SUSAN R. DELAHAY
b. 1904

SUMMARY

April 8, 1986

Interviewed by Bill Seymour in Leonardtown, Maryland

Oral History Project
St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's City, Maryland

Counter

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VERBATIM TRANSCRIPT

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BRS: Mrs. Delahay, as a child, whenever you or any of your brothers and sisters got sick, did you go to the doctor or ...

SRD: No, we always had a doctor that drove a horse and buggy. And he’d always come out to the house, house visits. We never had a hospital even.

BRS: Were these regular visits? Did he just come by like on a circuit?

SRD: No, indeed. [Inaudible] We, we had to contact him in Leonardtown, too, by horse and buggy to go see that he was, that he would come and visit. But of course momma had ten babies and he was there quite often at times. But he was a good doctor, Doc ... Doctor Lynch. He was a, well he’d make powders, you know. [Inaudible] powders on a little piece of paper and roll them things up and we’d have to put ‘em in a couple tablespoons full of water and take the powder, that was our dose of medicine.

BRS: Did you, uh, use any home remedies when ...

SRD: Oh my goodness, momma had a lot of home remedies. When the babies one time got the upset stomach. She would go out and get the mint and uh, crush it, put it on a cloth and put on their stomachs, and it would cure them of the colic. And, oh my, she had different things. Oh, she had sulfur and lard for itch or places, itchy places on our bodies which we often had. And for sore throat, what was that now? Camphor. Put a camphor bag around our neck and let us smell it.

BRS: And how long would you wear that bag?

SRD: Well, overnight or a couple o’ days. Yeah, but the doctor had a right rough time 'cause he had to go at nights mostly, to visit the sick. [Inaudible] bad roads, we didn't have the roads then, just a gravel road, dirt road. Kind a tough on poor doctors then.

BRS: You and your, your brothers and sisters were, were born in the family home, right?

SFW: I was.

BRS: Were, were your two sons born at home?

SRD: My children were born at home, too. They had the, the hospital was ‘bout started when my children came along but they were born at home, did very well ... with them.

BRS: Do you remember when the hospital was built?

SRD: I have been in that hospital. I had a gall [bladder] operation when I was fifty-two. And that's about the only time I was in the hospital, really.

BRS: Did you get to Leonardtown much as a child?

SRD: Nooo. No. Uh, Plank Bridge out there, you know the big bridge?

BRS: Uhhmm.

SRD: That wasn't a bridge at all. It was down in a run, and you'd have to go down into the run with the horse and buggy and get up and go up on the other side with the, go across the run, you know. Right rough. Oh, I remember when they put the state road through there.

BRS: Remember what year it was when they put the road in?

SRD: What, what is it?

BRS: Do you remember what year it was when they put the road in?

SRD: I was, I was in my teens, I knew. I also remember, now what was rain? Terribly ... we had twelve inches of rain in three hours right in a circle around here, right by the, mostly round that bridge. And we got caught up on, uh, the Maryland Tobacco Growers and we had to stay there for a couple of hours. We couldn't cross the run goin' back home, couldn't get home. We had to stay up there with our cousin. That was when they put, uh, the second road in you know redid it.

BRS: Uhhmm.

SRD: Made the lanes on it. And that was, uh what, 15-20 years ago I guess, now. One forgets what date that big it rained. But my sister was with me and uh she called her' husband and told him she, we couldn't get home, now that was only 'bout two miles across, and he, she said, "We can't get home with a, the run has flooded and we just kind a ..." And she said, "It has rained and we couldn't see how to drive, we had to stop on the side of the road." And he says, "I don't believe you," he says, "it's not rainin' like that here." Just a two mile stretch, you know.

BRS: That must have been quite some storm.

SRD: It was. It was just a cloudburst right over the head, you know. And we wasn't by ourselves, either. There's a lot of 'em stranded up there. Great big old stones washin' cross the road. See, there's nothin', there was, they were just in the middle of it, had torn up things gettin' ready to put pavement in. It was a mess.

BRS: Do you remember when the Base came to the county?

SRD: Sure, sure. That was in, what, '42 to '45?

BRS: Yes, ma'am. 1942. Do you, what kind of an impact did that have on the county?

