



Interview with Kenneth Mount

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: Emily Bershad

Premises of Interview: Mr. Mount's home, Freehold, NJ

Birth date of subject: October 12, 1935

Ms. Bershad: How long have you lived in Monmouth County, and what do you know about your ancestors?

Mr. Mount: Well, I have lived in Monmouth for sixty-three years, and my ancestors,...strange, I never saw but one of my grandparents. Two were in an automobile accident where Van's is now, and they both died as a result of that accident. My grandfather on my father's side owned a bakery on Throckmorton Street, which was Mount's Bakery. Now, I never saw this man; then Carl Steinburg came across all these old movies of Freehold borough, and the surrounding area township and all that.

Ms. Bershad When was that old movie found?

Mr. Mount: I guess about three or four years now. I watched that film, and that was the first time I ever saw my grandfather. He was at the bakery.

Ms. Bershad: Is the film available, I mean, do you know where it would be?

Mr. Mount: I would imagine if you went to Carl Steinburg you could get a copy of it. They were selling them at the American Hotel when they first came out for I think fifteen dollars or something I like that. Somewhere around the house I had one. If I had it available, I would just give it to you. You're talking about a lot of back history. That would be a film to watch.

Ms. Bershad: I will tell them at the Library, the people who are doing this history of Monmouth County, they probably would be interested. So, if they went to the American Hotel they could find it? Is Carl Steinberg in the phone book?

Mr. Mount: Yes, he owns the furniture store on Throckmorton Street.

Ms. Bershad: Oh, yes, okay, yes I know. Okay, so you were saying that your grandfather had a store and sold what?

Mr. Mount: It was a bakery.

Ms. Bershad: And where was it?

Mr. Mount: On Throckmorton Street, back where the Conley's Lodge, that is an Elks Club now. That used to be the bakery. On my mother's side of the family, most of them were employed by the Rug Mill. One uncle was a manager over there, and then I had another uncle, Ralph, who was in the dye room. He would make dye for the rugs. I had an opportunity to work there for one year when I was fifteen years old. Not too much more about the family, except like I said, I have just seen one grandparent, and that was my father's mother, Annie.

Ms. Bershad: What places in Monmouth County have personal significance for you other than Freehold and why?

Mr. Mount: I always liked Asbury Park. When I was young, my parents would take me there and that was a real treat. And it is a shame to see how the businesses are going down and all that, right now. It was too bad the economy went the way it did. I have been here all my life and seen a lot of changes, but one that sticks out is Asbury Park. It went from really being something to just a dreary place, you know?

Ms. Bershad: How is your life different now than you thought it would be, when you graduated from high school? Is it different than you thought it would be? Have you gone a different way than you really intended to originally?

Mr. Mount: Yes. I didn't actually have that opportunity to graduate from high school. I wound up getting a general GED. But, when I was in high school, my plans were that I was going to be a priest. And, actually my whole life changed when my father died at a young age. I was the only one home and I actually took care of the family. In fact, back then we had the draft, and I had gone for my physical and I was going to be drafted before they found out that I was the head of the family, I went to 3A they called it. It was exempt, you know.

We did not hear of air conditioning. TV was almost unknown. A lot of changes in my lifetime; I never expected to be married and have five children. And it seems just like yesterday when I was in school.

Ms. Bershad: When did you first go into law enforcement?

Mr. Mount: Back in 1970, I took the police test with my brother. And at that time, I really wasn't that interested. I had always wanted to get into police enforcement, but it was with the State Police, and I took the test, I believe three times, and I finally passed it and went for my physical, and I was turned down because I didn't have enough teeth. Back then, you had to have a certain number of teeth. I had a molar pulled out the day before, and you had to have two molars. They were strict back then for the qualifications. That was back, when I was around twenty-one, twenty-two. Then when I hit the thirties, I took the Freehold Borough's test, I had a choice: I could go into the Township or with the Borough. But being I was Borough boy, I went with the Borough. And I have been in it every since.

Ms. Bershad: How long has Freehold Township had their own Police Department?

Mr. Mount: When I first started back in 1970, I believe they had about four police officers. The chief was Chief Narozick. His family lives here in the township over off Robertsville Road. At that time, we had State Police up in Tennent. There was a barracks up there. There was a barracks in Wall Township, and the State Police would work with the Township with whatever they had, and if they needed something, the Borough would always help them. I remember the Chief Wills, he was just a patrolman when I started, and there were a couple of others. They were full-time, but it wasn't a big police department you know the way it is today. Everybody assisted each other back in those days. But we mostly depended on the State Police in this area.

