

Interview with Donald Stevens

Interviewer: Robert Foote

November 7, 1996

**Q:** Robert Foote talking to Donald Stevens, November 7, 1966 in New York City. Um, let's see. First, how 'bout the, your family background, Don, some of the ancestors, and famous people and stuff.

**A:** Well, I'll, uh, I'll begin with my birthday, I guess I was, uh, born April 30, 1887, in Germantown, uh, Philadelphia, and uh, my mother was a Philadelphian. Her name was Caroline Akins, she was the sister of America's Rembrandt, Thomas Akins and uh, my father came from New Jersey [gap in tape] and uh, he was born in Ralway [?], New Jersey, and uh, had been studying at the, uh, Rutgers University. His mother, Charlotte Stevens, was a very devout Episcopalian and hoped that he would study for the ministry and uh, his father was, however, a, quite a famous illustrator, and not interested in religion, particularly, but, uh, a man devoted to art and to, uh, he had a great love of drama, and used to play leading, uh, role in the local drama of that neighborhood. And uh, was an illustrator for some of the famous weeklies of that time, uh, Leslie's weekly, and uh, and Punchinello, and some of the other early weekly magazines, published in New York. And uh, my father told me how his father, uh, made his illustrations, taking blocks of wood, rubbing chalk over them, and then would draw with a sharp pencil the lines that he wanted to have in his drawing and then with a carving tools, he would carve away everything but the lines, and that's how, uh, illustrations were made in those days. And uh, my father was studying Greek so intensively that he ruined his eyesight, or almost ruined his eyesight doing his, after his sophomore year, his father said, "Well, Frank, if you want to amount to anything, you've got to save your eyes, and you've got to stop college, and uh, take a year off and go down to the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, in Philadelphia," which my father was glad to do, and uh, he became so fascinated with art and the studies there -- he studied anatomy under Thomas Akins and some of the other famous teachers of that time, and he had no further use for going on with college, or certainly not with the ministry.

**Q:** Is that, is that where he met your mother?

**A:** And that's where he met Caroline Akins, who was also studying there. And, uh, they, uh, fell in love and were married. In fact, my father was in love with her older sister and then she had a tragic death, and uh, they were both, my father and future mother were smitten by this great loss, and I guess consoled themselves by getting married. And uh, they lived in, uh, West Philadelphia, and my father took up modeling there. He, he was a sculptor, and started a business with some of his fellow students in uh, I think it was Steven's [?] [unintelligible] and Company, and uh, out in West Philadelphia, they had their plant, and uh, then a great tragedy struck him, because my, I had an older sister, a year older, Margaret, and uh, she was named after this Aunt Maggie who died, and she uh, uh, was a year older, she was born just a year older than I was, and uh, my brother came along, two years after me, and uh, a few weeks, only about three weeks after that, my mother was stricken with typhoid, probably from the Schuylkill river water and um, died, and that was a terrible blow to my father. And uh, he saw no use in living and didn't know what to do. However he had picked up a paperbound, I think on one of the trips on the train, they used to hand out paper volumes to people sitting on the train, and then they would come back, hoping, the bookseller, hoping that people would buy it, enough to make a living. And he picked up a, had picked up a copy of Progress and Poverty by the great American economist Henry George. And uh, he thought it was extremely interesting, but he didn't give it any serious thought until he thought this was a great man, and after my mother's death, he suddenly remembered the wisdom of this great thinker, and he went over to New York and hunted up Henry George, who was then editing a

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little, uh, paper called the Standard, and he was such a, a, wonderful soul and such an inspiring person that he told my father, he said, he had never had that kind of a, a terrible blow, none of his close family had died, but, uh, he said "I sympathize with you, but you have got something to live for, since you're interested in this helping other people to get more out of life and stopping poverty, you will find in that something that will help you to forget your old loss in trying to advance a cause that will keep people from suffering and misery and poverty that the great masses of our people, the people of the world, suffer from." So my father went back to Philadelphia, helped, uh, got in touch with a, they called them single-taxers [?] in those days, and he found there was a single-taxer, I think he helped to start a singletax group, called the Philadelphia Single-Tax Society in Philadelphia, and uh, he uh, my grandmother came over from Ralway [?] and lived with him, to look after his three little children –

**Q:** Your grandmother on which side? Your father's side or your mother's side?

**A:** On my father's side. No, my mother's mother died when she was young. And uh, so his business began to prosper and he –

**Q:** What, what was he doing then?

**A:** He was then doing artwork. At first he, the first work he did was sculpture, he worked on, with one of the foremost artists in Philadelphia at that time, who had commissioned to do many of the statues in, uh, the, Philadelphia city hall, and that was just his first work and uh, I have pictures of some of those early days, after he graduated from the academy, and had gone into this business of sculpture and uh, he, uh, I, I can see [?] he, one of these pictures where he's working on one of these great equestrian horses that was in the, out standing around the city hall in Philadelphia. But then he had helped to start this business of himself, and some of the other students at the academy, uh, first was Stevens Conkling [?] and company, and then I think it was Stevens Armstrong and company, and uh, then he, uh, his younger brother came in, Henry G. Stevens, came in with him, he wasn't interested in social problems at all, but he was a good businessman, and so my father handled the art end of the business, and my uncle Henry Stevens, Uncle Harry, as we called him, handled the business end. And it's interesting, they were now in the national arts club, and uh, my uncle, Henry G. Stevens was one of the, as I remember, was one of the founders of this national arts club where we're, now we're sitting. And my father, soon after that, became a member of it, he also helped to start the, uh, the Philadelphia sketch club, uh, in Philadelphia, and the, and the, uh, one other, what was the other one, another art club in Philadelphia. And, but, uh, his real interest in life after meeting George was in carrying on this social reform and uh, he was very active in Philadelphia and New York, and later somewhat in Washington, and it was decided that uh, these men should uh, they decided that they wanted to start the, uh, try to take a state and initiate a so-called Henry George, or single-tax system or taxation, as a shining example for the rest of the states. Before going on with that, I'll say that I had a very exciting time, out in this big plant, out 48th and Girard Avenue in Philadelphia, where they had, they did a great deal [?] of artwork in clay and modeling plaster work, wrought iron, uh, wood carving, marble, artificial marble, plaster panels, a invention that the carried on [?] to make light panels for steamships -- all kinds of interior and exterior decoration and I used to be quite a pest around the class [?] in the day, and [unintelligible] using the blowpipes to blow uh, spitballs, not spitballs, but clay balls [unintelligible]. I can remember one of the sculptors out there grabbing me, chasing me and grabbing me by the legs and taking me over to the big