SRD: Well, it, it looked like it was a cloudburst over us, really: everything was turned and goin' you know. We had a proving ground down on, uh, in the neck, you know. See, it was a, a point goin' out in the, to the Potomac ...

BRS: Uhhmm.

SRD: And they cut off here, and right below the church made a gate on the road, had a guard on it. Nobody would go on that, could go on that point. They was testing VT fuse. And Mr. Raley was on of the guards, and he stayed on that gate a long time at times. Well, eight hours at a time. But nobody could go on there and they tested that VT fuse and it was bam, bam, bam. And my nephew said he saw a difference in the battle when that fuse, that bullet was perfected and come into use. The turning point in the war.

BRS: Did you know any of the people who were uprooted when they put in the naval air station?

SRD: Uprooted. Well, the Bell people weren't, were, weren't they? They always had their farm down there, and they were, they're the automobile people now in Leonardtown. They came up to Leonardtown and established. And I don't know especially too many of them over there, but I know there was a lot of houses just goin' up here and everywhere.

BRS: Has the naval air station been good for the county, do you think?

SRD: Well, of course it's been good. It's brought in the people to work and of course that means more money for salaries, our people all went to the Base to get a job and do what they could and, 'course some of them went to school and they and they would work, start workin', too, and made good for themselves. Why yes, I think it was good for the county.

BRS: Can you tell me how you think life in the county changed from before the Base came to after it came in terms of ...

SRD: Well, it was, was very slow at first, you know, and there was just farmin'. And 'course the watermen, there was nice water, up, for the men to go out and make a livin' round the ... oysterin', fishin', crabbin'. 'Course they still have that now but the oysters are getting' scarce, too. Now, around this point there I was talkin' bout that came in [inaudible] when the Base, about the same time, both came together. We didn't have a telephone or a light wire down there, you know, and it seemed like when they went down and the light and telephone went right along behind them.

BRS: Was there much friction between the people of the county and the ...

SRD: Much what?

BRS: Much friction between the county people and the ...

SRD: No, I don't, no, no, I don't think so. 'Course, the, the people knew they was gettin' a good living out of the Base. They were gettin' paid every day, every week, you know, and they were gettin' a good thing out of it themselves.

BRS: Do you remember when the ... were there German POWs used in this county as labor during the war?

SRD: The what?

BRS: German prisoners of war used in this county during the war.

SRD: I don’t remember too much about that. I can’t understand what you want me to answer.

BRS: I was just wondering if you remember, there are large parts of Charles County that were developed by using German prisoners of war during the war ...

SRD: Oh, uhhmm.

BRS: And I had thought that some were used in this county and I wanted to ...

SRD: I don’t think that, that German prisoners of war. I don’t think, uh, I don’t think they were down here.

BRS: I was just wondering. Like I say, I didn’t know, and I just was wondering if you would remember anything about that.

SRD: ‘Course contractors and people had a good thing of it. They could employ more people themselves and more people had work and of course that’s been the farmin’ commenced to decrease, too. And the acreage, didn’t plant as much and always some people work at the base and come home and work a little plot of tobacco at night and on the weekends.

BRS: When you first met your husband, or first were at the age when you started to date, could you describe for me, say a typical outing that you would have?

SRD: Well, uh, uh, we always went to dances. In the wintertime they’d say come on, we’re goin’ to have a dance at so and so’s house. And they had a band, the Wathen band. Fiddle and a guitar, and, uh, and fiddle and guitar and hmmm. And violin, violin. Mitchell Wathen played the violin. And they had a, a nice little party, nice time. But when I got up, my head ... well, when I was teachin’ school –- when I started teachin’ school, Clem always carried me down to the school –- Meadow’s Neck. ‘Course we had to go through Leonardtown, and we’d often stop by the movie. Go on down and he’d spend a little visit and then come on back home. And that’s the way I got back and forth to school. That was most ever’ week he would do that. Made it right nice. ‘Course we weren’t youngsters, either. I was 29 and he was 39 when we go married.

BRS: Were the rites or rituals of courtship different for somebody of your age than they would have been for say a teenage girl?

SRD: Huh, the rites?

BRS: The ...

SRD: The restrictions and ...

BRS: Right.

SRD: ... rules. Well, I don’t think so. ‘Course kept track of where their children were goin’ and all ...

