Interview with Randolph E. Wise

1/12/78

(in Walter M. Phillip's home)

I attended Boston College, and completed my course in 1935, which, you will recall, was the peak of the Depression years. Employment was difficult to come by, Roosevelt's social security program was just gaining momentum, and they were looking for male, professional social workers, male social workers with their Master's degree. At that time, in 1938, Boston College opened a graduate School of Social Work. And I attended that school, and obtained my degree in 1938.

I held a position in New York for a year, then came to Philadelphia, worked in a small juvenile delinquency agency, the Inter-Agency Council for Youth, for a short time, and then went to the United States Court as a United States probation officer.

There had been some scandal in that court. The chief probation officer was alleged to be acting in a way that was not consistent with the best interests of the office, and changes were made. The chief probation officer from the district of Richmond, Virginia, Carroll Minor, was brought to Philadelphia to straighten out the office. It was he who recruited me to go to that agency as a probation officer.

Shortly thereafter, the government was conducting a very large investigation in Newark, New Jersey, that involved the Mafia, and they were seeking assistants from the outside. I was assigned to assist in their investigation. After about two weeks of doing investigative work in the
Newark area, I received a call to come back to Philadelphia at once. Carroll Minor had accepted a position with the U.S. Department of Justice, the Bureau of Prisons, and I was then made the chief probation officer for the eastern district of Pennsylvania.

That left a vacancy. While in Newark, I was very much impressed with a probation officer of that district. I asked that he join us in Philadelphia, and he agreed. From that day until this day, we've been together in our work. That man is Ed Hendrick, who was the superintendent of prisons while I served as Welfare Commissioner.

The war came and I entered the U.S. Navy. Ed became the acting chief, then shortly thereafter, he entered the service as well. Upon completion of the war, I returned to my position in 1946. Then, in 1949, I went with a national agency, which was then the National Probation and Parole Association. Today, it's known as the National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

I stayed there until 1952, when Joe Clark appointed me Welfare Commissioner, and that came about in this way.

I was on a survey in the state of Maryland at the time, and I would come home on weekends. I had received calls to put my name in the hat for the Welfare Commissioner's job, but through my own inquiry, learned that the position had already been committed. However, the urging continued, and I prepared a dossier of myself and submitted it to Matt McCloskey.
I was advised to do that by Leo Kirk, who said that Matt had done an awful lot for the party, and had not sought anything in return. I met with Matt, and he apparently was sufficiently impressed. He then directed Bill Teefy to take my dossier over to Jim Finnegan, and with apparent agreement there, he called Joe Clark. Joe Clark called me into his office, where I met with him and Buck Sawyer.

They were noncommittal at that time, and the first meeting ended with an indication that there'd be further discussion.

(WMP: This was about how much before Joe got into office?)

After the election and before he was sworn in. I would say it was in early December of 1951.

You will recall that they had a citizens' committee of very distinguished Philadelphians recommending names for the departments. They may have been involved in recommendations for health also, but I'm not so sure about that. All candidates for the position had to appear before this committee.

Going back to my conversations with Joe and Buck Sawyer, I felt that Joe was at the point of no return on his prior commitment. I told him that although I'd like very much to be a member of his official family, I appreciated his position, and if not selected, I would still like to serve in his unofficial family.

He had a real problem at that time. He had already appointed Tom Gibbons, already appointed Frank McNamee, had already appointed Bernie
Kelly (who later became a Judge)...

(WMP: Yeah. Bernie Kelly.)

...as deputy managing director, and he said to me that he can't make this an all-Catholic administration, he can't make it all-Protestant, he can't make it all-Black, he can't make it all-Jewish. I understood that fully, and was reconciled to the fact, but I gave it a try anyway, and for a good reason I didn't make it.

I returned to the survey in Maryland, then got a call from Buck Sawyer to see him, rather quickly. I did, and he told me I had the position.

Then...I guess you'll use your own good judgment as to what will be deleted...

(WMP: Well we don't usually delete anything...) 

(BF: That will be up to you. We'll give you a transcript of what you say, and you can make corrections. However we don't correct the tapes so you have to use your judgment as you go along, I guess.)

