

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT REDFIELD

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Molly Graham: This begins an oral history interview with Robert Redfield. The interview is taking place in East Brunswick, New Jersey on July 6, 2015 and the interviewer is Molly Graham. To begin, I know you wanted to say a little more about horse racing in New Jersey.

Robert Redfield: Yes, that would be good. Racing had been legal before the 1900s, and then horse racing became illegal. Legal dog racing came to New Jersey around 1935, 1940, but horse racing was illegal. In the 1940s, Theresa Mahoney, an assemblywoman from around Jersey City--we were from the New Jersey shore area where there was a racetrack when racing was legal, and we wanted to bring it back again. My mother and Theresa Mahoney worked together in getting a bill passed to bring horse racing back to New Jersey. They were active with different groups to get the bill passed. When racing became legal, the first track may have been near Atlantic City. The second track was Monmouth Park in Oceanport, which was close to where we lived in Colts Neck. There were a lot of groups raising money to pass this bill and bring racing back. It ended up that Amory Haskell, who was exceptionally wealthy, was one of the principal sponsors of a thoroughbred racetrack in Monmouth County. He and Phil Iselin founded the track in Monmouth County, but we were very closely involved. In fact, my mother got one of the first boxes in the grandstand prior to the opening of the clubhouse. The second year, our box moved over the paddock area between the clubhouse and the grandstand. Eventually, we had a box in the clubhouse. This would have been in the mid-1940's. That was the beginning of horse racing coming back to New Jersey. Raising funds was relatively easy because many corporations and individuals felt it would do the state much good.

MG: How were you raising funds? What was that campaign like?

RR: Well, the main thing was raising funds with racing in mind. Then it was voted on. They already had dog racing; that was legal. That was how we got our greyhound, Gloomy Gloom. He was a former racing dog. So, the Monmouth Park racing track was constructed not far from where we lived. It's in Oceanport, New Jersey, about a mile from the ocean.

MG: Are any of these tracks still in operation today?

RR: Yes, Monmouth Park is, but a lot of the tracks have closed in the last couple of years. Horse racing has taken a big hit. It's becoming difficult to maintain the tracks.

MG: You would go to the racetrack as a family?

RR: I would go with my mother or with friends during the meet. We always had our box at the track. It was a project that my mother became interested in, and I worked with her. I wrote articles and editorials in the paper about why racing should be brought to New Jersey. I have copies somewhere. The head of the legal department for the track was David Wilentz, who was also our attorney at that time. He was one of the most influential attorneys, not only in the state, but he was very, very influential in national politics. David Wilentz was the prosecutor in the Lindbergh kidnapping trial. [Editor's Note: David T. Wilentz served as New Jersey Attorney General from 1934 to 1944 and gained international prominence as the prosecutor in the trial of Bruno Hauptmann for kidnapping Charles and Anne Morrow Lindbergh's son. His son, Warren W. Wilentz, became a prominent attorney and Democratic politician in New Jersey.] He was a

very powerful lawyer. He was also the lawyer for the track. The track had to be licensed, approved and voted upon.

MG: We talked about this last time, but did you want to say more about how you discovered talent?

RR: We were always involved in entertainment of all kinds and so it came naturally. It evolved from there. I never got involved in heavy rock and roll, like Bruce Springsteen. That kind of music became popular around the same time as the drinking and driving laws becoming more strict. From there, the business slowed and changed.

MG: Do you remember what precipitated the change in the drinking and driving laws?

RR: Once DUIs [driving under the influence] were enforced, they were frequent. Drinking and driving laws really impacted the clubs and their business. Immediately, entertainment was on the weekends mainly with live groups. There were fewer opportunities to book bands.

MG: Were you thinking of retiring from the music business around that time anyway?