Ms. Bershad: Have there been any major changes in the Borough's Police Department since you have been working there?

Mr. Mount: Back in 1970, The Borough's Police Department was over the top of the Fire House, and we moved from there over to Hudson Street into the school. There is going to be another change coming up pretty soon. I think that is going to be when they move from there over to the Rug Mill, because it seems like that might happen. When I first went on, I believe there were maybe fifteen police officers, and it has doubled since then. It is roughly about twenty-seven or twenty-eight now. It is better training. When I went to Police School, we had our training at the County Jail. Now I have to say, police officers today seem to know more than what we knew when we went out. When I first started, I was given a uniform and a gun, and I carried that. I started in March of 1970, and graduated from Police School in November, so you figure for three or four months, I didn't have any training at all. But today that is unheard of. Today, before you put your uniform on, you have to go to school. There is better training, and I feel, more equipment today.

Ms. Bershad: Yes, I agree. I would like to contrast the way medicine is practiced today in this area, and the way it was when you were growing up. I know that we did not have Freehold Area Hospital out on Route 537, of course, in those days. Could you tell me a little about it?

Mr. Mount: There was no hospital. It was unheard of. And I don't even remember when Jersey Shore or Long Branch came into being where they are now. My family for some reason, I don't know, would deal with Trenton, Saint Francis Hospital. That is where I was born. And as far as medicine goes, I know two brothers that were born right in the house on Court Street. There was no hospital to go to. I remember Dr. Lewlis coming to the house. In fact, I can remember when one of my brothers had whooping cough. He almost died on account of that; it was a bad disease. A lot of drug stores are now like CVS and Revco, which was here for awhile. The big change I have seen is the drug stores. Lenny Barbish, Abe Elin, he used to have Wood's Pharmacy. When I was a child, once a month we would all go down and get Castor's Oil. Have you ever had any?

Ms. Bershad: Oh, sure!

Mr. Mount: And that was given to us by the pharmacist. As far as medicine goes, you just went to the doctor when you were sick, and there was no six months checkup, or anything like that. And I believe even the women when they were pregnant, just stayed until they had to go and have the child, you know? Compared to today, I wouldn't want to go back to where I was in those days. I would take the medicine in the medical field that they have today. It is a big success around here. It is a big town now, and look at the size of the CentraState. It's nice to have that close by and plus, First Aid. They were around but not, I mean they just had a couple of members then. I can remember the time whenever there was a First Aid call, you'd hear a siren go off, that is how they were notified. Because there were no pagers back then. Everything is new today. So, the changes are good changes.

Ms. Bershad: Yes, I agree. There is much more availability for medicine and the medical practice than there used to be. I wanted to ask you a few things about restaurants, of course, they have changed a great deal. When I was a kid I used to be able to bring my dog into a restaurant. But now, of course, you cannot do it, everything is changed. How about the restaurants in Freehold Borough? Were there many, and what were they?

Mr. Mount: The biggest restaurant was the American Hotel; it was operated by Mr. Datener. It was a family restaurant; you could go in there and you had a big menu to choose from. You had the small restaurants. There used to be one where Stefanos Pizza Restaurant is. There used to be a bar and a restaurant inside. That was the fast food in those days. You could go in there and get a sandwich and food like that. Conway's Bar was over by Sagarretson's. I don't

think they served food in there. And Van's, as far as I can remember, has always been there. That is always an excellent restaurant. I can remember some years ago, you could get a double lobster dinner for something like six or seven dollars. Today, they're worth thirty-five dollars. Then, Max's, Route 9, is a boarded up building now. That was a big hamburger place. It was like a McDonald's back then. And right where the Ford place is, there's a gas station just before it. That used to be a big road stand; McCormick, I believe owned it, and you could go in there and get hamburgers, hot dogs, and buy the fresh fruit and all the things they had there. They were the big places back then. Moore's was always there, but that wasn't a restaurant. And that was the end of it, because Route 9 wasn't built up. There were no such things as Hardee's, McDonald's, or any of those restaurants.