[Five second gap in the tape.]

SRD: Um, a little dancin', whatever. But the children were very well taken care of. They'd have their little parties, too. And in the winter they would skate, on the ponds. They were all of 'em, anybody who could skate did skate on the ponds. We had one down our way, one down Miller's Neck, and that was a very good outin' for 'em in the wintertime when they couldn't do anythin' else. And they'd ... 'Course you couldn't skate when it was dark, either. Couldn't see. Had to do that in the daytime, Sunday afternoon.

BRS: These dances and skating parties, were they chaperoned by adults?

SRD: Well, there was adults with 'em, but they weren't chaperoned as so and you would say. They behaved themselves and didn't rambunction and all that. Down on our little creek, we used to go down there, and just youngsters, you know, had skates. I had put on skates but I was a bad skater. But some people were experts at it, and they would skate and skate. And it was very interesting, very ... it was really good exercise for us, really in the wintertime.

BRS: Does it seem like the weather has changed from between then and no, does it seem warmer in the winter?

SRD: Seemed like we had a big porch at home, and of course we were a bunch a children; we'd go out on that porch and run up and down, you know, and jump off it and plays games, as such. But now, I don't see all that nice sun in the wintertime. The snow'd be on the ground and the sun'd be shining, you know. But now its, uh, muggy kind a damp, mostly. 'Course in the summertime we'd have nice old hot summertime, too. We have always had April showers. I always remember April, it'd be nice and soft and, uh, plant the garden and all, it's been right rough on the little farmers this year.

BRS: You took care of the church down here, St. Francis Xavier, just ...

SRD: I lived there, well we lived there, went there. I lived there for fifty years, I did. My husband died fifteen years previously, and, uh, he took care of the farms. He had, uh, oh I don't know, was it six or eight farms he had to look out for, such as collectin' the rent and givin' it to the boss, Brother Carley, and seein' bout the fertilizer, they'd ... if one got it, he'd plant it. It all come in at one time, you know, and be delivered. And most of the time it came on a boat, too, in the early days, and be delivered down to the wharf and they'd have to back the ox cart out in the winter and pick up fertilizer. And that was the way they'd ship the wheat. The wheat'd go down there the same way. And he was overseer for the farms, and he collected the rent and handed it on to the boss, Brother Carley. The Jesuits were our boss all the time. And one man said about Brother Carley one time ... he said "You know, Susie," he said, "there'll never be another Brother Carley." They thought so much of him. He was very ... well, he had farms in, in Charles County and, uh, and Bowie; up in Pennsylvania I think they had a plot. [Inaudible] He didn't wear the Roman collar. He was, he wore a nice suit and shirt, but he didn't have the collar. He was excused of that being out in like he was.

BRS: Why wouldn't he wear the collar in public?

SRD: Well, he, he was out in public, and you can't go 'round at night, you know and mix with people. To supper in fact, suppers and whatever. No, he was willing to wear it, but I say he just didn't have to. They excused him of it. Go to meetings, you know, and ...

BRS: Nowadays. I would think he would wear the collar. It's a commonplace thing.

SRD: Yes, uhhmm.

BRS: Was Father Carley part of a small group that didn't wear a collar or was he just ...

SRD: No, indeed. He lived at Chapel Point all the time, lived there with other priests. No, he wasn't ...

BRS: You basically kept the Church clean.

SRD: No, at times there were, there was three or four colored ladies would come, and maybe once a month or so on, walk down two or three miles here and sweep up and dust, you know, but in between times I would catch up and you always had, I always had to do linens, priests' vestments and altar linens and altar colors. It was quite a chore. Then you had to starch and iron 'em. Well, you still to starch and iron altar colors, but there wasn't so much activity either. Church on Sunday, and that was it, you know. We didn't have the hall for recreation. We had a church festival in the summertime that was a all-day job. And it was a month or so gettin' ready for it. We had to do the fancy work and get the chickens, who was goin' to bring chickens. Had a supper, or dinner they would it. And the ladies all that work and, most of the time we'd have the suppers in the barn. That was the only shelter that we had. The house wasn't big enough for all those people. And the festival, as I call it, was outside. It had a fancy table, a ice cream table and, and sometimes games, throwin' horseshoes or whatever that they would bring. We all had to pay a little stipend and that's the way we made the money to carry on the church work.