Well, I have to recall that I almost resigned from the job before I started it. Joe suggested that I propose names for deputies, and that I not select a Catholic. Well, he implied a strong pitch for Johannes Hoeber. As I saw the department at that time (it underwent very substantial changes as a result of the charter), I needed a deputy for social services and I needed a deputy for correctional services. And here's where Ed Hendrick enters again. He was the only one in Phila-
delphia who had the necessary qualifications on the correctional side, outstanding credentials that Johannes Hoeber did not, and I don't think he was particularly interested in that area anyway. So, the time came for me to return to Joe with my names, and Buck Sawyer was there, and I gave him the names. All he said was, I thought I told you not to come up with a Catholic.

Well, I said, I was very aware of that, but I searched dutifully, and there was no one who could compare with the background and talents of Ed Hendrick, and that I felt that the credentials should be considered primary. Joe wouldn't move an inch, and I wouldn't either. Although it was a very polite conversation, what was going through my head was, "I don't know if I want to get in this kind of a ball game, if I'm going to be told what moves to make." I was ready to concede and to give up and return to my study in Maryland.

All the time Buck didn't say a word. So my last shot when I realized that we were at an impasse, was something to the effect that this is a large department now (under the charter it was going to become much larger), and that I would like very much to have an administrative deputy. Then, for the first time, Buck spoke. He said...Joe, Randy has a very good point there. We can do it. We can have two exempt deputies, and one on the civil service. So that's how it worked out. Manny Kaufman took the exam and he was the civil service deputy; Ed and Johannes were the exempt. It was certainly to my gratification that things worked out that way, because, as you well know, Johannes was a fellow with
great talent and he aided me considerably.

So then the fun began. Tom McHenry was chairman of the City Commissioners, and up to that time, the Welfare Department only had responsibility for complete orphans, children who had neither mother nor father. These children numbered just a handful. The large bulk of the children under care were under the aegis of the City Commissioners, and that set-up was fully patronage at that time. I'll never forget, they tried to make such a display of conscientiousness in their jobs, and they'd go around and do a head count on these children at ten and eleven o'clock at night, waking youngsters up to ask if they were being treated properly by their foster parents.

So we went to court on that one. They died hard. And their attorney at the time was Herb, (he later became a Judge) Stein, or Klein. But at any rate, we won. And so all of the children fell under the care of our department.

Our next big obstacle was the Board of Prison Inspectors, appointed by the Common Pleas judges. Their counsel was a man named McCracken. They contested us for a while, but then McCracken advised them that the charter prevailed and that the prisons then fell within the Welfare Department, and that the charter called for a prison board of trustees. And so it was in about 1954 that we assumed the prisons. One of the first things that we did in regard to the prisons was to terminate the segregation. There was rigid racial segregation at that time. So we mixed the populations. Moyamensing was used principally as the deten-
tion facility, the House of Correction for the less serious type of offender, and Holmesburg as a maximum security institution.

Moyamensing was so archaic, so old, that you'd just be wasting money trying to make this repair and that repair. After all, it was opened in 1835. We closed Moyamensing and opened the Detention Center, which is on State Road, in 1963.

Ours was strictly a professional operation. And after being tested in the beginning, it seemed to be accepted in that respect. So I don't think we were exposed to the political harassment that some of the other departments may have experienced. We had somewhat of a great convenience, in that the Welfare Commissioner could discharge any person convicted of vagrancy or disorderly conduct charges. We had an awful lot of those cases at that time, and I soon learned that it had been a common practice for committeemen to intercede. I think some of them shook down families to arrange for the release of the family member. It wasn't unusual. Pop would come home on Friday, his payday, catch a load, and he'd be out for the weekend, maybe argumentative, and Mom would get upset, call the police, and he would be arrested. He'd then be committed to the House of Correction. Come Monday, Mom would have a change of heart, and want him out. So we would begin a quick investigative procedure, whereby we verified this. And if the factors were favorable, we would release him.

Now, I received a number of calls for that kind of accommodation from the politicians. I would receive a number of requests for the admission of elderly people to Riverview or some other home for the aged, and many requests for the care of the mentally retarded, to effect their
placement in one of the state institutions.

