

Interviewee: Paul Dorf
Interviewer: Ruth Terwilliger and Paula Bruno
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Transcriber: Janena Benjamin

P. Bruno: How old is the building and when was it first built?

P. Dorf: I think there is no paper here to tell you the exact age of the building.

P. Bruno: Can you give sort of an approximation?

P. Dorf: Approximation. It is far over 100 years, far, far over 100 years, approximately. That's all what I heard, I wasn't born on that time.

P. Bruno: Okay, when did you come into the Inn?

P. Dorf: I came into the Inn in 1939.

R. Terwilliger: Who did you purchase it from, Mr. Dorf?

P. Dorf: I didn't purchase it – that's a corporation.

R. Terwilliger: I see.

P. Dorf: Metuchen Inn is a corporation, founded in 1923.

R. Terwilliger: So you just then more or less became the manager or whatever it's called at that time?

P. Bruno: How did you come to get the job of manager?

P. Dorf: Because I was interested in this area and through them that I supplied all the hospitals around here and the industry with poultry from the farm which we have in Franklin Township.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, you had a farm in Franklin Township?

P. Dorf: We still have it.

R. Terwilliger: You still do. A poultry farm?

P. Dorf: It was; it is now a fruit farm.

R. Terwilliger: A fruit farm. So you didn't actually live here at the Inn with your family? You just managed it.

P. Dorf: Yes, that was partly when my boy went to Franklin Township to school in the kindergarten and he caught a pneumonia at that time. That's when I took him away and brought him here. He went here to

school and graduated here from Metuchen. From Metuchen he went to Rutgers and from Rutgers he went to Duke Medical and now he is at Harvard.

R.Terwilliger: He is a surgeon, isn't he?

P. Dorf: No he is a pathologist.

R.Terwilliger: I see. And he teaches at Harvard now?

P. Dorf: He is not teaching, he is the head of the pathology department.

R.Terwilliger: You must be very proud.

P. Dorf: I think he has the best knowledge a person could get in that field.

R.Terwilliger: And it's kind of nice to think it started right here in Metuchen, you know, in the Metuchen schools.

P. Dorf: Well, the Metuchen school was absolutely not good, I have to say very clearly if somebody wants to know it. There were five boys that went to Rutgers and only one boy graduated it in three years and that was my boy. The rest of them flunked out, not that they was dumb, they was maybe smarter as my boy but not educated enough to go to college. Because a college boy before he goes to college, they should train him to learn the library, to handle a library. That if he wants something to know he couldn't go to a teacher if he is in college and say, "What is this, I didn't understand that." There isn't such a thing.

R.Terwilliger: No.

P. Dorf: And if he wants to know it then he has to go to the library and pick up in the library what is wrong and what he don't understand and they didn't train him here. Absolutely not. He went in the advanced classes. That doesn't mean absolutely nothing. And he was not the best in the class for the other ones which flunked out. So I speak very clearly. Normally they say always my boy is the best or my children are the best, which was not a fact.

R.Terwilliger: Well, it isn't always the brightest people that are successful, there is a lot more to being a success than just intelligence.

P. Dorf: I believe that but I know that everyone which flunked out from this Rutgers and from other schools, from that particular year I'm talking only, they are absolutely high graded for college and not educated enough to go to college.

R.Terwilliger: I understand what you're saying.

P. Dorf: Very clear I express myself. Not that I say that because I pay taxes here in Metuchen and the school was not right at that time, I don't know how it is now, now I'm not interested.

R.Terwilliger: What was Metuchen back at that time? We're talking about in the 30's now; it was a very small town wasn't it?

P. Dorf: That is correct. When my boy went to school - he's not in the service - he graduated here in 1962. He's young; he's only 33 years old. So '62 that is not so long ago.

R.Terwilliger: Not so long ago.

P. Dorf: Not so long ago. That is correct.

R.Terwilliger: I thought you were talking that he went back in the 40's or something to school.

P. Dorf: No, when he went to public schools, he went to public schools after the kindergarten when Mr. Spoerl used to be the principal here. Because Mr. Spoerl used to come every day in here, he ate here because his wife was paralyzed at that time and then she died later and we're talking now from 1945 '46 '47 '48 '49 '50.