BRS: Were you the one who more or less organized the festival or ...

SRD: Oh, no. They had the ladies from, well, five or six of them would come. One would have the fancy table you, know, and she would get her help. Another one had the menu and have the ice cream table and they would have their ... I guess, let me see, they had ice cream then. I mean we didn't have to make it. 'Course we made in our homes, too, but with the ice ... but that, uh, was great big five gallon—no, more like ten gallon, I reckon, of tubes, tanks ... bring it there and work out under the tree. And boy, we liked that ice cream, too. Cakes people would make, ladies would make. Chickens they'd have to kill, you know, and get dressed. We didn't have refrigeration really in those days like we do now, well, like we did 20 years ago.

BRS: Still using the old-fashioned icebox?

SRD: Yes, indeed, we've had a I remember we had one. A man would come around every, twice a week to bring a hunk o' ice, and if it run out, it run out and we had to wait for him to come back again. That's where we kept the milk. Most people had a bucket in the well, and they would lower the milk to keep it fresh and the butter down in the well. And it was very good that way, too. Some of them had a stream from a spring or somethin' that they could cover over and put their dairy products in there and keep. That was mostly how they kept the dairy products, in those things. 'Course the meat and bread and whatever we ate up and cooked some more.

BRS: Did you much smoking of meats?

SRD: Everybody smoked their meats. They had a, my father had a big, old dinner pot that had been to waste, went to, got a hole in it, and he'd fill it up with ashes and make a fire on top of that out of, out of hickory. Hickory smoke was the thing that they liked to smoke meat with. And poppa had, I thought, the best meat around, but he worked over it. Smoked it, and then after it got salt enough, we'd, we would wash it and put it in paper and put it in a bag; kept it all summer long.

BRS: Did you help with the whole smoking process?

SRD: Well, poppa usually looked after the fire. That was a little dangerous for us, you know. And he'd get his, uh, hickory pieces, chips mostly ... and you mustn't let it make a blaze; he'd just let it smoke and smoke the sausage for a couple of days. And they was some kind a good, too. Boy, did he have a hog one time. Weighed 810 pounds. That was too big, that was too big. We had, had to walk the poor thing to the scaldin' pot and then kill it. It was so big we couldn't get it on a cart, you know, or somethin'.

BRS: Do you remember how to make sausage?

SRD: Sure, I know how to make sausage. We had our regular recipes, and we raised our own sage. Pepper, black pepper we always bought, and salt. And put a little saltpeter in it to give it color and preserve it a little more.

BRS: Could you tell how to go about making sausage?

SRD: You have to save the scraps of, the lean pieces, you know, off the spare ribs and all. They would cut them in the meat house and all the scraps , they would put it in a big, old tub and bring it up to the house and we'd have to cut up in strips and grind it by hand-turn the grinder by hand and grind it. Then spread it out on the kitchen which was washed and cleaned. It was a good old wood table. And then put, scatter seasonin' all over it. It was measured especially. Momma would do that, she'd put it all .... Then we'd have to pack it and go it and dough it, you know, like we did dough, work it in. Then run through a mill that we turned by hand. Put the skins, save the own sausage skins from the hogs. Put 'em on the spout, and we'd turn it and somebody be there to turn it, to pull 'em out, you know, and regulate the meat going' in 'em. And then we make 'em sausage, you know, and turn and twist 'em pull it [inaudible] pull the sausage through and make a knot and go on and make another like. They were called links. Sure, I knew how to do it.

BRS: You had fresh sausage for breakfast then.

SRD: Oh, boy! Then eventually we got a big presser that held about a gallon of meat that you could fill it up with meat and turn it with a wheel that was a little easier, too. Hang 'em in the meat house, and that was where you'd smoke 'em. Put 'em on, uh ... had regular, tobacco sticks, the small, smooth ones, if they weren't smooth poppa would smooth them down with his knife, you know, and hang them on the house and wash the sticks off and let 'em dry and put the sausage on them and carry 'em back and next day or so smoke 'em and then they were ready to eat. We carried sausage to school for lunch. Made biscuits in the morning, you know, and have them and sausage-split 'em open and fix a sandwich with the biscuits. Carryin' all those things at first I remember [inaudible] pear preserves, sickle pears. People had, down on the manor, had sickle pear trees, and we'd, poppa'd go down and get a bag full of those and we'd carry 'em home and peel 'em and momma would make preserves and put 'em, you know, and cook 'em plenty, they'll keep. Wouldn't keep during the summer too much. But from

fall of the year 'round to the early spring they'd keep, and we'd have preserves, and they were good, too, those sickle pears. 'Course the apple trees were kind a year 'round job.