So I couldn't look upon that as venal politics at all. I think the politician was just as entitled to consideration of a valid request as any citizen. And so, that was about the extent of it. When the time came for the hundred dollar dinners, which those of us in the upper brackets would attend, we'd probably get a table out of it. I met with Jim Clark on one occasion to explain to him what a social worker is, what his income is, and he was very decent about it. You know, it didn't bother him that they did not purchase tickets. He already knew of the suppliers.

(WMP: Was Jim Clark...where was Jim Finnegan? at this point?)

Well, Jim was like Joe Clark, a one-term president of City Council. He left at the end of that term to be Stevenson's campaign manager.

(WMP: That's right. Yeah.)

Jim was, you know, no problem to me at that time. Francis Finnegan, his brother, was the first chairman of the prisons' board of trustees. So we worked very closely. Jim would always put you to the test in your budget presentation. He was very astute, very knowledgeable. He would come up with awfully good questions, and believe me, we went through rehearsal after rehearsal before we made our presentation over there.

(WMP: Is Jim's brother still alive?)

No. No. He preceded Jim in death. Died very unexpectedly at a very young age.
But we had some awfully good friends in City Council at that time. I guess we had enemies too, but Jim Tate was always a support to us, Charley Finley a great support, Lew Stevens, Connie Dallas, and what's his name Moore...*

(BF: Cecil Moore?)

No, no, not Cecil. No this fellow was white. He held an important post, too. He has since died.

(WMP: I can see him....)

A very nice looking man.

(WMP: That's right. Yeah.)

He was a great help. Raymond Pace Alexander was all over the place, you know, he talked a great game, but....

(WMP: Well, Randy, tell us about what you did to shape up the services.)

Well, of course, we were blessed with a good civil service. We didn't chop anybody down, so we inherited a staff of twelve...quote...social workers...end of quote. They were appointees, all women. One or two may have had a college degree in her background. We didn't run roughshod over them, but we brought in some awfully good people. We designed our organization. It was approved. Then we proceeded with the recruitment of our personnel. We had Manny to start with, as a deputy, and he certainly knew the social work community in Philadelphia, and could talk to the kind of person we would want. One of those was Florence Silverblatt, and Florence certainly

*Victor E. Moore, Democrat, member of City Council

**Manuel Kaufman, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Public Welfare
has to be one of the most outstanding social workers I know of. And that's throughout the country and perhaps internationally.

Philadelphia was extremely fortunate in having one of her calibre. And she, in turn, was able to recruit some very good personnel. She established a very fine training program. We clearly defined the areas of our concern... first of all, intake, and we developed an intake procedure with appropriate policies.

Then there was the liaison with the other co-operating child care agencies. We worked with about twenty-seven different private voluntary child care agencies, from whom we purchased care for these children. She set up the procedures, how a child would be referred, how we would play the supervisory role, and then she set up the terms of accountability.

In those days, the courts determined the amount that the city would pay the private agencies. It was common practice that the attorney from each of the boards would get together, file a petition, and I think oftentimes they would ask for five dollars a week, in the hopes of getting three and it usually worked out that way.

We didn't feel that that was the best procedure, that the administrative office had a better appreciation as to what went into the care of a child, what it represented in terms of expenses, and we turned to Dick Dilworth, who appointed a committee headed by Coggie Cheston.*

(WMP: This was when Dick was......)

* E. Calvert Cheston
Mayor. He was mayor. That was a very prestigious and a very fine committee. It conducted hearings. Manny Kaufman was the staff person. Much research was done. We touched base with other communities. It came up with the recommendation which was bought by everybody, that the rates be determined administratively, that the department should determine the rates.

And that was accepted and I think the court was very happy to get out from under that, also.

We used information from the U.S. Department of Labor, and from other sources, to determine what would be an equitable rate. At the same time, we placed a greater emphasis on what the parent might be able to pay. If we could not work that out on a voluntary basis, why we brought that information to the attention of the court.

At the same time, we felt that a child had a right to his day in court, and he also had a right to his day not to be in court. By that I mean there were ever so many cases where the child was in a very dependent situation, where the parents were seeking help, where there was no conflict, no dispute between the parents,....if there were two parents alive, they were both in agreement, that the child should be placed, temporarily, at least, under the care of the city. And so we worked that out with Judge Hazel Brown, whereby we would effect the placement of this kind of child, and then submit a list to the court every two weeks, and have that ratified by the court. So the court still had, ultimately, control over these situations.