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box, an enormous box full of red clay and lowering me down, so that my curly hair went into the, into the, into the clay, which I well deserved. But I learned a considerable amount of the technique, by watching the others. I went to school in Philadelphia public schools, and uh, I went, I went to church with my grandmother as a little boy, a very little boy [garbled tape] well, after St. Paul's reform, the Episcopal church, the low Episcopal church, not the one that is very close to Catholic church, but it is very simple form of religion, and uh, the uh, I went to uh, kindergarten there, at that time, at first, when we lived in Philadelphia, after my mother's death, they moved down to, uh, Twelfth and Cuthbert [?] street, which is just north of Art [?] street, a little street and I think it had its center [?] on Twelfth Street, I can remember that as one of my earliest recollections, when I was a very tiny little chap, I guess, not more than three years old. And uh, later the, my father moved out to Filbert Street, Sixteen, Sixteen, Nineteen Filbert Street, and then later we moved to 1623 Filbert Street, and lived there for, oh, I think up until almost 1900. And uh, I went to, after I graduated from the kindergarten -- oh, yes, it's very interesting -- my father was a, a very progressively-minded man, far in advance in his thinking from most men, and uh, one illustration of that, which shocked my grandmother terribly, was that he didn't believe that uh, wisdom came with age, and he felt many [?] children are a lot more intelligent than their elders, so he didn't want us to look up on him, my sister and me, as a mighty person, over him [?] and he said he'd like to have us call him Frank. And that, as I said, shocked my poor grandma. She couldn't believe in that. That any father would suggest such a thing to his offspring, but my sister and I took to it -- oh, I forgot to say that my father, had one sister, an older sister, uh, she was Edith Eddy, Mrs. Charles Eddy, and she had married a successful Yankee businessman, Charles Eddy, who was the secretary, as I remember, of the American lithograph company, in New York, with offices at 18th and 4th Avenue. Just a couple of blocks from where we're now sitting. And was a very successful businessman, and so she came down to see my father after the death of my mother, and said, "Well, Frank, I realize what a terrible situation you are in, and let me take, uh, little Roger home to live to me, with me, until you get straightened out and work out a way to have him back." But he never came back to live with me, we used to visit back and forwards, we were very close all our lives, but he lived in Bail [or Bale or Vail?] New Jersey, and I would spend many of the months of the summer and he would come down and visit us in Philadelphia and spend Christmas with us, and so forth. So that, in spite of being geographically separated, we saw a great deal of each other, and we had uh, a very unusually close relationship all our lives. And uh, so, uh, I went to school at the Northeast Grammar School in Philadelphia, which was at 15th and Ray street, between 15th and Broad Street, on Ray. And, uh, I didn't take to school very easily. I guess I wasn't very bright or was bored to death, and I always aimed to, I never was left down, I always aimed to get the passing mark of 70 and always succeeded in making that, and uh, and then they used to have twelve grades in those days, and they had a change to eighth grade, and they said to the top grade, that if, if, the, if the top ones, would, would get passing marks, why, they could go in to take examinations to go into high school. And uh, so I thought, well, that might be more interesting than this, I guess, so I tried, and I succeeded in getting my passing mark, and then I was outraged when they wouldn't let me take examinations. So I, I, I said "Well, I don't want to go on anyway," and when I told my father that, he was delighted, because he had no use for the education that you got in a public school -- he didn't think that they really stimulated one very much, and they just aimed to absorb a certain amount each year, and graduate and finally get an examination and go on to high school, and so on into college, but he didn't think that it really stimulated- stimulated the growth of real education. So