BRS: Did you father ever make his own wine?

SRD: Made grape wine. He wasn't much of a wine maker. He made his grape wine, and let's see what else he did. He'd, he'd make his own tobacco sticks, though. He'd take a, oh, I don't know what you call it, a adze or somethin' or other, it was a handle and it had a little blade to it, and he'd chop his won tobacco sticks out. That was an interesting job.

BRS: What kind of wood would he use?

SRD: Well, he used oak, maybe. That split easy. Chestnut when he could get it. He made fence rails, too, out of chestnut. Then they had a lot of chestnut trees in a forest, and we would go up to Oakville sometimes .... Now that was a picnic for us. We'd, uh ... Peter Busser had a car then, and he'd carry a bunch of us youngsters up there and pick up chestnuts off the ground and carry them home. Sometime we'd roast 'em, and sometime we'd cure 'em out and eat 'em like that. They were small chestnuts, but they had a much better flavor than the cultivated chestnuts, but they had a much better flavor than the cultivated chestnuts. And we didn't have so many chestnut trees at home, but we had walnuts, black walnut trees. Oodles of black walnut trees everywhere, and we'd have always have those for just eatin' purposes or for puttin' in cakes, put on top of cakes and decorate 'em, make candy, fudge candy. Chocolate was cheap then, you know. Sugar was plentiful. Go to the store, momma would, momma'd give us quarter and send us to the store to buy a five pound bag of sugar for a quarter. Although poppa'd get a bag of sugar when cannin' time came; he'd get a hundred pound bag of sugar. And that'd last quite a while. He'd, poppa liked his little spirits and all, but he wasn't much of a wine drinker, wine maker and wine drinker, but momma mostly, I guess momma make the grape wine.

BRS: Do you remember how the wine was made? Did you ever get to help?

SRD: Yes, indeed. You put a quart of grapes in a gallon jug and fill it up with water and I, I can't say about the sugar, but you put sugar with it and a cloth to cover the top so it would ferment but yet the bugs and things wouldn't get in it .... You had to put that cloth on it and keep it until fall when they'd strain it out and seal, and seal it then and put it away. That's about it. I forget how much sugar to put in it, really. But there's a nice old, old red grapes, you know, uh, purple grapes, that made a nice color to the wine.

BRS: Were you allowed to have wine as a child, or was it for special occasions?

SRD: Oh, sure. It wasn't, grape wine wasn't so strong, though. That was our Christmas treat. Set the table with refreshments and have a glass of wine to drink or lemonade. Momma'd always make five or six cakes when Christmas came and of course, my birthday is Christmas day, so Christmas days I'd go out and pick my birthday cake out. And it was always coconut cake. I loved coconut cake. That was old coconut that you had to peel and grate with your hands, too. Loved coconut.

BRS: Since your birthday and Christmas were the same day, did you get anything special?

SRD: No, not especial. I got a, a nice doll most every Christmas and that doll, we'd play with it all year, you know; and by Christmas we'd get a different type of doll or whatever. Always had to have an orange in the toe of our stockings [inaudible] always look for that orange.

BRS: Can you describe a typical Christmas from your childhood?