Then we did the same thing, really, at the prisons. We installed
training programs, made the qualifications and specifications more clear for the recruitment of personnel. We arranged for promotions, and it worked satisfactorily. We modernized the system as best we could, with additions to various buildings, with the termination of Moyamensing and the opening of a new detention center. At Riverview we first changed the name...no, before we did that it was under the administration of the Bureau of Charities and Corrections. Ray Groller headed that bureau. So we separated them then, and Riverview had its own board of trustees under the charter. We gave Ray his choice; in did he want to stay with the prisons, or did he want to go to Riverview? He elected Riverview, and he was appointed as superintendent.

(WMP: Was Riverview, prior to your administration, called the House of Correction?)

No, no...the Home for the Indigent.

(WMP: The Home for the Indigent. That's an old, old one.)

The Home for the Indigent. Yes. It was built in 1915. And it took thirty-five people to attend to a thousand residents, elderly people, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. So we had work to do there.

(WMP: You had to beef it up, you mean.)

Oh yes, yes. We had to get a whole complement of personnel, with the appropriate disciplines, also medical personnel, and it took some little doing. We still used inmates from the House of Correction for much of the maintenance work at Riverview. Let me tell you how we came up with
the name Riverview. It was the Home for the Indigent, and we thought that was an odious-sounding name, so we conducted a contest, and limited it to the residents. So the fact is that two hundred fifty residents submitted proposed titles, and some of them were great. One was Clark's Recreation Center. Another was...I Ain't Got No Mother Nor Father Home. Another was the Home for Structural Steel Workers, Steel Painters and Steel Contractors.

So we were taken. I went to Freddy Mann and gave him this idea. He said he'd provide a twenty-five dollar bond. And so we were taken. Five people submitted the name of Riverview and we all thought that was appropriate.

(WMP: They worked together on it, did they? Or did they each...how did they...)

Well, no...each. Each happened to come up with that name. It seemed entirely appropriate, you know, right on the river. So, I think we gave five prizes. Dr. Elizabeth Ravdin gave one. I gave one. Joe Gallagher, the former postmaster, he was chairman of the Board of Trustees, he gave one. So that's how we came to the name Riverview.

The first big thing that happened there was the addition, the Riverview extension. That was my first exposure to large construction. I think this certainly was a first in Philadelphia, and probably a first in any large municipality. It was Buck Sawyer's idea that we conduct a contest. Forty-three firms submitted forty-eight designs, and they were put on display in the Mayor's reception room. Then, a jury was appointed of architects from outside the city. There was one from New York, one from Cleveland,
one from Chicago, I think. They came in and made the selection. And
the winner was Bellante and Claus.

So Riverview Extension was finished and low and behold, the architects
won an award for best design of a public use building.

(WMP: Who were the architects?)

Bellante and Claus.

(BF: Who gave that award? The A.I.A.?)

A.I.A. And I was on hand for that. They also received another award.
They did the Stenton Center for us, over on Stenton Avenue at Washington
Lane, and that one received a national award for the best use of colors
in a public building.

Then they gained some recognition, and you may remember, Walter, years
ago there was the Home Show, every morning, featuring Arlene Francis and
Hugh Downs. They came to Riverview and featured Riverview for one day
on this National TV program, so we had some exposure on that.

Well....what else to say....

(BF: How long did you stay in that position?)

I think I hold a record. I had five uninterrupted terms, twenty years.
I've also been active in professional organizations, the American Public
Welfare Association, the National Conference of Social Work, the American
Correctional Association and others, and I don't know of anybody who has
held a position for that length of time.

(WMP: You haven't said anything about the Holmesburg Prison, have you?)
Well, I can bring that to your attention in rather bitter terms. With what we had to work with, we had a good prison operation. A good prison operation. There's no question about it. We had strength at every echelon, but a building that was erected in the late 1800's is not going to be without its faults.

Then, during the sixties, it was a period of protest. The protests reached the prisons, and there were supporters on the outside. A suit was filed by three inmates against Ed Hendrick, the superintendent of prisons. Before a three-man court of Spaeth (I'll reserve comment on that in this situation), Nix, and ....oh,....he's still on the bench....well, I'll think of his name.....Ted....Theodore...

(WMP: Ted Spaulding.)

