

Transcription of the interview with Laurie Schaefer

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Interviewer: Richard Leavy

Location: Delaware County District Library

Leavy: First off, I just want to say thank you very much for participating in this. This is an interview about the Little Brown Jug and your experiences with it and any stories you would be interested in telling us. So, could you take a guess about how old you were when you first started to attend the Little Brown Jug race?

Schaefer: Well, first of all, my father was John H. Brown and he was a director with the fair for many years and he was in charge of the employment trailer and employing the workers. So early on, when I was very little, I remember him having badges in our house and having people come in, giving them badges as to what their number was. So, that was when I was quite young. I think I was in middle school, so that would have been (19)62, (19)63, (19)64, around there, that I actually made it into the grandstands on a Jug day. For me it is hard to separate the actual fair experience with the actual Jug race, because we were up at the fairgrounds a lot. So, just to let you know, I've been trying to figure out which was just a regular fair day, which was an actual Jug race day, and my memories for that.

Leavy: Let us go back to when you were in middle school. Do you have any recollection of what a race day was like and being in the grandstand and so on?

Schaefer: That's a great question, because my parents, kind of because they were there and they were going to be there, my father was going to be there, up and down in the grandstand. We were allowed to go up there. There were a lot of my friends whose parents had to be convinced the it was a safe day to go, because a lot of parents felt like Jug day had people up there that were from out-of-town and people were a little concerned about the security of it. My parents were of the mindset that it was the safest day to be there because it does cost a little more to get in. There aren't as many kids. We could get in, get on the rides easily. For me, I could remember a few of my friends that were allowed to go. Many of my friends were not allowed to go on Jug day. If my mom had, or my parents had extra tickets they would give them to us so we could get up into the grandstand. My mother usually had the box filled on Jug day.

Leavy: Since those early 1960s, can you say about how often you've attended the Jug?

Schaefer: I was trying to find some of my tickets. I know I attended when I was in high school, because the 'H Teens' and the 'Key Club,' the girls club and the boys club, were allowed to usher and help out, so I can remember going up there in high school and getting the day off (of school). This was before you could get the day off. They were not giving the day off for the teachers or the students at that point. My dad would set it up with the high school to allow the Key Club and H Teen members to go up there and I

was president of the H Teens so I got to go up and help usher. That was probably my first memorable experience of being there and watching how the whole thing was.

Leavy: What did ushering feel like or what was involved in that?

Schaefer: It was fun. You had a program and they would come up and you'd help them find their seat, either in the grandstand or in their box (seat). My parents had a box, it was #423, it still is #423. So, I knew where they were. It was fun and I know this a question coming on, but I think the thing that really impressed me early on was how dressed up everyone was. I would see people that I'd seen, just because they were friends of my parents, but boy did they really dress up differently when it came to Jug day.

Leavy: So all the men in suits?

Schaefer: Oh my goodness, yes. Women were dressed and some of them had hats and it was quite the style show.

Leavy: As time went along, were you going with high school friends, were you ever able to just be there as an audience?

Schaefer: It got to the point where, especially when – I grew up with three brothers – when it got to the point we had gone away to college or wherever, my mom then decided that the Jug day box should be for family. Then she stopped trying to get friends in there for the Jug day and she would fill the box throughout the week with friends, and she left (Jug day) just to us. So, I would say that – we lived here after I got married – about (19)75 on, I can't remember missing much. Because my mom said this is for family, so my brothers and I, my mom, my dad just went into the box. We'd have our day.

Leavy: So, forty years' worth.

Schaefer: Definitely.

Leavy: Over that time, did you have some rituals, some things that you always did on a Jug day?

Schaefer: It's kind of funny, one of the things that they were trying to build up and make it more community-friendly for a given period of time. So they started what was called the Little Brown Jug Festival, which was a whole week of activities, during fair week. It would start like on Saturday night – the fair didn't open until Sunday, it used to be – so starting on a Saturday night and in the night there were activities. There was a style show, there was a catered barbeque, and there was a sit-down dinner type thing. There were all sorts of things going on that was called the Brown Jug Festival. They had pins for those and it was quite fun to be a part of the Little Brown Jug Festival.