P. Bruno: Just getting back to the Inn a little bit, you say it is over a hundred years old or so. Have there been an additions put on it?

P. Dorf: Yes, always. The last addition was put on in 1913.

P. Bruno: And what was the addition?

P. Dorf: The wing from the rear, the wing after here. I brought this wall out.

P. Bruno: So would that include the bar area?

P. Dorf: No, the bar area is the original room but adjacent to the bar area, this is the last construction which was put on. But there is not only one thing which was put on, there are many other items. The lobby was put on. That was a roadhouse.

R.Terwilliger: A roadhouse?

P. Bruno: What is a roadhouse?

P. Dorf: Same thing like a motel. At that time it was called a roadhouse. But George Washington was not staying here.

R.Terwilliger: He never stayed here.

P. Bruno: Were there any other inns in the area when you took over the Metuchen Inn in the late 30's?

P. Dorf: Not that I know. There was an inn named The Ramble Inn, which was next to where the bank is at the present time but they had no rooms. The word inn was just as a restaurant; the two sisters handled the restaurant.

R.Terwilliger: The Litterst girls.

P. Dorf: That is correct, exactly

P. Bruno: Did they provide competition for you?

P. Dorf: No, we never had any competition. Never.

R.Terwilliger: What kind of people came here back then, were they just local people?

P. Dorf: Oh no, we had names here. Well for example, during the war the Camp Kilmer was managed by General Duffy. The home of General Duffy - I shouldn't say the home but the place where he hanged out all day – or if somebody wanted to have him, they had to call here.

R.Terwilliger: Oh really, that's interesting.

P. Dorf: We had more than General Duffy; we had many. I just don't want to mention all the names because I don't know if that is the right way.

P. Bruno: Can you mention just a few?

P. Dorf: Of the generals, no I don't think that's right. But General Duffy was the manager or the person responsible for Camp Kilmer, that's enough when I say that.

P. Bruno: Beside generals...

P. Dorf: With the generals, they was only for short periods here. Otherwise they stayed over at Camp Kilmer for a month or two months or some of them got discharged from overseas. They had to come to the Camp Kilmer and they all was here. I wouldn't say all, but almost all of them was here.

R.Terwilliger: Do you have any contact with this General Duffy?

P. Dorf: Duffy, he is dead I believe. Yes, we do have congratulation cards for Christmas, etc. but years back. They are in the box of our correspondence.

P. Bruno: Besides military personnel, were there any other famous people that came to the Inn?

P. Dorf: Yes, yes, Henry Ford.

P. Bruno: Wow.

P. Dorf: Arthur Treacher.

R.Terwilliger: Arthur Treacher.

P. Dorf: Ed Sullivan.

R.Terwilliger: Oh, my gracious. Well tell us a little bit. First Henry Ford – was he here visiting Thomas Edison?

P. Dorf: No he came here. But I tell you what I heard the principle how he came to this area. There used to be Major Geiger in Metuchen. He used to be the head of that building down there – that military bar – oh, what do you call it?

R.Terwilliger: Oh, you mean the Masonic?

P. Dorf: Not the Masonic. Masonic, that is a club.

R.Terwilliger: The American Legion?

P. Dorf: That's it - the American Legion. He was the head of the American Legion and he was a clock antique collector and he sold and he bought and Henry Ford was also a collector and he came over here to buy from Major Geiger some merchandise. He used to live in the Lake Avenue. And that's how he came over here and he got the property for the Lincoln Mercury plant

R.Terwilliger: He did, I didn't realize Henry Ford ...

P. Dorf: So I heard that. I don't want to say that I know 100 percent that's how he came to this area and bought the Lincoln Mercury plant.

R.Terwilliger: Right, its hearsay. That's very interesting.

P. Dorf: Ed Sullivan, he took films here in the Lincoln Mercury plant on his Sunday show.

R.Terwilliger: Oh his Sunday show.

P. Dorf: At that time it was a Sunday show and he used to come in here with Mr. Riley. That was the secretary of Henry Ford II. And then he was staying here. He was quite often here and many times he called me and said hello.