RR: No. With lounge business stopping, I was working with national acts at that time. I immediately went into personal management of major acts. We had a great reputation and many people knew about us. Our first office was on Central Park South and then we moved to where the CBS building is now, 53rd Street and Broadway, where they film Johnny Carson, *The David Letterman Show*. My office was right over the stage door. We saw the Beatles and Elvis, etc. We could touch their heads from our office on the second floor. That was and is the heart of entertainment in New York.

MG: Tell me about some of the national acts you worked with.

RR: We were predominantly management. We worked with major booking agencies, like the William Morris Agency or the Music Corporation of America. We knew what to do with any entertainment that we were managed to create the interest of the major booking agencies who booked the acts in Vegas and internationally, etc.

MG: You mentioned your wife, Jo, would help you out with the business. I'm wondering in what ways.

RR: She would help in the office with phones and contacts, and home as I was working around the clock. She supported me. She would help make international contacts. She would make calls, help with contracts, and things like that.

MG: How have you seen the music industry change here in New Jersey and nationally since you started in the business?

RR: It's changed drastically since I started in the lounges in the 1940s. I remember when the Stone Pony was Mrs. Jays. When it was Mrs. Jay's all the top-40 and five piece bands would

play there. They also were well known for their hot dogs and hamburgers on the ocean side. Inside was the main restaurant, which was also very good. A lounge was connected a little further down. Now it's much harder rock. It's where Bruce Springsteen played after the music changed. We didn't cross paths because I was involved with different kinds of acts, not hard rock. The Stone Pony has an interesting history. A lot of rock bands got their start there. That venue is right on Ocean Avenue in Asbury Park. I feel the music has gotten so harsh and antisocial. Musicians no longer look professional onstage. They're not entertainers like they used to be.

MG: Is there anything we're missing? Anything we have not talked about?

RR: I had such a long and varied career--at the Asbury Park Press, a trucking company, then entertainment and a wholesale meat company. There were so many different clubs and lounges and then so many different acts, such as variety shows, big bands, top-40, singers, comics, and dancers. It wasn't just music. The artists really learned their trade in the venues. That generally disappeared when the drinking and driving laws were passed. Literally, the venues for these artists disappeared.

MG: Well, we have covered a lot. I really appreciate all the time you spend with me.

RR: One thing I forgot to tell you was around the time I was managing boxers and even had my boxers fight the main event at Madison Square Garden, we had an apartment on 82nd Street and West End Avenue. This was closer to our office in New York. It was also much quieter in this part of the city. One night, I woke and sat up straight in bed. I said to Jo, "What wasn't that?" She said, "What are you talking about?" It was just so quiet and we weren't used to no noise. Another time, Billy Pickett, a fighter I managed, who was a great fighter but on drugs, came looking for me about two o'clock in the morning because he wanted money. Our doorman wouldn't let him up. He had a bat with him and threatened the doorman. The next day, the doorman quit his job.

MG: I don't blame him.

RR: Pickett was destined for something big, but drugs got in his way. A year and a half later, there was a big investigation into boxing and the mafia's control over it. I was called in because of my boxing connections to testify. That was a big deal. They were looking into organized crime and Frankie Carbo, who was a mafia boss over boxing. I mentioned I was always working, but we would spend weekends at the shore, which was really nice for us. I really hope a book can be written about my experiences, from being in Paris when Lindbergh landed in 1927, to all my work in entertainment and so forth. I have about twenty-five pounds of materials in my archives that could be included.

MG: I think that is a great idea.

RR: Everyone who hears my story says it would make a great book. It's such a great cross-section of industry, entertainment, humor and politics. I'm looking forward to seeing the transcripts. Some final folks I should mention: I was connected in the movie industry with the

Westmore family and many others who were famous for doing all the makeup in old movies. They were very good friends of ours. I took their daughter out for a while. My history has been so multifaceted and there are so many varied areas to talk about.

MG: I agree. We have covered a lot of ground. Let's conclude the interview. Thank you for all the time you have spent with me.

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Transcribed by Molly Graham 12/2/2018

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