SRD: We'd always have to go to church first. And sometimes in the oxcart. And the buggy wouldn't hold us, hold too many, but if it was ordinary weather, a lot of us would walk and poppa and momma would go in the buggy and carry a couple of the babies, you know. Always have to go to church but in the, we'd always have sausage, too for breakfast. And for dinner, of course, we'd have the turkey. And we didn't have stuffed ham so much year round like they do now; we'd have turkey for Christmas and stuffed ham for Easter. 'Course we'd have it during the winter, too, for, the stuffed ham, if they needed it and wanted it. But it was a must for Easter, stuffed ham, and turkey for .... Now for Thanksgiving they always had a nice duck, roast duck. And, of course, sweet potato pie, pumpkin pie, and a vegetable. We'd have, uh, [inaudible] of course mashed potatoes and gravy, peas, and poppa always had his cabbage. We could make slaw. He'd grow his cabbage and put 'em in a little bed. And put dirt around 'em, and set 'em up in that little bed and put brush around 'em and they'd keep all winter out in the garden. He'd take the potatoes and put 'em on the ground, put straw, put potatoes, potatoes, and pile 'em up in a cone and put more straw on 'em again and put dirt on top on them ... I guess just dirt from around the edge and make a ditch all the way around the edge which was for drainage, and put dirt [inaudible] all around and it'd keep 'til spring. Make a little hole in the side when we wanted to get in there, get out potatoes, reach in there and get out potatoes. Put a ... brought a bag in there ... in the hole.

BRS: You were telling me once about the tobacco barns that used to be down on the point down here in Newtown. Was that where your father used to take his tobacco?

SRD: Well, every farm had their own tobacco barns. We were up the road a little bit from the church. Mr. Jim Abell was overseer for the property when I was a little, little girl. His picture's in the, on that picture was taken in 1880, and he was overseer for the farms then. And, uh, he lived on the manor awhile, but he, his, he bought a piece of ground up further by the store and after momma got, and the girls got big enough to have families and all, he gave, he kept one half and lived on the bottom half with one daughter and then the upper half next to the road he gave to momma and poppa. And it was quite a farm, too. And there's where we were raised, and that was that was the house I was born in that just wasn't quite finished. That's how old our house was. And Billy Bailey has the house now. He bought the place after poppa died, and he didn't want ... he was going to build a house. When he got in to it to tear it down, the, the men advised him, "Please don't tear that house down. It's got too nice timber in it to tear down." So he went ahead and built, redid that house, and that's what he's living in today. Nice little house, and it was right next to the school, too, right across the lot from the school.

BRS: When your father would take his tobacco to market, where did he take it?

SRD: He had, poppa didn't raise tobacco in the early days, real early days, but after we children got up so we could help him with it, he only raised three acres of tobacco. That wasn't much tobacco. And he would take it to Stone's Wharf [inaudible]. Bayside Wharf off the back road. That'd be about five or six

miles up the road by oxcart. Take a couple of hogs up there and put it on the steamboat and carry it on to Baltimore.

BRS: Can you tell me what it was like to work? Even though it was only three acres, I assume the children all helped with the tobacco. Can you tell me what it was like working tobacco?

SRD: Tobacco? Well, first, we had to go up the row and get the, the yellow leaves and dry leaves off the bottom of the plant, you know. Put 'em in a wheelbarrow and carry 'em to the barn, and we'd call those ground leaves. Then when they all got cured out, wrap 'em, put 'em in your hand in a little bunch, wrap one of the leaves around it, and make a bundle of tobacco. And he would carry that and sell it just like the other tobacco. Carry it on, sell it on steamboat. It wasn't too much tobacco. I don't guess it was a hogs [inaudible] in the full year. But that's what the, he always told us "This is to get your shoes to go to school." He said, "I want you to work hard over it, and get a good job and we'll have good shoes." So, that was it for the ground leaves. Then after they were gathered, you could go right on and cut the tobacco. Put it on the oxcart and carry it to the barn and put ... always carry it to the, well they did it in the field, too. But put it on the cart, carry it to the barn and put it on the tobacco sticks with a spear. [Inaudible] plant'd go on there, five or six plants to a stick and then hang it in the barn. 'Course he'd have hired people, too, couple of colored men, and put it in the barn until it got cured out and then when a warm day'd come in the winter, get it down and get all the leaves off and we'd have to separate 'em. There was seconds, that was the first things off, then the crop and then the ground leaves. Not the ground leaves, the tips we called 'em. That was the end and that wasn't so good. And they all had to be separated and packed different, too, in different hogsheads. And they had their own hogsheads to press the tobacco in 'em and put in as much as you could and then carry it to the wharf by oxcart.

BRS: Did you ever go with your father when he took it up to the wharf?

SRD: No, that was men's job.

BRS: The kids never got to ride along just for a treat?