R.Terwilliger: That's really interesting.

P. Dorf: And that was about Ed Sullivan, a very fine man. And Arthur Treacher; when he came here that I could tell you the original how

he came here. On Plainfield Avenue there is a Dodge agency that used to be a Rambler agency.

R.Terwilliger: Oh yes, I remember that.

P. Dorf: Remember? And the name of that agency was..., what was his name?

R.Terwilliger: That I can't remember.

P. Dorf: And Arthur Treacher financed him. And when they opened the place Arthur Treacher was staying here for eight days and he was the man that brought the people in.

R.Terwilliger: I have to show my ignorance now in saying, who is Arthur Treacher? I mean I know Arthur Treacher's Fish & Chips.

P. Dorf: Yes, but the movie actor.

R.Terwilliger: Oh yes, he was an English actor.

P. Dorf: English right, and he played always a bachelor. And I tell you how I know that it was Arthur Treacher. That was the best thing I ever heard. We had a fellow here in the bar sitting and Arthur Treacher was sitting with his wife in that corner over there. She was a heavy set woman and Arthur Treacher was a slim fellow – and he was older at that time already - he died when he was 80 or 90 or something like that. But anyway that fellow in the bar was a good customer, steady customer from Perth Amboy. He said to me, "Paul, who is that fellow?" And then he looked over. That fellow never said boo to anybody but he just bothered him you know? And then he said, "You know I think I must know him." Then I said, "Well if you want to know, I'll look in the hotel register. He must be there." So I came back, I looked in the register and it said Treacher. So I didn't have my mind that it was Arthur Treacher so I said, "Treacher." He said, "That's him, that's him, I know it. That's the movie actor!" Then Arthur Treacher came to me and I spoke with him – he was here already three days and when we speak of when he got out well he never was very, he was just a dry man. He was always dry. When he laughed I think that's a specialty for him. And he brought the check over to the bar and paid the bill. And that fellow, he comes in for years and years and he never spoke to somebody although a very fine fellow, he was with General Cable. He said, "Excuse me, are you Mr. Treacher?"

He looked at him and he wouldn't answer.

R.Terwilliger: He wouldn't?

P. Dorf: No, no, no, no, no, no, they don't do that. He was just as dry as

R.Terwilliger: Just a very private person.

P. Dorf: That's right. Now you could have the Directors of Westinghouse, the Directors of Englehard Minerals and Chemicals, the Directors from Revlon. General Johnson used to come in here four or five times a week, from Johnson & Johnson.

R.Terwilliger: What about Mr. Edgar, wasn't he here?

P. Dorf: They were staying here, oh sure. They had that house on the street but Mrs. Edgar had an apartment in the Waldorf Astoria, I believe. And when they came to Metuchen she was staying here many times and when she was staying in that house by herself we had to bring her the food over there. She wouldn't eat no food from nowhere else. And Mr. Edgar, he has a special type of food. He ate the steak, he chewed it and then he spit it out.

R.Terwilliger: Oh, just chewed the juice out?

P. Dorf: Very rote, or *the red* typically. Always with a flower and a very fine looking man. And I remember in 1976 (perhaps he means 1956?) one day Mr. Edgar came in and said, "Paul, I want to show you something." So he was waiting until I got out from that bar and he took me by the arm and I came outside and there he had a brand new Packard.

R.Terwilliger: A Packard?

P. Dorf: A Packard. All chrome and oh, it looked like a circus! But a very expensive car.

R.Terwilliger: He was a very wealthy man, my goodness yes. But that's where Englehard Industries started, from his business.

P. Dorf: He merged with Mineral and Chemicals and then Englehard came in 1958 or 1957, something like that. Englehard was always separate. The father of Englehard was the only person in the United States which was allowed to handle gold.

R.Terwilliger: Oh that's interesting.

P. Dorf: Because we were not allowed to buy gold. Since the last two years we were allowed to buy gold. But Englehard, he supplied all the jewelry stores. Everybody had to buy from him. And now the company is Englehard Mineral and Chemicals and they are the biggest dealers in ores in the world, and then the gold and then they went into newspapers you see.