No, Smith. Yes. Yes. Dick Sprague represented us. At the suit these inmates were allowed to testify and just expound endlessly on the inhumanities, indignities, brutalities, and everything else that was carried on in the prisons. Sprague decided in the beginning that he would not cross-examine, he would not put on any of his own witnesses, wouldn't seek any phoney...they had no right to set themselves up this way, and he would knock it out at the Supreme Court. So that's how it went. And the Supreme Court, because it had no opposing evidence, could do nothing but uphold the lower court.

So now, from time to time, you'll read about the place being unfit for human habitation, and these gross adjectives denouncing the place, and it would compare favorably, with any prison system in the country. And
I would have expected more out of Spaeth than the other two judges, to permit a blatantly one-sided case to appear before it and to act upon it.

So of course, you know what the papers do with anything like that. They picked it up and they played it to a fare-thee-well.

(BF: Was Farview under your department?)

No, that's state. Also another thing....oh. When we discovered how this was going, we ran to the city solicitor. Lee Anderson was the solicitor then, and said, we ought to have some coverage over there. There ought to be someone representing us beside Sprague. And Matt Bullock went over there for two hours one day, and that was the end of it.

And then, ....

(WMP: I don't understand why Sprague was in it at all. He never worked for the city, did he?)

No, he was....you know, the assistant D.A. at the time.

(WMP: Dick Sprague. Oh yes, that's right.)

And the other unfortunate thing, where we took a bad rap, was when Barbieri appointed Alan Davis to investigate homosexuality in the prisons. If it were not for Ed Hendrick and the degree of cooperation he gave him, Davis couldn't have done a thing. He didn't know the prisons, didn't know where to start. So he was given every cooperation by our staff. Then it comes out and we're given a horrible blast. A terrible blast. Then after all this happens, Lee Anderson tells me that under no circumstances can a
judge set up his own grand jury, yet that's what Barbieri did in this case.

So he tells me and probably his wife, but he didn't tell Barbieri or anybody else. Both Specter and Davis played this to be a fare-thee-well, and we had an understanding with Barbieri that if we didn't attack the report he would then terminate this involvement of the court, Davis being out there.

We agreed, and it was my understanding, just so long as the D.A. and Davis did not appear on each and every radio program and have press conferences on this. That was the agreement. It was then violated by Davis, because he continued to speak. Then, I had to speak at the labor meeting at the Bellevue one night, and the press got me outside to question me about my remarks to the labor group, but I turned it around, and directed my attack on Specter for his unprincipled behavior in this whole situation. I brought out the fact that, when he came into office, we had roughly three thousand inmates, twenty-six hundred of whom, their cases had already been disposed of, either sentenced or awaiting an appeal.

At this time, out of three thousand inmates, twenty-three hundred were undisposed of. They were his responsibility, and they were languishing in the prison because he was out popping off on street corners, in Washington, everywhere but at home doing his job of disposing of the criminal cases.

Those were some of the negatives, I guess, and you can't be in this work without the negatives. We were compelled, in 1959, to enter into a program I didn't want, but it was a peak of delinquency, really, and D'Ortona had
the answer overnight. So overnight we had to convert the old contagious
disease hospital at Second and Luzerne, into a facility for delinquents.
It was frightful. I've never seen so much glass in all my life.

(WMP: All broken.)

An invitation to the kids, you know, to....

(WMP: Had it been broken or what?)

No, no, it was right there. They had deactivated that hospital because they
had perfected controls of contagious diseases in the main. So we had to
open up that ugly old thing, and it was a terrible experience for the kids.
After a while we were fortunate to get rid of it and transfer it to the
state, and the state used it, and the state certainly had their headaches.

(WMP: Is it still being used?)

On a day care basis. But that affair led to the creation of a division
of youth conservation services within the department. We structured it,
and had three principal activities there. The Youth Conservation Corps...
those were kids fourteen to seventeen, who we would assign to the Fair-
mount Park, to clean up debris from storms, honey-suckle and other objectionable growth, weeds...and we paid them thirty, forty, or sixty cents an
hour, on the basis of the evaluation given by their supervisor. And there
was a supervisor for every ten kids.