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he was delighted, and he said "Well, Don, come on down and work in the shop." I don't know how old, I wasn't very old at that time. I'd guess, [unintelligible] eleven, eleven years old, or twelve, I don't know what it was. Anyhow, I enjoyed that very much, I remember the first job I worked in the office doing, uh, making out the payrolls every week, putting the, uh, correct amount of money in each of the envelopes, giving them to the men, and so forth, and there were other work that I did, then gradually I got into doing work in, in plaster and uh, I enjoyed that very much. But it certainly didn't give me the orthodox education, but to go back to what I said, that my father got very much interested in this idea that, uh, he helped stimulate, of let's see if we can put the single-tax over on a state, and since the Philadelphia single-tax society was one of the strongest in the country, and New York wasn't far away, where they had a strong movement, the Manhattan single-tax club, and another one in Washington, and uh, the single-tax movement was rather strong in that part of the country, why, it was decided that Delaware, which was a very little state, which only had 3 counties and lay just between Philadelphia and uh, and uh, Washington, and close to New York, just across the river from New Jersey, where there lots of singletaxers, they decided to make that the headquarters of this movement, in Wilmington, Delaware. And I can remember the big, uh, truck uh, with two big white horses, uh, used to haul a finished work of my father's out to the plant out in West Philadelphia, coming up the house one day, and unloading a number of very large boxes, and I can see my father opening them up, these were wooden crates in those days, and I was quite amazed to see what he took out -- he took out, uh, civil war uniforms of the union forces, and uh, I can see now, with the, down on the floor in the front room of our Philadelphia home, twenty, 1620 Filbert Street, were these knapsacks, which were made of sort of a black oilcloth about the, eighteen inches square, I think they were, and uh, they, about four inches deep. And uh, he drew lines on it and, I can see him, in white paint, writing about four inch letters of "single-tax" on the back. Of where these union soldiers used to carry their equipment. And uh, into that, the campaigners of the single-tax campaign of 1895 and 96 carried their literature, and I had a little suit made for me by some of the women who were single-taxers, I had the honor of being one of those who went down to Wilmington in May of, of uh, 1895, to uh, open up our headquarters, and my father rented a couple of floors down at Eighth, the second and third floor of Eighth and Market street, in Wilmington, the Northeast corner, and on the first floor, they had the offices and meeting room, and on the third floor, they were equipped with cots and blankets, because these George [?] many of them spent, would spend weeks there, and some would come and spend a weekend when they could, and others spent a good bit of their summers there, and uh, a great deal of it was done by walking all over the state, they had one train that went down, I think, in the afternoon to the lower part of Sussex county, which is the lower, lowest of the three counties. It was said that Delaware had three counties when the tide was out, two when it was in. Newcastle county was the one with the, about half the population of Delaware was in it, and had Wilmington as its big city, and then Kent county, with the capital in it of Dover, and uh, then uh, Sussex. So that uh, I had a very exciting summer, and we used to go down at the end of the wintertime, and it was a tremendously successful campaign, but it, it didn't succeed in uh, convincing the legislature, or assembly as they call it down there, to accept the saner and more just system that Henry George had evolved. And so after two years' campaign, uh, a man who was closer to my father than his brothers, he had two brothers, an older brother I didn't mention who lived in Bayon [?] his name was William P. Stevens, and uh he was a, he was a, became a dean of shipping. He was the editor of, uh, [unintelligible] and became one of the officials in the, these big international races and a close friend of Thomas Lipton

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[?] and so forth. So I, I, I spent a great deal of time in Bayon [?] there, with his very lovely wife, and she was sort of a second mother to me, and so the, the aunt Edith, Mrs. Charles Eddy was another second mother over there, and then down in Avondale, Pennsylvania, my mother's older sister, uh, Ann Fanny [?] had her home on a big farm, she was another mother to me. So I spent a great deal, I spent a great deal of the summer, my sister and I and my brother had these really four homes that we spent our time with. And then there were a number of the single-tax women who, uh, would look after us, so that, while we lost a very wonderful mother, we didn't know her, and these several women, uh, played very good parts as substitutes in looking after us. So we didn't, uh, we didn't have a feeling of being motherless. Well, Will Price was this man who was closer than a brother to my father. And he was really a terrific man, a genius in many ways, just as my father was, in many fields, like my father, he was an artist, and he was one of the foremost architects of that time in America. His name is, uh, Will, William Price, everyone called him Will Price. And uh, he, as an illustration of how good an architect he was, he, uh, he was the builder, designer, builder of the Marlborough-Blenheim [?] hotel in New York, in Atlantic City, and later the, uh, uh, what's the other one -- still famous today. It will occur to me later. Uh, but, like my father, he, he just lived for the single tax. So he said, "Well, Frank, we didn't, we didn't capture the state of Delaware, make it a Henry George state, uh, but let's make a working model of the system.

**Q:** You, you had some trouble [?] in jail, didn't you, on that single-tax campaign?

**A:** No, I was too young. I went to jail later. My father went to jail for so-called breaking the peace, down in Dover by speaking and obstructing traffic, they said, and he was, speaking not in the open, on the street corner, or anything of that kind, he was speaking in the great square there in Dover, but they, he was arrested, the second man to be arrested, the first man stepped up on the soapbox and he was hauled down by conservative old, uh, alderman or whatever he was, then my father stepped up, and he was hauled off, and others followed. They had, I think, about thirty of them were arrested, uh, during the next week or two. And uh, so uh, but I was too little for anything of that kind, I happened to be in Bayon [?] and I know uh, I, my aunt Edith opened the letter that my father had written me, showing that he had, he had sketched a picture of the jail and my aunt Edith was very conservative and she was shocked to think that her brother was in jail down there. But the, the governor of the, of the state was opposed to this outrageous, the persecution of these men who were not disturbing the peace of the community at all, and he pardoned all the, all the ones who had been sent to jail, and after that, they had no more trouble of that kind. But, uh, after the campaign was over, my father and Will Price began to plan for setting up a, a single-tax colony, as they called it in those days. And uh, in 19 uh, in 1900, in the spring of 1900, my father and uh, my stepmother, Ella Getty [?] her name was, and uh, she lived with us after my grandmother went back to live in, live with her daughter. And uh, they came down to Delaware, came down to the last station in Pennsylvania and walked down the railroad tracks, inquiring, when they got to Delaware, were there any farms that might be had at reasonable prices, and when they got down a little below Carpenter's station, which is just a little way from the state line between Delaware and Pennsylvania, they saw an old farmer plowing, and they said "Do you know of any farm that we could buy?" And he said "Well, yes, there's the old Derrickson [?] farm, just the other side of mine," he said "I think that you wouldn't have any trouble buying that -- it's a run-down farm, and there's an old tenant farmer on it, why, uh, I think that you could buy." So eventually, that was bought

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by Will Price and my father and turned into what they called the single-tax colony, and for the first few years, why, very few people settled there, and then it was found, it was a beautiful site of a hundred and sixty-two acres, sixty-three acres, and about seventy acres on it of woodlands, and a lovely little stream that ran through it, and a smaller stream on the other side, and uh, it became quite a popular place for a number of people, and for summer resort, and a number of the single-taxers from Philadelphia came down and settled there --