SRD: I used to go with 'em, we children, when they carried the coops of chickens up there. Sit on a coop of chickens, you know, and go up the road. And that was an outin' for us on a Sunday afternoon, We'd, he'd see the steamer comin' in the bay, and he'd get his cart and ho up here and meet it, up at this end. It was all fun in a way.

BRS: How was childhood different for your sons as opposed to your childhood?

SRD: My brothers, let me see how, well, they had to work like we girls did, too. We girls had to work like the, the boy came, see I was the fifth child, then came the boy. So he was the sixth child. We had to, uh, work like little turks, you know, like little boys, before he came along. But he was delicate, and he was always taken care of. We had to, uh, give him the best of the chicken, you know, and pet him and so on because he wasn't never strong. He got strong after he got grown. But, uh, he did work, my lord. I had to drive a car before he did because I was older than he. I was eighteen. You always had to be eighteen then when you drove a car. And I drove a car first, and when he came along he took it over, old Model T. Then we got a 'A' I believe is what you call it.

BRS: When did you get your first car? The car that was your very own car?

SRD: I never had a very own car until after my husband died, I don't reckon. He always had his name on it you know, and took care of the, fixin' it and the motor and everything. I drove it, but, uh, after he died I took it over. Had it in my name, in fact. That was the only difference. I always drove the car and washed it and cleaned it as much as he did when he was living.

BRS: I guess what I'm looking for is when did you and your husband get first get a car that didn't belong to your parents?

SRD: Well see, he was older, and he had his car when he got married. Before we got married, he had his car but he had to go down to Meadow's Neck every time. They were gettin' old, too. And the boys, boys were talking over the farm then when we got married. I lived with him down on the, their farm just down below the church for a year and then we went up to the church, and he was boss up there, you know. And his parents were gettin' a little bit older and they did little things like feeding chickens. Mrs. Whilhite had a strawberry patch. That's what he worked best in the garden. He worked all, all the garden best, best he could. And Mrs. Delahay always raised the chickens and turkeys until she wasn't, got so she wasn't able and then I took over. Well, I helped her all along, too. Lord, had to work together to make it up, make a livin'. And after they died, why we were there with the two boys; they were growin' up, too. The little fella was six years old when he started drivin' a tractor. And one day he came to us, and daddy said, "Bert, where's the tractor?" "It's out there in the field, daddy." Had jumped off the bees and nests, he had got, run into a bees' nest and the bees had got after him and he, and its, the tractor, that the Lord had stalled out, stopped. The older one was a, a bookworm. He didn't do much work around the, around dirt, farmin', you know. He was a bookworm; loved his books. He taught himself how to play the piano.

BRS: Were you sick often as a child? I mean was it just a ...

SRD: Well, we had colds and sore throats and measles and all those kinds of things, but momma always had a remedy to help us along, you know. No, we never had too much, uh, hospital. Didn't have any hospital. One little fellow died when he was a year and a half old with pneumonia, and momma sat there day and night and held that child. He was about two and a half when he died.

BRS: How old were you when he died?

SRD: When he died? Oh, I guess I was ten or twelve.

BRS: Do you remember any of your impressions of death?

SRD: Oh sure, we knew what death was.

BRS: Was he buried down at the church?

SRD: He was what?

BRS: Was he buried down at the church?

SRD: He was buried in, um, he never had a Mass. He was too young. You didn't go into Mass with a young one like that. But he was buried in the cemetery with all the services. The priest was there and a real nice little funeral.

BRS: When somebody died in those days ....

SRD: My grandfather and grandmother [inaudible]. We remember that very well. One of 'em died on the twenty-ninth of March, uh, that was grandmere. Then grandpere died, uh, the twenty-ninth of March the next year.

BRS: Exactly one year apart.

SRD: They had a big funeral. All the people ... they were well known.

BRS: This is kind of a sensitive subject, and I don't know quite how to put the question, but what would a funeral be like? Did they have a motorized hearse like they do now?

SRD: They had a horse hearse, and most of the people had buggies when I first knew what funerals were. And they would have Mass for the, the older people, you know, of course. And there would be a parade to the church, then a parade to, not a parade, go in a group of cars, wouldn't go in a parade, and bury the body, and they never had any conveniences, uh, like a tent over it and whatever. And carpet. It was always very plain then. But they were buried with honor.