Now, that took hold and became so popular that Kennedy enacted legislation...
his Neighborhood Youth Corps...was patterned after that, and my testimony
is in the act verbatim. So I think that's something else we did for the...
(WMP: What's the Y.C.C. program. They don't clean up the Wissahickon trails anymore.)

No, no, they don't. They have a no-show deputy in charge of it. You remember that Mrs. Thomas from Fifty-second street who raised so much hell about the nightclubs and the rackets out there? Well, Rizzo appointed her...she doesn't show up and it's just deteriorated...it's gone down the drain.

(BF: Did you stay on into the Rizzo administration?)

No. No...

(BF: When there were changes of administration, did that significantly affect your department, or didn't it make too much difference in what you were doing?)

(WMP: Do you want to say why you didn't stay on in your job?)

Yes, I have no objection. Frank and I always got along very well...we knew each other...we had to have a lot to do with each other, you know, police and the prisons. We were mutually cooperative. And I had no intention of resigning, but, you know, letters were going out to everybody to urge them to resign. That happened to Groller...it happened to the deputy in charge of....

(BF: Who was urging you?)

The mayor. The mayor. Rizzo. And I had not heard anything, and I wanted him to come to me, so I could lay down my conditions. I knew this...that
he didn't have much simpatico for what I represented, you know, in social work, welfare, and felt it important that we have ground rules understood.

But he never did come to me and it came down to the last week. And one Sunday, I picked up the paper and there he blasts Sam Baxter.

(WMP: The last week of what?)

The last week before he took office. Rizzo. And it was in the Bulletin or the Inquirer...he blasted Sam Baxter. And that surprised me very much because in my opinion, Sam had to be the most dedicated, most competent public servant in the country.

(WMP: Terrific! Yeah. We interviewed Sam.)

Oh, is that so?

(WMP: Yeah, sure.)

Well, I said to myself, said to my wife....my God, if he can do this to Sam, he can do it to me. And I entered this job under conditions of honor, and by God, I'm going to leave it under the same conditions.

So, Jim Tate was in Hawaii, and I tried to get him. I put a phone call through, and he called me back later in the day, and he couldn't believe that Rizzo hadn't asked me. And so I told him I was going to submit my resignation to him. This was like....oh, December 23rd, or something.

(WMP: You were going to submit your resignation to Jim.)

To Jim Tate, yes. So, they questioned me and I claimed it wasn't on the basis of any disagreement, or animus, or anything else. And I've seen Frank since, it's a formal, sort of a formal rigidity. You know, where
we used to do a lot of kidding. That doesn't exist anymore.

(WMP: I sort of slapped these questions together. I don't know if it occurred at all to Manny, but one that came to my mind when we were talking, you had a lot of property in your department, didn't you? Didn't you have some of that land up near Byberry and so, or am I wrong about that?)

Yes. There was a prison farm of about two hundred fifty acres. And up to that time, and after we took office, it was used to produce vegetables and fruit. And in those days it produced a very substantial amount of produce for the prisons, and I think for PGH and Riverview.

Then, another thing we did, during the Dilworth-Longstreth campaign, Longstreth, very properly, made much of the Potter's Field, which was up around Second and Luzerne. It was near the federal hospital. And it was a disgrace...an absolute disgrace. So we created a Potter's Field up on that property, up near Byberry.

Then, development took place in that area. And we suffered terribly from that. They stole us left and right, and they desecrated the cemetery, this Potter's Field...playing touch football out there.

(BF: Excuse me. What are you saying? What kind of field?)

Potter's.

(BF: Potter's.)

(WMP: Do you know what that is?)

(BF: No.)

(WMP: That's a place where you bury people who don't have any relatives
and so on.)

(BF: That's what I was thinking, yeah, right.)

For the destitute. It's a cemetery for the destitute.

And then, the bottom...our own bottomline showed that it was too expensive an operation. What with the central purchasing of foods and what they were doing with the packaging of foods, this became a very expensive operation, so we transferred it to the department of Public Property.

Our other real estate was along the waterfront from Riverview, up to the opening of the creek, Pennypack Creek, where the detention center is now.

(WMP: That's where the Phillips family had a farm, in the early 1800's.)

Yes. Yes.

(WMP: You wouldn't know that...)

Well, I am aware of it, because, the property, the house, was north of there. Your house was north of there, miles away.

(WMP: But I'm not thinking of the property you probably visited...my house.)