**Q:** How did it get its name?

**A:** Well, it was named Arden because my father and Will Price were lovers of Shakespeare and gifted actors, both of them were very clever actors, and uh, so they named it after the forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, where the exiled Duke lived. And uh, so, uh, it seemed very appropriate that these people, who were really exiled in a way should call it Arden. Uh, it's interesting that later, 19, that was 1900, and a group of us, eight of us single-taxers, by that time I was of age, in 1922 we succeeded in buying Jerry Harvey's farm, he was the one that'd pointed out this farm to my father, and he had a farm of a hundred and thirteen acres, I think it was, just to the east of Arden, reaching all the way down to the B & O railroad, which was about half a mile below Arden. And a group of eight of us created the second colony, and uh, later we called them enclaves instead of colony, which was more appropriate. But the colonies usually, for people who, uh, think the same way, and Will Price and Frank Stevens had laid down a rather unique uh, policy from the very beginning, that, as Will Price, I think it was, said, well, we won't set ourselves up as arbitrators of who should come in here. If this is going to be any success as an experiment, which might be accepted by the rest of the country, uh, we should not try just to have people who think the way we do come and live here. We should let anyone come in. And uh, so that was the policy they laid down, they never asked anyone, uh, who lived there, wanted to live there, who they were, or what their ancestors were, what color they were, or what national origin, and if they had the money, uh, to pay the first year's rent, that was all they'd need to put down, and they signed a lease, ninety-nine years, with the option of renewing it, so they had security and tenure, and uh, the early settlers, most of them built their own houses on the land, and they could use all their money for building their house, instead of having to put a lot of money into land. And uh, that was how Arden started. As I said, in 1922, it had been so successful that all the land was taken up, and that was one reason we wanted this second enclave, and we, uh, a group of eight of us laid down the same principle, and elected three trustees to hold the land in trust for the people who lived there, and assessing their land, the full rental value of the land each year, they simply paid this one amount, the assessed value, for each plot of ground they had, according to the area of it, and they didn't pay anything for the improvements. That was the underlying principle of Henry George. And if you kept your land idle, as is profitable in the exclave, you were just losing money, because you paid just as much if the land was idle as if had a fifty thousand dollar house on it. So, that system encourages progress, encourages people, or forces people to let go of land that they're not using, and letting other people use it. And uh, all the land, all the state just, as considered this enclave like an estate, and they billed the trustees every year, fortunately, in the country, they don't assess the full rental value, they assess, in those days, about half the rental value, so the balance of the money we could use for building roads and doing other improvements. And uh, I'll say that, uh, this, uh, system was so successful that we got the banks to take over a mortgage on this, as we had a sound system there, and they, uh, they took over a mortgage in Arden Town, which had a very

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heavy interest rate that we had to pay and uh, rather restrictive in some other ways, and the bank approved it, and when we, when we found another farm on the other side of us, of sixty acres came on the market that we could buy for, I think it was fifty thou-, fifty-five thousand dollars, why, uh, uh, two of us started a third Arden, and that's called Arden Croft [?].

**Q:** You and who else?

**A:** How's that?

**Q:** You and who else?

**A:** Who?

**Q:** Which two started it?

**A:** Buzz [?] Wehr [?] and I started it, and Henry George III, who was a grandson of the great Henry George, the three of us finally started, we got him to come in, so that we were the three -- Mr. Wehr and I did the initial start of the thing. And uh, it was a very, uh, interesting, that by that time, the uh, the uh, we had made Negro friends in Wilmington, and uh, they said "Well, I don't suppose we could have any land there." Well, we said, "We have the policy, that was started in 1900, we never ask anybody anything. If they have the money to rent it by the year, uh, we sign leases with them." And uh, over a Saturday and a Sunday, we disposed of practically every leasehold, almost a hundred leaseholds, to the people who had signed up their names. We had a hundred, I think it was a hundred, or pretty near a hundred numbers put into a hat and shaken up, and then the people who drew out numbers, and if you were number one, you got the first choice, number two, and so forth, of the land, and it was interesting that the, the first one who drew out number one was a Negro woman, very cultured, college graduate, a gifted concert musician, but we had, I would say, about twenty-five percent of the, of those who got land there in those days were Negroes. However, we, we don't have that many Negroes at present, because in the early days, it was very difficult for them to finance through the banks in Wilmington. And uh, although my father and Will Price and some of the others started a [unintelligible] credit system, and it was very helpful for people to get their start in house-building, why, we didn't have enough ready cash to uh, uh, allow everyone to build -- they could only have a little money for each one, so that, we had, later we had a B and L, which also helped, a building and loan, or building and loan association, which is still operating very successfully today. But up until recent years, it has been very difficult for Negroes, uh, in Delaware, as it is most places, to finance the building of a house.

**Q:** [Unintelligible]?

**A:** Well, one of the, showing, showing how much advanced Will Price and Frank Stevens were in their thinking was that uh, as I said, they didn't believe that wisdom came with age, and so we didn't have any suffrage age. Anyone who was interested could attend, the town was governed, after the trustees received the money, their job was to lease the land, and collect the income from the leaseholders and then pay the taxes and uh, see that the terms of the leases were carried out. But the government of the town was in New England town meeting system, in those days, we had a town meeting every month. And uh, they didn't have, of course, TV in those days, we didn't have radio, and we were too far away to have city diversions, so the uh, town meetings were interesting, not only to adults, but children. And uh,