Ms. Bershad: I understand that during Prohibition, Van's was a speakeasy.

Mr. Mount: I went in there a few times with my father. They had a bar right downstairs. I believe they still have it. I don't know if they took it away. And, I remember they used to have horses in the back of Van's. James Cartwright owned it. Always had the peacocks on the side of the house. I am trying to think. I couldn't have been more than maybe eight or nine years old. But, I do remember going in there, and it should still be in the cellar.

Ms. Bershad: I would think so. Prohibition was in the 1930s. What major changes have you seen in this area of Monmouth County in your lifetime?

Mr. Mount: When I was young, living on Court Street, we lived across the street from what is now the County Courthouse. I have seen a big change there. It used to be Sinclair's Estate. They moved the Sinclair house over on Schanck Street. It is a big white house with pillars on it. That used to be right where the courthouse is. And, that was the wealth that that family had. But, I could go from Court Street toward Monument Street, and there was nothing but woods, fields, and all that, no houses in sight. I think the first development over there was Home Terrace. That is down by the Monmouth County Correctional Center. Another big change that I saw was African Americans. They used to go to the Court Street School. I would pass them on my way to Saint Rose, and I never paid any attention to it. And now, you know how desegregation came in, and everybody goes to school together. We have seen a big change in the school system. And, the town changed a lot today. Back then there were no traffic lights. There was no school crossing guard. Everything is safety towards the children today. You have the police patrolling the streets where children walk. Everything works out for the better. There are a lot of changes in electricity, cars, a lot of change.

Ms. Bershad: Would you say the police department changes have been mainly in the size of the department or are there are any other big changes you can think of in the Freehold Borough Police Department?

Mr. Mount: Well, we did double our size, and I feel that there is better training than what it was back in the 1970s. Everything today is education now, which is good. And, I have seen a big change in the salaries. Now, police officers are making half way decent money.

Ms. Bershad: Of course, the cost of living is much higher too, you know, so you have to think of that.

Mr. Mount: Right. I moved here twenty-six years ago. My light bill was twenty-five dollars. Today, it is ten times that.

Ms. Bershad: Salaries have to go up to keep up with it. Was there a change in Freehold Borough when the Rug Mill closed down?

Mr. Mount: As far as I can remember, there was a big change. The streets changed. The people sold their homes, and a lot of people were out of work. The economy in this town just fell right through, you know. Nestle didn't come in till maybe 1940, maybe 1950, or something or that. And, I have seen a lot of my parents' friends. They moved from this town to South Carolina. That is where the Rug Mill moved to. There was a big change in the economy. Yes, that really hurt the town when they moved out.

Ms. Bershad: Nestle helped it a little bit. It was another employer. But now what is happening in that area where the Rug Mill once was?

Mr. Mount: They've got a nice big park over there, Liberty Street Park. We used to go over there to the softball games. That was fun for the children. Now, some of the homes, the landlords weren't keeping them up, but now there are tougher laws to enforce all that. If you go over there now, you will begin to see it is beginning to be a nice area. Where before, the landlords didn't care about painting the homes or all that. There was a lot of crime. We had to go over there a lot of times. Drugs were the biggest problems. In fact, drugs are the biggest problem in Freehold today. And, of course, everybody has that problem.

Ms. Bershad: I understand you have an interesting story about your brother and the Lindbergh kidnapping back in the 1930s. That would be when Charles Lindbergh's son was kidnapped wasn't it? Would you care to talk a little about that?

Mr. Mount: My mother and father told me that they were out for a drive, and at that time they had one child, which would be my oldest brother, Charles. He resembled this Lindbergh baby. My father stopped at the checkpoint on the road. The State Police saw this young baby. They actually took my parents back to the barracks and they took my brother, Charles with them to make sure he wasn't the baby. My father laughed about it. That was a shame about the baby.

Ms. Bershad: Was this in Flemington?

Mr. Mount: No, I believe this was in or around Lakehurst. My father used to like to go down there and watch, at that time, they had the gates open. In fact, my father was there when The Hindenburg went down. He witnessed that. Yes, they had a little scare that day. Charles did look like the Lindbergh baby.

Ms. Bershad: Well, Kenny, I want to thank you very much for this interview. It has been very interesting, and I look forward to seeing it when they have it all typed up. I will give you a copy.

Mr. Mount: Thank you, and it has been a pleasure.