Interview with Constance H. Dallas
November 5, 1979

Here I have a group of questions which you have posed and so I shall start right with the first question. And the question is when you lived in Chestnut Hill back in the days before the Clark administration were you active in civic activities? If so, did some of your activities extend down to Center City? When I lived in Chestnut Hill I spent the first 25 years of my married life bringing up the family and I did some civic work if you call teaching in the church and teaching in the confirmation class and then teaching in the diocese of Pennsylvania a short course on teaching teachers how to teach. When I was 30 years old while I was still bringing up the children I was elected President of the House of the Holy Child, which was a caring agency for little Negro girls founded by Miss Edith Wharton Dallas. She had looked around in the mid-19th century to the late 19th century and had inquired what was the most neglected area in Philadelphia or the most neglected field in Philadelphia and she was told by church people and civic people that there was absolutely nothing being done for Negro orphan girls. The little boys could sometimes get jobs selling papers or running errands but the little girls were hopelessly lost. So she founded the House of the Holy Child and many many years later I became its president. That was a civic job and it is now known as Children's Service, Inc. and it is part of the United Fund. It's at 311 South Juniper. And it has changed its emphasis to being a foster home care agency and it takes, I believe, both boys and girls. But I'm not close to it now.

Let's think what else I did. I'm sure I did other things.

(MBP: Connie, were you ever involved with the League of Women Voters?)

No, I wasn't. In the first place I didn't become acquainted with it until I began to run for City Council and then they asked me to be a speaker at their luncheon. And they had asked my opponent to speak and they were so naive they
didn't realize that if he stayed away that I wouldn't speak. I couldn't speak. They wouldn't let me speak because my opponent didn't appear. And so I felt that the League of Women Voters was therefore pretty naive organization at the time. Now since then I have joined it and I'm currently a member of it and I'm very much interested in the effort in this township. But at that time I was not interested because they seemed to be a little naive and they had not yet gotten their bearings in the ways of politics.

Now, the next question -- am I correct in my recollection that your husband, George, was descended from one of the presidents of the United States? No, he was not. He was descended from the brother of the Vice President -- wait, let's get this straight! His great-grandfather was a Vice President of the United States under Polk and he was the United States minister to Russia. And in 1856, he was Ambassador to the Court of St. James and the most useful thing he seems to have done is to have brought Texas into the union. That's why Dallas, Texas is named Dallas. Now he was my husband's great-uncle, not great grandfather. And the second part of your question is -- if that is so, did your legacy of public service stem from that kind of background in George's family? Definitely not! It's because I was brought up in a family that thought you should always do some public service or something for your community. And I wasn't at all fascinated or hypnotized by George's ancestry other than that they were colorful, useful, interesting people. But I've always been interested in genealogy because I'm interested in genetics and I have studied psychology for more than 50 years. And I started that when the children were babies. I went over to take courses at the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital that were given for young mothers in bringing up children. Dr. Strecker had a course for young mothers in discipline, teaching, and so forth and it was very useful for young mothers. So that must have been 1930, when I was 28.

I was very interested in both of our families backgrounds because we found that in many places our ancestors had known each other, had worked with each other, or had sometimes married each other. We were both descended from a whole line of English kings, and many people are, though they haven't the means of knowing it. Now, curiously, we had the means of knowing it. We had certified genealogies. And so that was just picturesque and interesting and it made us sometimes joke a little bit and laugh about it.

For instance, my mother Anna Le Conte Brook Shaw as the original daughter of the Revolution (not the DAR) bought the first piece of land to make Valley Forge a National Shrine. My grandfather, David Brooks, helped develop what is now known as the Electric Region, the Franklin Institute. 
In my family it was a tradition that everybody should save a little time for the community in which they lived and my grandfather Snow was commended for serving in his community and mother was in her community so it was just part of the atmosphere at home.

Now number three question is what led to your being elected the first woman councilman? Had you run for any other office prior to your election to Council?
No, I had not. In fact, I rather -- I intensely disliked politics and I thought any way I would serve would be such as the House of the Holy Child, but I did not want to go into politics one little bit. However, I had taught church school and I had gained some ideas from that of being of service and when Joe Clark telephoned me up in Bucks County -- we were up at our log cabin in the woods in Bucks County -- he telephoned me and said that he and Dick Dilworth were forming a team to try to do some reform work in the City of Philadelphia. And he said they had a full Council slate, but they had no Protestant and they had no women. They had enough Jews and enough Catholics on the Council slate but no woman and no Protestant and I would do two for one. So would I do it? Now, in the meanwhile I had asked to be a watcher at the polls and I immediately said no to that. And then I felt a twinge of conscience because in church school George had written a course called the Social Responsibilities of Christian Church membership. And I thought there I go teaching a course like that and I won't even serve at the polls! So I ran after the man down the street -- it was Mr. Nicoletti, who ran a cigar store in Chestnut Hill -- and I said alright, I'll serve. Now I've written a biographical chapter on this, which I'll let you see if you like, because two psychoanalysts and three psychiatrists have asked me to do a biography. And I've started one or two or three times and I never can get interested in doing it. But that was the story. I felt conscience-stricken and I said I would serve at the polls.