BRS: Nowadays when somebody dies, first the body is sent to a funeral home and prepared ...

SRD: No, we let, they were laid out in the homes then.

BRS: Laid out in the homes?

SRD: [Yes].

BRS: The doctor then would come and sign the death certificate?

SRD: And did what he could and if he was there long enough would pronounce he had died, you know, passed on. Well, when my father died, he had a heart spell and died one mornin'. He was sick, had been sick, and the doctor'd been seein' .... But the doctor didn't come when he died. He just pronounced him, made out the papers because he knew what was the trouble and that he was going to die at any minute. So he made out the papers, and gave it to the undertaker and that was it.

BRS: How old were you when your father died?

SRD: I was married when my father died. I guess I was, uh, I guess I was forty, uh, fifty years old when my father died. He lived quite a while after momma died. Momma died, had diabetes and died at sixty-five. He lived to be ninety-two, I believe. He, my youngest sister was home for a long time. After she joined the services [inaudible]. Then he got a colored woman to come in every day to do the wash, ironin' and cookin'.

BRS: Are the people who live on this peninsula now pretty much the same families who have lived here as long as you can remember?

SRD: No -- yes, the same families are dyin' out now, too. But, uh, different people .... You'd be surprised how many strange people came in with the Base and just, well, they moved in and mingled, you know, with the others. Uh, Society Hill, in fact, and Rosebank. There are people who aren't, weren't natives here. People who come from other places and moved in [inaudible]. There's a family

over to Society Hill, we call it, uh, Breton Bay Golf Course. I don't know what they call it. And they were, uh, he was born and raised up in Charles County, and he went off to different, uh, sorts of work. And now he's kind a on the retired list. He does real estate now, but he's moved out to Society Hill again. And we have him in our community and that's the kind a people ... lots of people like that come back, you know. We have a young man, our cousin Joe Abell, has, was born down here but went to Washington to school and worked in Washington and he's come back now after retiring and he lives out at Society Hill. And he plays golf and well, just, his wife died two years ago, and he just, uh, does [inaudible] himself now, you know. Doesn't have any job to bother him.

BRS: I take it most of the younger members of these families that are leaving the county are not coming back.

SRD: A lot of 'em don't come back, yes. But a lot of 'em do. I don't know, about half, I reckon, do come back and establish and keep on goin'. We have one lady, did I tell ya, that she will have a birthday Sunday? And she'll be a hundred years old. She's lived here all her life and she's, uh, our school teacher at first. She's my sister's teacher, and she's lives here now. She lived up Clements way when they first got married. And she was a Wathen and he was a ... she married, uh, Fulton Abell. And they live down there by the store now. And she was the one that put one of the glass windows, had, put her name on it, you know, paid for it and had it installed for her.

BRS: Well, ma'am, I'd like to thank you for talking to me about these things.

SRD: Well, I'd like to be able to say more but I don't know what ...

BRS: Believe me, ma'am, you've said enough. It's been a most enjoyable and most enlightening experience and I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude.

SRD: Well, you're very welcome, but I'm not much of a talker.

END

SUSAN R. DELAHAY
b. 1904

FIELD NOTES

1986

Interviewed by Bill Seymour

St. Mary's College of Maryland
St. Mary's City, Maryland

Strength more than years is what one sees in the eyes of Susan Delahay, the kind of strength years of a strong faith provide. A strong vibrant woman of some 81 years, Mrs. Delahay gives silent testimony to the good life well lived.

Mrs. Delahay no longer lives in the manor house at St. Francis Xavier Church, her home for 50 years. Yet, the house and the church are never far from her thoughts. A photograph dating to 1880 overlooks her bed, a photograph that pictures her parents and grandparents. On the wall hangs an official papal acknowledgement given in testimony to her many years of service to the church. Although Mrs. Delahay modestly downplays her life in and around the church, they clearly were and are very important to her. Those years have given her a quiet dignity that demands respect.

The past is very important to Mrs. Delahay; keeping alive the past is almost a passion with her. The quilts around the little pink house date to the 1880s, and she will readily talk at length about them. The pictures, the chairs, the tables, they all give evidence of the value of the past in her life. County-proud, Mrs. Delahay represents the heart of St. Mary's County.