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then we, we formed, and they, they could have a vote, if they were interested enough, and so they got interested in town affairs, as children today are not at all interested in the town affairs. And in fact, you go to the town meetings, and the younger people don't, don't uh, show up very much. Very few of them, until they get older and get married and so forth, they don't, the younger generation don't attend town meetings. But, uh, we had a lot of, of uh, interesting community activities, besides the monthly town meetings, and one of the earliest was, my father, who played the banjo and guitar, uh, uh, and some of the others who came down had instruments, and every Sunday, they used to go down to the woods, and we had a campfire, and we had, uh, community singing, and if anyone was a soloist, they would bring their violin, maybe, or they would ask somebody to accompany them while they sang songs and, or, we, we uh, however, we, for the most part, we liked to have everyone taking part in the community singing, and we sang a lot of the old Steven Foster and other songs of that kind, in those days, we didn't have jazz or popular music of a very high order, and uh, so we developed a, we developed a very great deal of community interest in music, and uh, we soon started a club which we called the Arden club, and that was, that had a library, and it had a dance floor, at first, before we acquired the big barn, and uh, we used to have dances there every Saturday night, we'd always chip in and get a couple of gallons of ice cream and invite the farmers in the neighborhood in, and we'd have a very neighborly dance evening. That was one of the things, and this was all started for one of the houses down there, that was called the Red House, which had been built by the son of the farmer who left after a year or two, so we turned it into our clubhouse, and uh, we didn't have room to dance, in those days, but we wanted to have dancing, because a number of them liked dancing, so we cooperatively built a dance floor, out from the side of this building, twenty feet wide and thirty feet long, and we put cedar posts up all around it, and strung wires all around those, and hung Japanese lanterns with candles in, so that we had a nice, attractive, and light enough dance floor, and we had cut a doorway from the side of, the north side of the uh, Red House, and we had a big square piano that we bought very cheap, and we rolled that up against the doorway, and that's how we had our music, and we'd have these jolly dances, and then we would have ice cream, and then often for diversion, a whole group of the younger generation would walk three miles down to the Delaware river and sit on the bank and sing some [unintelligible]. And so, we, we had a great deal of community life, and, uh, in 1908, uh, Scott Nehring [?] was down there, who taught economics at the university of Pennsylvania, and he was so interested in economics that he and my father soon started economics classes down there and uh, my father and Will Price started the, well, my father in 1905 started the beginning of drama there, well, in 1905 there was only a few houses down there, and uh, they'd tell of my father, after supper, he used to go out there with a spade, and there was a great big boulder there, about eight feet wide, five or six feet tall, and he, he just thought that was the wonderful backdrop for a, for a, stage, and then he built a flat [?] out of that, stone, or had the, some of the farmers who worked with him built up a stone proscenium there and then the set up, we had lots of chestnut trees in those days, and they set in two big chestnut trees on each side of the stage, and on top of that, my father modeled some decorative Greek capitals to cap them off. And that was the beginning of the drama, and when my father was working one evening, they tell that a couple of the old folks came by, and stopped, seeing him out there with a spade, doing something, they couldn't understand, what are you doing, Mr. Stevens? He said "Building a theater." And then they knew he was crazy, they thought anyway that it must be crazy, when here were these men came down and bought land and they didn't buy it and make a profit for themselves, they'd let anyone come in and uh, for six dollars a year,



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you could rent a whole acre and you didn't -- if you built a house on it, you didn't have to pay taxes on it, and uh, they, the trustees paid out of the economic rent that came in from the leaseholders, they paid all the state and county taxes in those days, and uh, so in a couple of years, however, we were playing Shakespeare almost every Saturday night. And the, the bulk of the actors were, uh, we youngsters, who brought our love of acting and playing, as we were in our, teenage kids. And uh, my father also was advanced in his thinking, because he, he felt that the, teenagers ought to have their fun without having, being under the restriction of not making noise for the elders and so forth. So he acquired a, a second house, which was built in Arden, it was a couple of hundred yards away from his house, and that was owned by the third trustee, a Frank Martin. Who was a, had a job with Will Price in his architect's office in Philadelphia. And Frank Martin, after there got to be maybe six or eight houses built around thought that he was, it was getting too popular, so he built a house in the woods, and my father bought this house, which we named the Admiral Benbo [?]. He, my father had been reading Treasure Island to us, and so he said that my sister Margaret and I could have that for our home, and uh, she was in her teens, early teens then, and so was I. And we lived there, and of course, she learned to cook and I did after a fashion, and then we could have our friends down from Philadelphia and New York and we, we had a square piano there, and we, we would have the jolliest times. And uh, we had simple diversions. I remember Will Price, uh, uh, had a couple of, he, he wasn't able to live there, because it was too far from his work, we didn't have very good commuting service, and so he had bought a section of land over near Swarthmore, between Media [?] and Swarthmore, which was, he called Rose Valley. And uh, he uh, what was I starting to tell about Will Price?

**Q:** Some of the diversions you had, some of the --

**A:** Oh yes! Yes, oh the, he, uh, my, uh, my father and Will Price got -- Scott Nearing [?] was the one really who started the, the club there, and they made that democratic, just as the, Arden was democratic, in that we had no blackballing at all. Anyone who lived in the place paid the annual dues to the club, which in those days, it was 1908, we started out with paying three dollars a year, so that anybody could join. And uh, so that was a, that was another illustration of their forward thinking. Uh, and uh, that policy has been maintained ever since. Although we've now some hundreds of members, um, anybody who lives in anyone of the three enclaves of Arden, Arden Town, Arden Croft, is on the same basis as everyone else. They are equal in the town meeting -- no one can say you can't come in, or get out. And uh, there are all degrees of economic situation. Some of them came in, hardly had a seat to their pants, you know? And they could get started by, uh, by working with some of the people and helping to build their houses, earn a little money, and then borrowing a little money from the [unintelligible] of the B and L, and building their own homes, and there are a number of people who, who became outstanding in our community, who had been farmers who had no future until Arden was started, and they got their little start of independence, and uh, that policy today is a sound one, just as it was in America in the early days, that everyone could come in, until they began to get afraid that we were getting in too many hunkies [?] or too many colored people, or too many, I mean, Chinese, they weren't allowed to have citizenship, or so forth, or Japanese, so that the, in many ways, this was a, uh, this was a remarkable experiment. Well, I, I got my first start, uh, in doing, uh, something besides working in the craft shop in Philadelphia, or rather the uh, shop of my father, when I, when my father went down there and wanted to have a place where we could spend a weekend, stay over Saturday and