Well that led to one thing after the other and Allen Doty called me up -- he was a lawyer in Philadelphia -- and asked if I would be a committeeman and of course I said no. I didn't want to be a committeeman. I didn't want to go into politics. But he said that's why we have bad government because people like you won't serve. So I finally said alright. And then when Joe Clark called me
up I said I couldn't do that! That's too much responsibility. I still have children at home. They were grown up, but they were not married. And so I said I couldn't do it. And Dick Dilworth whispered in my ear one time and he said don't you dare ever repeat this, but we can't possibly win. So I said alright, then I'll run. So I ran in 1946 and true to Dick's prediction we did not win. And then following that both our daughters were married and our son went off to Harvard. Well, that made a big difference when four years were up and they came up to me -- Jim Finnegan came back to me and said now will you run? And I had spent four years at the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital doing civic work as I considered it there. Doing public relations for the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital. Well, I leaned an awful lot there and it was the most marvelous preparation for City Council. Couldn't ask for anything better! So I said alright, I'll run. And that was the beginning of it.

(MBP: You ran at large didn't you?)

No. I ran for the district and I loved that! I loved the interest of getting to know what the grass roots were in my district. I loved seeing life in the vertical instead of the horizontal and I made over 300 calls on foot to little businesses in my district -- the undertaker, the bartender, and I still get Christmas cards from one of the bartenders in Manyunk -- he owned Mom's Bar on Main Street in Manyunk.

(MBP: Connie, who was your opponent?)

I believe my opponent was Harry Galfand, but you'll have to understand that my 77-year-old memory is not perfect. We'll have to verify some of my comments, but I'll tell you every time I feel an uncertainty. So far, I always know when I'm uncertain.

Now you ask -- what do you think were the most important contributions during your four years as Councilman? I have so many things to be thankful and happy about. I should say the number one is that I was able to pass, after great resistance, public resistance and political resistance, the first comprehensive health code the city ever had. Then I was able to pass the first air pollution code -- the ordinance -- and that was fought by all sorts of organizations -- from the shoe stores that used to x-ray your feet, to the PublicAlcohol (?) that had a terrible smoking chimney down on the waterfront. Ever so many. I had thirteen months of hearings on that bill. But it got through, thank goodness. And then I had to carry
through the ordinance for the Tinicum Wildlife Preserve. Now Austin Jenkins was wonderful as the civilian backer of that, and producer of that bill. And he took it to Joe Clark, who was the Mayor. But the law had to be passed by Council and I finally got that through when all the factories alongside the Tinicum Marsh wanted to use it for a dumping ground. And they had been using it for a dumping ground. I will not name those factories because now they have become very helpful. But anyway there was great opposition to it. So those were happy things. I was able to stop an ordinance for building a bridge across the Cresheim Valley that would have cost several million dollars. Now it would cost several more million dollars. But that was supposed to run into Lincoln Drive -- from Allen Lane to Lincoln Drive. And I was able to pass the bill to pave the Cresheim Valley drive, which is Emlen Street going to the Cresheim Valley. And it took a good deal of doing and a good deal of effort and a good many hearings. But we got that through.

Then, I was awfully glad to get the Henry Ave. extension of three miles up through Roxborough. And the city Fire Department had pointed out to me that Ridge Avenue had a 9% grade on the lower end and that Manyunk Main Street and Ridge Avenue up above were very congested routes and there was no third artery for possible use in case of fire. So that cost three million dollars -- I think over three million dollars -- but we finally got that through. And that was what caused my being defeated for reelection, but it was the right thing to do and it was a great help to the real estate people who wanted to have houses and apartments going up through Roxborough along the edge of the Wissahickon and on the opposite side of the road. So it has been a blessing to Roxborough ever since.

(WMP: Why did it cause you to be defeated?)

Because it was opposed by John B. Kelly and Isaac Levy, who lived on Huntingdon, and were very strong politically.