Yes. Yes.

(WMP: I'm thinking of a couple of generations before that, where they had a farm which was later...it doesn't matter...)

A farm where the prison is now?

(WMP: Yes, I think so.)
Oh, for heaven's sake. I know it's great ground. Wonderful ground.

(WMP: Not the prison, but right by the....well, you know the creek goes through there and winds around the fish hatchery around there. It was up there at...)  

(BF: We're getting short on tape and I'm just wondering if you want to say something about question 12, some sort of general observations. That's maybe too general for you to even grab hold of...)

Well, I would have to say that the Clark and ....well, the administrations under which I worked, encouraged citizen participation. And with that, I think there was a greater awareness as to the social ills and anomalies, which heretofore, everybody was content to be kept locked in the back room. I think the window was opened by their inspiration.

There was a great pride in the city. It was, you know, no questioning it, and it was catching. It was a real thrill in those early days. I think you started the quarterly meetings, the commissioners’ quarterly meetings, where we would meet at the hotel or the museum, or some place else, and about four o'clock, or from four to five or five-thirty would be business, and then you’d have cocktails and a dinner following. And that was very nice. Joe insisted, in the face of any disaster, that the city present a united front. So that, if there was a bad fire, or any other disaster, everybody was out. Health, welfare, property, fire, police, you know, and the coordinator of all this was Sam Baxter, and that other wonderful guy who I saw this morning in a car by himself driving, and that's Eddie Grimm.

(WMP: I'll be darned. Still going, I guess.)
Eddie's got to be eighty-five. He has to be eighty-five! But there he was in a city car, a Plymouth, driving down East River Drive, by himself, no driver, no chauffeur. So, there was this movement, until, I think, the rioting started. And with that came....

(BF: That's in the Tate years?)

Yes. Philadelphia was hit in '64. First we had rioting in the streets. Then we had rioting on the campuses. And then that was followed by rioting in the prisons. And I don't think any large municipality or state escaped it, not even the federal government. You know, they had bad situations in their prisons.

So that created an aura of fear, mistrust, it gave surface to perhaps latent biases and prejudices, and all of which had the effect of setting back the progress that had been made.

(BF: In terms of what? Cooperation and trust and that ...)

Yes...the confidence of the citizenry in its government and the disposition to participate as they had previously.

I think we had some well-intended legislation come, but not the checks and balances that should have accompanied it.

For example, I think Kennedy came up with the phrase...maximum indigenous participation, in these community programs. And that was misconstrued by the people to benefit, that so much money was being appropriated, and it went for them. They wanted no part of City Hall, they didn't want any supervision; it was just for them.

And that was awfully difficult to get off the ground in a sensible,
efficient manner. You mentioned Cecil Moore. Imagine going into North Philadelphia, and trying to create a nucleus of people to be the spokesmen of North Philadelphia. We tried it. You know, I was chairing a meeting and trying to get this thing organized. Cecil Moore was there. And I said, the press will be outside, and no one's to talk to them but me. I'll tell them what took place at this meeting.

As soon as the door was opened, Cecil had them all over in the corner, violating everything that was agreed upon.

What happened to the land? Well.

(WMP: First of all, about how much land did you have? A couple of hundred acres, I would think, counting what you had up along the boulevard.)

Well, let's start with up in the boulevard, and I've already explained... we terminated our activities there, and we turned that to the Department of Public Property.

(WMP: You don't know what happened to it after that.)

I don't know what happened to it after that. An awful lot of housing has expanded up that way, so whether it used that ground or not, I don't know.

(WMP: They probably sold it off to get some cash.)

That's right. Now, the Holmesburg Prison remains untouched, but that didn't actually represent an awful lot of land.

(WMP: Well, it was on the other side of State Road from us.)

That has not changed. We go from Northern Metals' property, north to the creek, And then, at one time, we had the property across State Road, we
used to farm that, but when the farming operation terminated, that was returned to public property.

(WMP: I wonder what's been done with that?)

Well, of course, the I95 runs right over it. It comes along...it takes a corner of Riverview, and goes over State Road and then sort of parallels Holmesburg Prison. And going up there, it usurped a lot of that ground across the State Road.

Moyamensing, of course, was probably five and a half acres. And that was returned to public property, and it may be a parking lot today, I'm not sure.