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Sunday night, we had no place, there was nothing but this old barn, and this old [unintelligible]. And uh, so he went up uh, into Pennsylvania, and ordered a truckload of lumber and bought tools and he and his friends built a sixteen by sixteen summer shack, just one-inch board thick, and uh, had great flaps [?] on the side, to let in the air, and farmers built a big fireplace, about four feet wide, and –

**Q:** Where was this? Which house was this?

**A:** This was the house we are living in now, the old homestead, we call it now. That was in, that was built in the early days, I think in 1900 and uh, so uh, that's where we could spend a weekend and spend the summer months down there, and did up until 1909. In 1907 there was a great depression in America, and my father's business collapsed, along with many others, and he went back to modeling, and had a studio down south, uh Philip [?] Broad [?] street in Philadelphia, and then, uh, some of his single-tax friends urged him to become a lecturer and go out and lecture on the single-tax and a lecture bureau was started, and he did that for awhile. And then he expanded that lecturing and he, uh, took my brother and me on a tour around, fortunately, my, uh, my grandfather had a comfortable income, and had left, uh, he was a great man -- his name was Benjamin Akins, and he was Thomas Akins' and my mother's father. And he was a, chirographer [?] his business was writing, and uh, his writing was like engraving. It was so accurate. And my father, I remember, told me that all, at one time, all the diplomas for the University of Pennsylvania and for Jefferson Hospital [?] in Philadelphia were written uh, by my grandfather, copper plate, and uh, so uh, how did I get off on him?

**Q:** You were saying your father took you and your brother around?

**A:** Oh yes. Well, that, my grandfather would, had made a comfortable living, and so, at his death, he left part of his money to Uncle Tom, and part to Aunt Fanny, and other part to uh, uh, uh, a trust for my mother Caroline, Catty, they called her. So that my brother and sister and I had a little income that my uncle was the trustee of. And so we were able to loan [?] my father had suffered severe financial loss, we were able to afford to go abroad, my brother and I. [gap in tape] After lecturing on economics and uh, single-tax and [unintelligible] art, and economics, and a number of subjects, he decided he would go abroad and gather material for a lecture on half-a-dozen countries of Europe, and uh, in those times, it didn't, the dollar was something more than it is today, because I remember we sailed from Philadelphia on a ten-day trip to Amsterdam, no, Antwerp, it was ten days. And it cost each one of us fifty dollars, for the ten-days trip, from Philadelphia to Antwerp, and uh, so that was only a hundred dollars apiece on that, the boat fare back and forward. And uh, then my father gathered a lot of [unintelligible] and other rich, had maps of these countries that he was going to visit, and on the way over, he uh, absorbed it -- he had a terrific memory, almost memorize a whole page. I remember he had a, uh, he had a campaign for, I think the anti-vivisection group out in Harrisburg, they were trying to, my father was very much interested in the, in preventing vivisection and cruelty to animals and he was one of the foremost protagonist for that movement. And he had to go out to Harrisburg to address the legislature or assembly. And uh, he pretty nearly memorized a whole page of the newspaper for that occasion. Um, I mentioned vivisection because he was interested in many movements, and the reason he became interested in that was when my father, uh, and my mother were married, they lived at 1729 Mount Vernon for a time, uh, with my grandfather and uh, they were horrified to see the cattle driven through Mount Vernon Street, westward to the Schuylkill river, where they had abattoirs to kill them. And it so

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sickened them that they decided they wouldn't have anything to do with such a dirty, cruel business and uh, that took a great deal of courage in those days, because they didn't have too many vegetables, and they didn't have any refrigeration except ice, and uh, my father didn't like milk, he never liked milk and uh, he didn't like tomatoes, and but, he remained a vegetarian all his life, and so he became interested in anti-vivisection and uh, --

**Q:** What did you do while you were abroad?

**A:** What's that?

**Q:** What did you do when you were abroad?

**A:** Well, when we got there, we did, we did Belgium first [laughs]. My father selected, I think it was, two of the outstanding cities in each of the countries and uh, Belgium was the first, and I think the next was France. And the next was Germany and uh, when, [inaudible] Antwerp, yes, I think [?] three, oh yes, and then, then Italy [pause] and [unintelligible] we didn't go any further down than Venice. And then we uh, seem to have missed one of them, then we went to England, I remember, because my father, loving Shakespeare, wanted to spend a great deal of time in the Shakespeare country, and uh, we did several cities in England, and uh, it's interesting that uh, he made sketches, on his tour, and I had a camera, so I, I took a lot of pictures of our tour, and uh, he was able to use the, good many of the pictures that he had, they were ones that I made in my small camera, and uh, when in the Shakespeare country, uh, he came to a, was attracted by a very interesting, ancient house, he took out his sketchbook, and drew a picture of it, and uh, when we got home, he said, "Well, let's, let's build a permanent home, a yearround home." And so he did. And the, with the help of a, the farmers who were able to carpenter and hammer, hammer and hatchet, and so on. Carpenters, they used to call them. We built a very interesting duplicate of the house that he had seen in the Shakespeare country. And uh, I had my first experience in carving there. And barge boards, [?] and the figures at the top, I carved --

**Q:** Which house was that?

**A:** And that's the homestead.

**Q:** The Robertson's --

**A:** That's the Robertson's farm [?] [or that the Robertson's founded?]. Yeah. And uh, after my father died and my stepmother, when she died, left the, the uh, uh, in her will, left the property of the homestead, and the old homestead, which she and my father had used as their summer home, uh, for me during my life. But she very wisely, uh, left it to go be inherited by my two daughters, Hope and Peggy. And uh, so, uh, that was very wise. I'd probably, she thought I would spend the money on things, and that they wouldn't have anything, and so she very wisely did that.

**Q:** [Unintelligible].

**A:** She, she had, she was very penurious because she had, as a young girl, she had gotten a job, her parents had died very early, and she had a job sewing hatbands in hats. I think she got something, something miserable amount, like five dollars a month for five days' work, something that kind of -- terrible. And so she always looked after financial affairs.

