospital fundraising, I said, "I'll cut my teeth on my friend, Kelly, and see what happens." He very generously gave a sizable pledge, and from that time we became good friends. They're wonderful people. Gerry still has his property and spends some time there, but for all practical purposes their residence is Lake Placid, New York. Lots and lots and lots of good folks in Monmouth County.

Ms. Paul: How did Freehold Township change from the time you moved there in 1970 to when you moved away in 1994?

Mr. Williams: The attractiveness of it became its nemesis in that it was a good place to live for those of us coming from outside the state. We thought this was super. It's not crowded, and it's beautiful territory, unlike any we had known. For those who were coming down from the five boroughs it was almost like Utopia for them; they had never seen anything so great. And that stream of folks kept coming because they felt they could improve their quality of life in a more rural setting. But they finally overran the place, and it became more of an urban setting. I think New Jersey has always been a densely populated state, but I think Monmouth County population now is probably close to a half million people. When we got there it was around 200,000. So if it's close to a half million now you can see what's happened in the county in a span of twenty years. That's a lot of folks to assimilate into your way of life and your rural setting. That's a lot of infrastructure to provide, a lot of schools to build, a lot of libraries to build, and equip, and that takes a lot of doing and tax dollars for all those little towns.

Ms. Paul: What did Freehold Township do to preserve open spaces?

Mr. Williams: We bought as much property as we could whenever we could. Freehold Township mirrored Monmouth County's initiative, in terms of administering a small tax on property for the express purpose of buying green acres and keeping them green. Through the zoning ordinances, we tried to make the density less, and green spaces greater, and you had to have more property per house. We never were able in Freehold Township to do what Colts Neck had

always done, that is establish a four or five acre minimum home site. We just couldn't do that, but we did try, and the township was successful in increasing lot sizes when it zoned its master plan. That's how you try to control your growth -- you control the density of your zones. I think we did a reasonably good job. I'm not sure how many times they've changed the master plan since I left, but they probably have.

Ms. Paul: Wasn't there a moratorium on building for a while because of water?

Mr. Williams: There was a moratorium on all types of construction because of inadequate sewer treatment facilities. For many, many years, a long way back, there were a lot of septic systems. Then they began developing package sewage plants for subdivisions, then more people kept coming and the package sewage plants weren't doing the job. If looked up and down the Manasquan River, you had town after town after town with inadequate waste water collecting and treating systems. So the state came in and said, "Until you can figure out what to do with all the sewage you're generating in Monmouth and Ocean Counties, we're going to mandate you to put a moratorium on construction." And so, I think for about five years there was a moratorium on construction in Freehold Township and Borough, and all over that area up and down the Manasquan River. Finally, we got a handle on how to gather and treat sewage. From that came the formation of the Manasquan River Regional Sewage Authority and it went through fits and starts before it ever got to the point where it became a feasible, practical idea. Everybody wanted to have their own sewage treatment plant, and everybody wanted to dump sludge some place else after they treated it. Finally there was a meeting of minds, and we built a huge transmission line that followed the course of the Manasquan River, that took sewage gathered in Freehold Township and Freehold Borough, Howell, and other towns all the way to a huge treatment facility in Ocean County. That became a workable situation and the moratorium on construction was lifted. But it was about five years until all that fell into place. And then when it was finally lifted, BOOM! Building everywhere

Ms. Paul: You were involved in that Manasquan River Regional Sewer Authority too, weren't you?

Mr. Williams: Only in terms of oversight from the Freehold Township Committee perspective. We oversaw its budgets and had a representative on that board. Kondrup was township representative, and when I left, Dave Segal was the township representative.

Ms. Paul: Please comment on the landfill issue.

Mr. Williams: The landfill was a really tough issue. We had to determine what was out there and what had to be done. As it turned out, it was one of the ten worst pollution sites in America. Remediation for that took a lot of time, tons of

money, and I'll bet you can still go out there right now and see those pumping systems working, pulling that liquid out of the ground where it was polluted, treating it, releasing it.

Ms. Paul: Did the township get federal money to help clean that up?

Mr. Williams: Federal and state. A lot of federal money, and the state had some money in the project too.

Ms. Paul: I see that there's building out in that area again. Do you wonder if people who are building or moving out in that area know the history and background?