But then we had another property, the Stenton Center, up at Tulpehocken and Stenton Avenue. And we yielded some of that property to the Board of Education for the construction of that Martin Luther King School.

(WMP: What about your property in front of Riverview, along the river there. There used to be ice-breakers there, until I sold them. Had them sold for the city.)

Yes, the pier is still there, not used, but my plan for Riverview, at the time I left, was for an extension towards the river for the completely ambulatory elderly person...the person who could get along on his own pretty well. Then I wanted to have a central section for the person who required some help, in the form of a wheelchair, crutch, cane. And then, the last building to be constructed would have been a skilled nursing care facility.

(WMP: And you had room for all of that.)

We had room for all of that. Now whether my successors pursued those plans or not, I don't know.
(WMP: There was some talk about having a marina there. Was that in your day?)

Yes. I heard about the marina.

(WMP: That was another of my ideas. I don't think it ever came through, did it?)

Well, we didn't oppose that so long as it did not encroach closely on the prison operation. We had to be very careful about contraband. And another thing was, what access or egress to the marina would there be?

(WMP: There'd have to be parking for cars...)

Yes. Would it, you know, be on the prison property, Riverview property, or would a roadway be developed around the circumference?

Then another plan that the Planning Commission came up with was the development of a wooded area with hiking paths, which would come...oh, right down immediately adjoining the Detention Center.

(WMP: Ed Bacon got it through City Council, I think, an ordinance where no construction may be within about two hundred yards of the river, going on up from down there somewhere. I hope nothing's.....But he didn't have a plan to maintain that land.

I can't look upon that experience without having a real sense of indebtedness and gratitude towards Philadelphia. I came as a stranger...it has been awfully good to me. I think I came at the right time. I came into public service, this kind of public service, at the right time to be able to present a program, have it professionally evaluated, and then have it
supported.

That was very gratifying, and it doesn't happen frequently, because, as I say, by virtue of prior national contacts, one could compare notes, and for a long time, our city was the envy of other jurisdictions.

I would like to feel that there can be some resistance to the flight from this area. I think that Philadelphia, like any other northeastern city, is feeling the threat of the sunbelt so far as industry is concerned. I'm on the central allocations committee of the United Way, and I learned about the number of jobs that are being lost annually, and it's very disheartening, it's very discouraging.

One can only live in hope that not only another Joe Clark or Dick Dilworth, but the cadre that they had surrounding them with the intelligence, the dedication, the foresight, the vision...has to appear...has to appear. And I'm not giving up hope. I think if it happened once, it can happen again. And I have a great admiration for youth today. It's very difficult for the youngster from ordinary circumstances to get advanced education today. It's so expensive...so terribly expensive. But the kids are getting it. They're hustling, and somehow they're getting it.

(WMP: What about the racial and ethnic problems of the city? Did you deal with them much?)

Yes, I saw them at their worst. And I like to feel that that bad day has passed. We haven't heard of the rioting in the streets. We haven't heard of the individual who championed a certain cause, and in doing that, caused considerable disruption of the order of the city. You know, I'm not finding that.
The gang activities are not as frequent, are not as damaging, as they had been during the peak, and I'm talking about the mid to late sixties. You hear of it occasionally, but there was much stronger manifestation of defiance and competition, really, during that period that I'm talking about.

I think that we will always have it, so long as dilapidated areas are permitted to exist in the city. They breed malcontent and all the other evils that go with abject poverty.

Down where we are, I look out now on acres and acres of parking space. The building is at Seventeenth and Race, right across the street from Sixteenth Street. A huge parking space, over to Vine, across Vine and north. They will be developed.

(WMP: Do you know of any plans?)

Yes. They've begun work. The Gas Company has already started the work for this new complex in that area bounded by Race, to Vine, Seventeenth to Sixteenth. And that will include an office building, a hotel, and convention facilities. And that package has been wrapped up and sealed, I'm sure.

What's going on north, I don't know yet.

(WMP: We interviewed the fellow who was the executive of the Old Philadelphia Development Corporation. What was his name?)

(BF: Jim Martin.)

(WMP: Jim Martin. Uhm hmmm.)
Was he aware of what's going to happen?

Well, he's got a lot of plans and things. He was very interesting to interview.