P. Bruno: Getting back to the Inn, what services did it provide for the patrons?

P. Dorf: Everything that was necessary.

R.Terwilliger: Lodging, food?

P. Dorf: Lodging, food.

R.Terwilliger: Baths?

P. Dorf: Baths, and a bar.

R.Terwilliger: At that time though there was a bath at the end of the hall? I mean the rooms don't all have their own private baths.

P. Dorf: That is correct. That is right but there was no more than two rooms in a bathroom. Never.

R.Terwilliger: I see. You mean one bathroom provided for two sleeping quarters.

P. Dorf: Yes, but there are rooms with baths.

R.Terwilliger: Oh there are rooms with baths?

P. Dorf: That is correct.

R.Terwilliger: And did you make those improvements when you came?

P. Dorf: No partly it was here already.

R.Terwilliger: Oh really, and what size staff did you have working for you? How many people?

P. Dorf: We had on the floor - we had two girls. One was 15 years here; the other one was 19 years here and then got sick and decided to take off at that time. And then we had five people in the kitchen at that time. This year's - you know the Oak Hills manor?

R.Terwilliger: Yes.

P. Dorf: The original was made from Henry Pfeiff and Henry Pfeiff was the kitchen chef here. And he used to be in the Roosevelt Hospital, also, a dietician.

R.Terwilliger: That's interesting.

P. Bruno: Did some of the people sort of live here?

P. Dorf: Permanently? No, that means permanently for what period you talk about. You know some people call when you stay long in a hotel that's three days or four days; that you can call that permanent, which I do not.

P. Bruno: What's the longest somebody would stay at one time here?

P. Dorf: A month, two months, six months. We had people from General Motors, from the Anchor Motor Company there Saturday that were staying here five years – that was a permanent party. And the reason why they were staying here, we were very close to them comparably and they liked it here.

R.Terwilliger: And of course this Inn was all pre-motels. There was just no other place to stay really.

P. Dorf: Exact what you say. But still it is isolated with any competition including Metuchen.

P. Bruno: Was the Inn used as a meeting place for businessmen?

P. Dorf: Also. Also. They had wedding parties, which is in the present time also, meeting parties. All the Governors from New Jersey had all the meetings here. Only I think the last Governor, Byrne, was not here or no organization which

R.Terwilliger: Governor Silzer stayed here?

P. Dorf: Oh sure, Mrs. Silzer. Mrs. Silzer with the daughter came here. That's all people which I can't mention. There are bigger people than the Silzers.

R.Terwilliger: You can't mention?

P. Dorf: Fred Pierce.

R.Terwilliger: Fred Pierce?

P. Dorf: Your Honor Fred Pierce.

R.Terwilliger: Oh, and he stayed here too?

P. Dorf: And he used to be the highest lawyer in town here.

R.Terwilliger: I knew the Pierce name.

P. Dorf: George Pierce and Fred Pierce and the other son in Washington, the head of the Water Department.

P. Bruno: Were there any other political people?

P. Dorf: A lot of them.

R.Terwilliger: You hesitate to mention the names.

P. Dorf: No that's not right.

P, Bruno: How did the Inn

P. Dorf: I am not a politician, excuse me, I refuse always to officially handle a politician more than a citizen.

R.Terwilliger: I respect your feelings about it.

P. Bruno: How did the Inn come to be so reputable?

P. Dorf: In a way to be honest, there was no competition. I do not believe I had any competition.

R.Terwilliger: But you don't run the Inn as such today, do you?

P. Dorf: Yes.

R.Terwilliger: It still is a place you can come and stay?

P. Dorf: The same principle, quality.

R.Terwilliger: You don't serve dinners though or anything?

P. Dorf: We still serve for our hotel guests, too.

R.Terwilliger: I see. I thought that you had sort of retired.

P. Dorf: No, not so bad. We are more or less.

R.Terwilliger: On a smaller scale.

P. Dorf: Yes.

R.Terwilliger: But I'm sure the competition is great today.