Mr. Williams: The law requires you make them aware; yes, they know. Any developer who builds, or proposes a development within a certain distance from that little pond has to make the potential purchasers aware of what's there, what took place, and what is happening. Buyers just can't go in there blindly.

Ms. Paul: What about the thorny issue in Freehold Township of using sludge as a potential source of energy?

Mr. Williams: I think you have to go back and think about whether Freehold Township had a really diversified tax base. If a town has a good diversified tax base, it usually has a tax base of about sixty to seventy percent of its tax dollars raised from business and industry, and thirty to forty percent of taxes raised from homeowners. And any time a tax base gets out of whack, the homeowner begins to complain. If you lose some significant industries or businesses, as Freehold Township did when it lost the big glass factory, you lose a major taxpayer.

Ms. Paul: Brockway Glass.

Mr. Williams: Brockway Glass. And there was a constant threat that the Nestle plant located in both the borough and the township was either going to cut back or relocate. The township never had a great big industrial base, so if you take out a huge component or two, you have a problem. And 3M also closed. Then we really had some tax base problems. We started thinking: how can we use this big, huge, rusty factory out here? Can it be turned into something productive and back on the tax rolls? A group came to us one day from Connecticut. They had a plan to take over the glass factory. They were acquiring rights to a process that takes sludge from sewage treatment plants, and, by using high heat and pressure, gasify the sludge. From the gasification process you would get methanol for fuel, and you would get some sulfur that could be reused. You also get an inert byproduct from the gasification process that could be used in road building. This sounded pretty good. The process was developed in East Germany right after World War II. When the Russians came into East Germany,

they told the East Germans that they were going to have to stop using brown coal, which they had been using in that part of Europe for ages. In order to heat themselves, the East Germans had to figure out what to do. The Russians weren't going to allow them to tap into their oil and gas fuels for pipe oil and gas into East Germany from Russia. The German scientists developed this gasification process: they took the brown coal, crushed it, and put it under high heat. They gasify it, fire it, and pull out fuel that was nonpolluting and had the inert products for other uses. This company in Connecticut was going to acquire that process, and they felt sludge was the answer. You know, years before, there was a fuel crisis in America where people were lining up three blocks to get a tank of gas when they could get it. Also the State of New Jersey heated sludge, dumping it in the Atlantic Ocean. Folks had these things on their mind. And so we looked at that process as maybe something that would be beneficial in Freehold Township. Well, what we probably underestimated was the fact that the township was beginning to change in certain areas due to the influx of many new people. We were having a younger element of folks who were first-time homeowners buying townhouses in the general proximity of that old plant, and the thought of trucking sludge in, one truck after another, was just about more than they could handle. They didn't really want to hear the good side of the equation, about the benefits in terms of methanol and all these other things, like putting a big factory back onto the tax rolls. That just wasn't flying, and we went through some pretty stormy public sessions. Matter of fact, we had to move out of Township Hall for public hearings. We moved over to Adelpia School, and that gymnasium was packed with seven or eight hundred screaming folks. So that process never happened. And then, of course, just as we were leaving, they were trying to do a deal with Nestle for a co-generation plant and the borough folks got exercised about that, and some of the same folks complained, and the co-generation idea was killed as well. Nestle needed to cut its operating expenses, and they thought that co-generation would be a good way to do that, without too much fireworks. They were wrong.

Ms. Paul: I remember writing you a letter one time as a Freehold Township resident. I thought it was funny even at the time, but we had gotten a water bill one week and the next week we got a letter saying that our house was going to be foreclosed for nonpayment of our water bill, which we had had in our possession for about a week. I remember writing a note to you, saying, "Doesn't this seem like a drastic thing to do?" There was a new tax assessor or a new tax person and a new computer program, and these things had been spewed out to a wide variety of people. You came back from Christmas vacation to a stack of messages on your desk, some of which were less politely phrased than mine, I think.

Mr. Williams: Well, yours was very diplomatically phrased in comparison to some of them I got. But it was a combination of two or three problems. We had a new person heading the department, we had new equipment, new clerks, and we had new computer software. The first thing you knew, we had people who were

threatened with foreclosure of their property for not paying their water bills. If they thought about it, it couldn't happen because you had to put a lien on property before we could foreclose it. But people panic, and don't think rationally sometimes.

Ms. Paul: What were some of the rewards of that time in your life?