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**Q:** How, how did [unintelligible]?

**A:** Well, uh, my sister went to the, uh, girls' high school in Philadelphia and uh, and uh, my wife who was one of her classmates, and uh, she was of Norwegian background, and everyone called her Inky, but her given name was Ingabov Von Delippa Crowan Skahnka [?] and then this kind of a drop, Stevens.

[Laughs]. Came on top of that. But she has been Inky-do, everyone, all her friends, ever since, her family all called her Inky, and she got her first love of drama, which has been one of her chief loves ever since, down in the early days of the theater in art [?] [gap in tape]

**Q:** [Unintelligible] How did, how did [unintelligible].

**A:** She, well, I first met her in Philadelphia and she has a memory like an elephant, I had forgotten, but she always delved [?] but my sister brought her down to our home, we'd moved, then to 15, 2015 Cherry Street, and uh, after school, one day, she brought Inky down to our home and I was sitting in the office there, lying back against cushions, and Inky brought in this school mate, and I was such a crude galoot, and when I was introduced, I just said well, "How do," and I didn't get up, I didn't shake her hand, and she, she never, she never forgave me for that. She brings it up all the time. So that the, that's how I met her. Then she used to come down and, uh, spend, visit us, you see, in the Admiral Benbo [?] and later she and Inky, she and Inky had a house together –

**Q:** In [unintelligible]?

**A:** No, uh, Inky, yes, Inky and uh, and uh, no, wait a sec -- I'm wrong on that -- oh, my sister died in 19-, in 19 uh 16. Same year, a few days, Will Price died, I think, three days after my sister. That was a terrible blow. And uh, but after that, Inky came down, and she and Jimmy Ware, who was one of the old early art guides [?] had a, a, uh, summer cottage together, right alongside of the theater. You can remember, as you drive down, past the theater to our house. They called it the rosary in those days. And uh, then later she uh, rented a little cottage, just the other side of ours, and there's nothing left of it today, but that's where the Southwell's lived, who were our neighbors to the north of us. And only, the only thing standing of that is the fireplace, and that's like the outdoor cooking places that they have back, only this is a great chimney and fireplace where they cook. And that, I'm, uh, Inky and I were married in, or decided to share our lives together in 1912, in May, May 12th, 1914. And there's so much more to tell, but I will have to defer that to another time.

**Q:** [Unintelligible].

**A:** But I wanted to –

**Q:** [Unintelligible].

**A:** Tell you that we, uh, we had just, uh, gotten our, our plans drawn for a house, and were starting to build a house, that, uh, we nicknamed, or christened the bide a wee, and had it well underway, in 1916 when uh, she was working in social work in Philadelphia and I had gotten a letter from, or a telephone call from a wealthy, Georgia [or George?] Fisk-Warren [?] and when Inky came home, we used to have to walk up and down to the station, about three-quarters of a mile from where we lived, and she came home, and I said "Dear, would you mind not finishing our house?" And uh, as we planned, why she said "Of course I would." All right then, I said, I'll write Fisk-Warren that you don't want to go and spend the

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summer over in Andorra, which was a little enclave of single-tax that he had started in the republic of Andorra, which is a tiny republic, an ancient republic, 16 miles in diameter between France and Spain, both of them having such a jealous eye on it that neither would let the other have it, so it became a republic. And uh, so we had a very wonderful visit to Spain in those days. And uh, and uh, Spain and France and England, and spent several weeks in Andorra. Fisk-Warren wanted us to come, because he wanted to have our advice about having been old organizers [?] about this new enclave he was setting up, and we found it very unrealistic, because it was so small it was insignificant but it was something that he was very proud of, and we were able to help him in several ways. One of his trustees, we were able to discover, was a crook. [Laughs]. He got rid of him. So, uh, but, I, I'll say one other thing, because you asked about it -- my father hated war, and uh, so did Will Price, and they fought against war, they fought our entrance into the Spanish-American war, and fought to have it ended. And uh, when World War I came along, why they bitterly fought against our entrance into that, and so naturally I became a pacifist and uh, naturally, uh, when I didn't believe in killing animals, I was a vegetarian all my life, because my father and mother had been, and my sister and brother and I never knew anything different, and uh, my brother's aunt respected his father's wishes and uh, so he never ate any meat, and neither did I, and neither did my sister Margaret, and later, neither of our two daughters, Hope or Peg, they continued to be vegetarians. But naturally, when I was called to take part in mass killing of World War I, I simply told them that I, I wouldn't do that, I didn't believe in killing, I didn't believe in killing animals, I certainly wasn't going to obey the commands of the government to go in and kill people that I didn't know and had nothing against. And so I did my bit for democracy, small as it was, in jail, in a workhouse, outside of uh, Wilmington, about six miles out of Wilmington. That was a tremendously educational experience for me, and it taught me a great deal about human nature and about the stupidity of jails and I was able, I'm glad to say, after I got out, it was a dirty, filthy hole, and diseaseridden, and people were dying there, who shouldn't have died, so uh, I got interested in prison reform and got actively interested, of course, in pacifism, and have been ever since. And today --

**Q:** One, one more [unintelligible] thing --

**A:** And, but --

**Q:** [Unintelligible].

**A:** Well, uh, I forgot that I'm not only an ex-con, but I'm a recidivist. That was my second session in jail. Because in 19 uh in 1911, we had quite a ruckus in Arden, because of an anarchist who came there, who got uh, he was a very brilliant, self-educated English man, a shoemaker and he came down there -- although Henry George followers begged my father not to let Reese [?] Reese Landon [?] in, but Will Price and Frank Stevens said "Yes, he has a right, even if he is a troublemaker." So they had him as a, as a tenant, and he was quite an able actor. But he sometimes came drunk to the rehearsals, and my father finally told him, "If you come drunk to rehearsal, we just can't have you." So he did, and my father did, and we wouldn't have him in, and therefore he came to economic classes, and began to shock the people by very frank talk about being an anarchist -- he and his wife weren't married, and all kinds of things, and so, that caused a great deal of consternation. I was president of the club in 1911, so I, I had a problem of what to do. And uh, oh, it was in 19-, yes that's right. All the directors except a Quaker urged that we must have him arrested and restrained under the magistrate, of disturbing us. And uh, they