P. Dorf: There is still no competition for this place. We have the largest selected bar in the state.

R.Terwilliger: Largest what kind of bar?

P. Dorf: Selected bar.

R.Terwilliger: Selected bar? Oh, I've heard about your – what is it - fifty year old scotch?

P. Dorf: 250 years old, 50 years that's nothing.

R.Terwilliger: How much can you sell that for? I mean what does a shot of that cost?

P. Dorf: The highest one is \$52.50

R.Terwilliger: A shot!

P. Dorf: We have no shots. We have only drinks.

R.Terwilliger: Only drinks. Has anyone ever bought that?

P. Dorf: We wouldn't have it if we did not sell it.

R.Terwilliger: I don't know whether anything is worth that much money.

P. Dorf: I go along with you. But you have to understand what you drink to pay the price. If you do not understand it makes no difference.

R.Terwilliger: Probably so smooth you'd want more!

P. Dorf: That's possible; I don't drink so I couldn't answer that.

P. Bruno: What was your menu like? What sort of food did you serve?

P. Dorf: The menu was a selected menu, it was a Swiss European kitchen and the highest or the most selected menu you ever saw we always had. Cooked mostly to order. We had no mass food, never did and never will. We don't take no working people in the hotel.

R.Terwilliger: What do you mean by working people?

P. Dorf: Working clothing.

R.Terwilliger: Oh I see, they have to have shirts on.

P. Dorf: It has to be selected. Not that they come with greasy fingers and smear up the doors or something like that.

R.Terwilliger: But as far as, like my husband and I want to have dinner here now, you don't serve people just off the street?

P. Dorf: No.

R.Terwilliger: It's only people that stay.

P. Bruno: How many people are staying in the inn today?

P. Dorf: How many people will stay today? That I don't know what it will be until after 1 o'clock.

P. Bruno: By today I meant contemporary, how many ...

R.Terwilliger: The average she means.

P. Dorf: The average, in short words it is pretty full.

P. Bruno: And are these regular customers?

P. Dorf: If not regular customers they are recommended from industry or very well known organizations.

R.Terwilliger: Can you tell me about your bar? Can someone come in and sit at your bar?

P. Dorf: The bar is public.

R.Terwilliger: The bar is public.

P. Dorf: Otherwise you would not have a public license.

R.Terwilliger: I see. I wanted to get back to, to revert back to the beginnings of this place. I'm interested in knowing how you - where did you learn hotel management?

P. Dorf: The hotel management I learned through my customers. I supplied to New York the biggest hotels, Waldorf Astoria, Hotel Astor.

R.Terwilliger: From the farm that you had you mean?

P. Dorf: That is correct and everybody wanted that I should take a place.

R.Terwilliger: You mean just from observing and dealing with these customers you sort of picked up the trade. You had no formal training?

P. Dorf: Absolutely not, I had my training during my visits in other hotels through deliveries or collecting money.

R.Terwilliger: Were you born in this country Mr. Dorf?

P. Dorf: No, I'm not.

R.Terwilliger: You were born in Germany?

P. Dorf: I'm not from Germany at all.

R.Terwilliger: Switzerland?

P. Dorf: I'm from Austrian Swiss.

R.Terwilliger: And when did you come to this country then?

P. Dorf: I came in 1939.

R.Terwilliger: I see. You still have that beautiful accent.

P. Dorf: I don't think that I will forget that because I am in Europe twice a year.

R.Terwilliger: Do you still have family back there? Relatives?

P. Dorf: Well I have my home in Europe.

R.Terwilliger: You have a home there?

P. Dorf: Yes I do.

R.Terwilliger: Do you think eventually you'd want to retire there?

P. Dorf: No, no. No, because I want to be here with my son. So I live here now because (*Doorbell or driveway bell rings*) I want to but not in business with him, my son is absolutely not a businessman.

R.Terwilliger: He needs you.

P. Dorf: He gives everything to the Salvation Army.

R.Terwilliger: How is the tape doing?

P. Bruno: It's doing all right. Is somebody here?

P. Dorf: Yes, excuse me.

P. Bruno: I'll shut it off for a minute.

- end -