Mr. Williams: I think one of the rewards was our park system in Freehold Township. We had good parks and we had a good recreation program. It grew from the early days when Al Gibson was on the Parks and Recreation Board to pocket parks and the expansion of Liberty Oaks Park and all the many programs there. Celebrating Freehold Township's Tricentennial was fun, and a big reward. It's not often in a lifetime that you can be a part of a tricentennial celebration! It was one greater than the United States had experienced at that time. That was fun, being mayor and planning it along with my wife, Lew, who chaired that committee, planning, and seeing it come to a conclusion. Seeing the hospital flourish was a plus, too. Also, our great circle of friends.



Freehold Township celebrated its 300th birthday in 1993. This was the logo for the year-long celebration.

On January 23, 1993, the incoming Township Committee and officials appeared in colonial costumes. At left is Duane Davidson, Township attorney, and William H. (Bill) Williams who was sworn in as mayor.



Ms. Paul: You got to marry people too, didn't you?

Mr. Williams: Oh, I did. I had some memorable ones. I had some folks that could hardly speak English. I had some folks that were so nervous they didn't know why they were there. I had a couple ride up on motorcycles. I'll never forget that one. Two motorcycles out front and they wanted me to come out in front of Township Hall and marry them. The young woman had on denim shorts that had the ripped legs so all the threads were hanging down, and they were ripped pretty good, because her bottom was hanging out on one side, and she had on lace gloves and a floppy type hat, and I'm not sure what kind of blouse. And the guy had on boots, jeans and a leather jacket.

Ms. Paul: Well, it was her wedding, after all, you know.

Mr. Williams: Yes, it was her wedding. The guy was the typical leather jacket kind of guy. So I married them out in front, on their motorcycle, and they roared off into the sunset. I don't know if they're still together or not.

Ms. Paul: How many marriages did you perform as mayor?

Mr. Williams: I think maybe twenty-five a year. In Texas, we do marriages with a justice of the peace. But in New Jersey, mayors are empowered to do that. I did a lot in my three stints as mayor.

Ms. Paul: Did you have any or do you have any responsibilities to the state?

Mr. Williams: No, not really, because of home rule. You don't have a lot of responsibilities to the state as such, except there's always a constant argument about the legislature enacting all these new laws that they feel are so great. You know, when you really think about it, this was an additional intrusion into your life. The state would tell the towns and the counties, "This is a great idea. We're going to put it in effect, and you pay for it." So the constant battle for state mandate/state pays was always going on, and it was always a budget-impacting situation. The state would come down with all this nonsense and they would expect the counties and towns to pay for it, and you had to figure out a way to do that. A constant battle.

Ms. Paul: You were one of eight municipalities in that Regional High School District. Please comment on that.

Mr. Williams: We tried to find our way out of that, too. We opposed the thought of a new high school in Colts Neck as being unnecessary. The township initiated the litigation to try to stop that, but it was unsuccessful. Many times there were discussions about how to foster a break-up of the regional system, but that really wasn't a feasible thing to do. There wasn't anything that could have been done by the township and governing body. And if I look back on it now, the regional system seems pretty good. If I look on it now and see how they administered that regional system, and what they accomplished, and how they lowered the taxes in support of that system, it seems feasible. I see what we do here in Texas. In this county right now we have four separate school systems in a county that's forty miles long. We should have one administrative system covering all the schools wherever they are. I can see a lot of positives about the way we did it in New Jersey, and a lot of negatives about the way we do it here.

Ms. Paul: Comparing Kerrville, Texas, and Monmouth County: What do you think are or were the pluses and minuses of Monmouth County?

Mr. Williams: If I look back on the almost twenty-four years we were in New Jersey, I would have to say it was a damn good experience. We chose the right place to live. We were there at the right time. We watched the town grow in an orderly fashion. We made many, many good friends. We had the privilege and opportunity to serve in places that were meaningful and those were all good experiences. I can truthfully say right now, though, I would not want to live there now. It's just the way things have developed. I'm more comfortable living in a more rural setting, not having all the impact problems that I'm sure the governing body in Freehold Township and the borough and all those other towns face now.

I wouldn't want to be there now, but it was a good experience. I don't regret it. If I could be conveyed back to 1970, I guess I'd do it all over again.

Ms. Paul: Thank you for all of the things you did, and thank you for this interview.

Mr. Williams: You're welcome.