(MBP: Connie what were your greatest frustrations?)

I don't remember any frustrations really. The other councilmen were singularly helpful and kindly and cooperative even if they disagreed with me. I had the most marvelous secretary, who is now a number three in the state department...
and she is counselor to the Ambassador at Nairobi.

I was the only councilman who had the chairmanship of two councilmanic committees and I think that was given to me to keep me so terribly busy that I couldn't possibly interfere with some of the political shinnanigans and it also made it impossible for me to do some of the things I wanted to do for the sake of the health committee. For instance, the Commissioner of Health and the wanted me to go over to the morgue and inspect the morgue and to see how that was handled and how certain things to do with death in Philadelphia was handled. Well, I never did get time to do that. The women in the Police Department wanted me to see what I could do about women in the Police Department. I was unable to do it even though I worked very closely with the Commissioner of Police, who was a wonderful man. He was a great man. That was Commissioner Gibbons. We've never had anything since to equal it.

Now question five -- having been such an effective councilman would you describe what circumstances led to your defeat? I think the one thing that led to my defeat was my being successful on the bill for the extension of Henry Ave. because I won over terrific political opposition, led by Mr. John B. Kelly, unfortunately, because he had done many good things for the city. But he did not want the cars and trucks to be able to go past his house and he did not want me to have the authority to put that bill through. He had asked me when I first went into city council -- in fact, he had told me -- that I should take my orders from him. And I told him that I had campaigned on not taking orders from anybody. So he rather resented my going ahead with this bill. But the Commissioner of Streets wanted it, the Department of Streets in the state wanted it, and we got it through in spite of Mr. Kelly and Mr. Isaac Levy, who supported him enormously because it meant the trucks would go by his property right near the Henry Ave. bridge and therefore I was defeated because the Manyunk newspaper, I'm told, was bought by Mr. Kelly. But I better not tell you these things that are what I was told but I have no documentation on it.

(MBP: Connie, what were some of the methods they used to defeat you?)

Methods used were to buy little local newspapers and much election material was circulated making false statements
that I was about to put an incinerator in a cemetery in Roxborough, that I was about to put trucks --- allow trucks to go on Lincoln Drive --- that I had all these plans, none of which were true. Other things of this sort. And it led to my being defeated by 250 votes out of 25,000. They had to have a recount. We had a recount and on the recount it showed up about 250 votes against 25,000 and yet when I was elected four years before I had 2500 votes for me. If I ....

(MBP: Connie, what was the real reason that Jack Kelly was so disturbed by the Henry Ave. extension?)

I do not know the real reason, or which reason comes first. But these are the reasons -- in the first place, he didn't want me to pass trucks in front of his house --- the trucks would be a menace and noisy in front of his lovely house and the same was true of Mr. Levy. The other reason was he did not want me to have the power to pass such an important bill and he wanted to denegrate me. And so this was an opportunity to fight me and defeat me. In other words, he wanted me to take orders from him, as a political boss.

Question number six -- after you were defeated for City Council, did you continue to remain active in public affairs? In a way I did, quite a lot. I was appointed a Commissioner of Valley Forge Park under Governor Scranton and I was immensely interested in that because my mother bought the first piece of ground to make Valley Forge a national monument. Now she bought it for a historical society to which she belonged, which no longer exists. But it was very touching to me that she would have done that and I would be on the Valley Forge Park Commission. Then Governor Scranton was nice enough to appoint me, as the Democrat, on his pretty much Republican Pennsylvanians for Economic Growth, that was known as 100,000 Pennsylvanians. And I served under Governor Scranton and four governors altogether --- following Scranton. And that has been a very effective committee. They say some people thought it became too political. I know under Scranton it was not political --- that he had an ambition to develop the economic growth of Pennsylvania and we thought of such things as Valley Forge Park and great tourist attractions and more funds were given to Valley Forge Park. We thought of the Grand Canyon of Pennsylvania --- all these things that would develop tourism because tourism is a second source of revenue for the state of Virginia, or it was at that time.
And Pennsylvania was losing manufacturing and losing certain other revenues -- railroads were being supplanted by truck use -- so that I thought that was very interesting and a very positive thing. But that committee has gone out of existence under Governor Shapp because he had no faith in it at all. It may be that it had deteriorated because there were many representatives of industry on it all around the state and I couldn't possibly know what some of my fellow committee members were doing. But Governor Shapp terminated it and put it into the Department of Commerce where I thought it should never be. It really wasn't a proper thing for the Department of Commerce. It should have been independent.