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thought it was a simple solution. Well, we didn't think so, but we finally, since we were outvoted, we decided "Well, go ahead and do it." See what happens of it. And by gosh, what happened next [unintelligible]. What happened was that the, after he spent five days on the rock pile, he came out loaded for bear [?] and he came out, the next Sunday, to the ballfield with a pen and pencil and took the names of all the baseball teams, and he, for publicity purposes, he went up to the tennis court and took the name of Upton Sinclair, who was playing tennis, and so ten of us were summoned to go in and be tried by the magistrate, and the magistrate put a big fine on us, of course, it was about eighty dollars and sixty-five cents, I think. And we all said this thing was unjust, that we were arrested for breaking a rule which was not a rule that applied to sports at all, it applied to gaming on the Sabbath, and um, it was an old colonial law, I think, practiced, and so we refused to pay the fine, and we took the, the uh, I don't know if it was a magistrate or a constable to an ice-cream parlor and, with all of our friends, and we had a great spread of ice cream, and then we were taken out to the jail, put in jail [laughs] and we only were given eighteen hours, which was ridiculous, but we were put into jail suits the next day. But Upton Sinclair, being in there, and we were put on the stone pile, too, and we had lots of fun on that. And we [laughs] we, uh, we rather upset the prisoners because they, we would throw the stones into the wheelbarrows and roll them up, and dump them off, and run back for more. They said "Slow down! Don't do that, don't raise the standard of work that way -- we're not going to work like that." And so we had to slow down. But when we came out, there were, I think, twenty-one reporters and photographers out there, and even from New York, but mostly from Philadelphia and Wilmington, and Washington, and so, they wrote poems about it and it was a national story, Upton Sinclair wrote his famous poem the, the uh, what did he call it? The Jungle? No, the Menagerie. And he compared society putting human beings behind bars, the way society put the animals behind, and it was a, it went from one end of the country to the other, and one of them wrote a poem of ten little Ardenites, like the ten little Indians, so it was quite an experience. So that the, that was my first experience, and my second one, then was going to jail in World War I. So I became a recidivist. But I got Thomas Mott Osborne [?] down when I came out, and he blew the lid off the place, 'cause it was such a filthy hole. Well, I think that's enough. I didn't mean to talk so much. Is there anything else you want to ask?

**Q:** What did you think about my father?

**A:** Oh, yes. Well, he, your father is a recidivist, too. [Laughs]. Because while he was married, as you, while he, he, his father was a Unitarian minister, became the dean of Unitarian ministers, Henry Wilder Foote, of Cambridge, I guess it was, wasn't it? And uh, but his, his mother, uh, belonged to a very old Quaker family in Philadelphia, the Copes. And uh, so that the, Caleb [?] Foote uh, uh, went to Harvard, did the right things as most Foote, Footes did, and then went to uh, Columbia. But he began to be interested in social and economic problems, and he became very much wrought up over the fact that, uh, what our government was doing to the inoffensive Japanese-American citizens and uh, those who were not allowed to be citizens, their parents, and so he uh, was sent by A.J. Mustie [?] of the Fellowship for Reconciliation out to the West Coast to uh, carry on the work of trying to help these people who were being uprooted. Peaceful people, the FBI never had a case against any of them, while they had plenty against the Germans and the Italians, but who were politically strong, and so they didn't do much to them, but they uprooted these very industrious and very peace-loving and uh, cultured people, and uh, uprooted them from their farms and their homes on the West Coast, many of them were quite

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wellto-do, and many had built up the desert into blossoming farms which, uh, some of the Anglo-Saxons wanted to get hold of, and the people out in California put enough pressure on the government in Washington, to the shame of FDR, that they uprooted these innocent people and gave them ten days to dispose of what they had in the way of possessions and carry just two suitcases each, as I remembered, and go out, mostly into the desert. They were transported into, temporarily into racetracks and other places, and then taken out into faraway places in the desert, and uh, it outraged a good many liberal Americans, among others, my daughter Peggy, my younger daughter. And she got a job, instead of going on and getting her master's, she got a job, out in one of those terrible camps out in the –

**Q:** [Unintelligible] my mother?

**A:** No, that was –

**Q:** Peggy.

**A:** Peggy.

**Q:** OK.

**A:** No, but uh, well, it's quite a saga on that, but Peggy, Peggy got a job, uh, uh, in one of the, these camps, teaching children, and she came, Caleb Foote, oh, well I'll have to take up your mother, Hopey [?], both of them had gone to Russia with us, and they had, six and eight years old, and their first real schools were village school. And so then they had to go on into progressive education, in New England, because they wouldn't fit into public schools that later both of them went into progressive colleges. Hopey in Black Mountain, down in North Carolina, and Peggy in the New School [?] which was an offspring of teachers' college, Columbia. And uh, Hopey, when she got out of Black Mountain, got her first job up in, uh, [pause] where Mrs. Roosevelt lived -- terrible, isn't that awful? Not Peekskill but Hyde Park. She got a job at a progressive school out there, teaching art.

**Q:** How did she end up in California?

**A:** What's that?

**Q:** How did she end up in California?

**A:** She had come under the Quaker influence, and the Quakers had started work camps all over and one of them that attracted her was Hidden Valley, I think it was called, out in California. And so she went out to California to spend the summer and in comes a very attractive, charming Lothario, working for Fellowship for Reconciliation. And he gave a lecture to these girls on this question.