I was on a committee of outstanding Philadelphia women to go up to the Westover Air Force Base in Massachusetts and inspect that and I'd better not say anything more about that until I look up the documents.

I ran the Community Service Office at the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital. I've served for twenty years on the Board of Governors of the Menninger Foundation, which is international and national. If you want to know certain things that I've done apart from the government. There are several more committees, etc.

The seventh question is when did you join Parrish and Company, investment firm, and how did you manage to carry such a load -- working for a living and your other activities? The first question of joining Parrish and Company -- I think it was in late 1956 when I joined them. And I had turned that job down three times. I've turned every job down I've ever had. I arrived at it somewhat against my will but because it made sense. And Parrish and Company made sense because I would have Saturdays off to be with George and there would always be somebody to take my telephone calls if I was called out -- because by that time he had begun having strokes. He had nine strokes over ten years. And it was necessary for me to go to work because we didn't have enough to live on if I didn't. He had to give up his job and he had worked for -- no firm that he worked for had a pension plan or a retirement fund. At the time of our marriage he was supposed to be the inheritor of plenty. So he did not get the inheritance, you see, and it was a very serious situation. The Depression used up the inheritance. So I went to work for Parrish and Company after looking into several things. And they
had asked me three times and twice I said I couldn't do it but I finally did it. Don Rubel invited me three times. I came in there and we -- I was able to swing it because the state department had sent me to Germany in 1953 on a U.S. specialist team of ten people from different cities to be -- the Germans had asked for us to talk about citizenship participation in local affairs. Well, that had been what I had been doing for the last ten years. And so the Germans had asked for me because we had had three of them visit in our house when the German team came over here under our state department in 1949 or '50. So in 1953 they asked for us to come over there. And Johannes Hoeber and Elizabeth Greenfield, and Eleanor Wolf, now Newbold, were a committee with a professor from Temple, who later became the President of Girard College. They were the people who ok'd the people to go. And the German people had asked for me and they asked for two other people which they had visited with when they were here. When I was over there the daughter of the Secretary of Social Welfare of the state of (?) asked me if she could stay in our house if she should come over to see the United States. And I told her that she couldn't because we had two Japanese staying with us then that the church had sent us. They stayed to spend the weekend and stayed three years. He stayed three years and he asked if his brother could come and he came. And just this past week I've been down in Washington visiting them and seeing him getting an honor from our state department after our government had so cruelly treated them after the second world war. It was really amazing. But the Japanese first helped us in order to earn their board -- they did the marketing and so forth. And George had had a mild stroke and it was alright for him to be in the house alone -- and he worked at the hardware store in Chestnut Hill for a little while until he had a stroke right there in the hardware store. And then following him, the -- when the Japanese left there was room for the German girl and the first one came over and she stayed two years and then she asked if her friend could come over and so her friend came over and she stayed a little over a year and she asked if her sister could come and it went on and on like that.

So finally I had some divinity students come to take care of George from the Lutheran Seminary in Mt. Airy. So I 

somebody there when I wasn't there and a lot of the time George was able to be there by himself and when he wasn't able to be there by himself a woman who was my client in brokerage had tried to get a part-time job and had failed and she came out to take care of him for four or five hours a day. And she has been our friend for twenty years now.
Question eight — did you not have a hideaway place in Bucks County? We certainly did, but we could not use it after George became ill. But we had had it for 30 years and it had been wonderful during the years that I was in city council and before that it had been perfectly wonderful when the children were growing up. We went up there when George was a baby in arms and we used to have George's ornithological society group up there — they would come at 4 o'clock in the morning during the migratory season and walk in the fields and woods and see the birds and then I'd make breakfast for them. And we had as many as 28 people at one time. And I have right here living in Dunwoody with me one of the people who came!

Now I think that is enough for that. Question number nine — when Joe Clark went to England to present a citation to Winston Churchill I have a recollection that you were there representing with Joe the city of Philadelphia? May I correct you on that? I did not represent the city of Philadelphia. I represented the Poor Richard Club. They asked me to go. And I brought out for your amusement the citation they gave me afterwards because I was given a cigar of Sir Winston Churchill's. I went to a luncheon that the Lord Mayor of Westminster gave for Sir Winston Churchill and there were twelve of us at the Ritz Hotel in London and when the cigars were passed to Sir Winston and to everybody else they came around by me and I said I certainly want one as a souvenir and I presented that to the Poor Richard Club and that is my favorite citation!

(MBP: Connie, thank you very much. That was a splendid interview.)