Leavy: Maybe we could show what some of the pins looked like?

Schaefer: [holding pins up to the camera] I wish this had a date on it, or I wish I would have put a date on it. This is a festival pin. This one is a 1989 festival pin, so that gives you some type of idea when that was. Here's another one...1987. So, around in there for a few years they had this festival. Their purpose was a good one. The purpose was to try to make it more accessible, to get the community involved. It worked, but then I think things kind of changed. It didn't become the event. As some new people moved into Delaware and Delaware started to expand as it did, there weren't as many people connected to it as there were, so they stopped that and concentrated on the fair itself, which was a good thing with the entertainment and that.

Leavy: So you have seen a lot of races, you have seen a lot of Jugs. If you were going to say 'what was a standout race or something really exciting'...

Schaefer: There were a couple of them. I thought of a couple. One thing that we would always do in our box – and we still do – are quarter bets with a deck of cards and you – don't choose your horse – you pick your card and whatever number that card is – you put your quarter in – and for as many horses, cards you choose you put in a quarter. Whatever one wins, you get the pot. Early on we found out that we could make more money doing that than what we could betting downstairs. My brothers and I a lot of times would go together and we would pick a horse or put money in a pot and we'd keep betting until it was gone. Those kinds of things, so that was fun...there are two that stand out and weather is one of the things that I can remember for some of them. One I remember was (19)75 or (19)76. My mother's box was full, but I was going to be able to go into the grandstand with a good friend of mine and I made an outfit for my mother to wear and I made a three-piece suit – skirt, vest and blazer - for myself to wear. We were all dressed up and that was probably one of the last times I remember everybody being so dressed up, but I can remember that very vividly – the suit I made. I was pretty proud of that. I would do that for my mom as well. Another one that stands out to me...all of a sudden, our friend, Bill Lowe - was the director of the fair – he said, 'Betty, I've got somebody, he's kind of a celebrity that needs to have a seat. I see that you've got an extra seat in your box, today. Would you mind?' She'd say, 'Sure, that's fine" not knowing who it was. It turned out to be Art Schlichter [laughing]. He spent the afternoon with us and this was before we realized – you know, what trouble gambling can get you into. But, it was a fun afternoon and we had pictures of all of us with Art Schlichter. So, that was kind of a memorable one. But the one that stands out, there are couple of them along the way. I remember the first year they started the bushes that say 'Little Brown Jug.' They put them out there and you could see where they were headed, but they looked so sparse. Then every year we would notice how much fuller they had gotten and more defined to say 'Little Brown Jug,' so that was kind of something to remember. There is one that stands out as well. There is that gate, you know, the pace car, and the gate goes [moving arms] and the car goes off to the side. There was one race where the gate did not (close). The gate stayed out and went over into the right turn where there were bleachers and a lot of people on scaffolding on trailers and mobile homes and all. Somebody that I knew, somebody that I graduated with from high school, she lost an eye, because the gate didn't close. It put a wet blanket over that particular race and that year. That was kind of a traumatic thing to watch. There have been all sorts of things that have happened every year. Our box was under, just enough under the shelter – kind of at the finish line off to

the side. We had pretty good seats, but it protected us from rain, from snow and direct sun. It kind of was a good place to be. We were able to see everything.

Leavy: You saw some very close races. I don't know whether or not in thinking back over these years, is there a horse that you particularly remember, maybe not...a driver, anything?

Schaefer: Like I said, I've got many of these tickets from past Jug races. Many of them, yes, I do remember seeing. I don't remember any one specific, but kind of a funny thing about the names of them. I brought this [holding up a postcard] to prove this, my daughter had her wedding reception up at the fairgrounds and she really wanted this because my dad had passed away and my mother had just passed away, just like a month before. She was very adamant about having it up there because of the connection to our family. They went to the actual box to have their picture taken. We all have a bigger picture of us. They would make these Brown Jug cut outs with the name of the horse and the time. Well, my dad ended up with quite a collection of those over the years, when he was given one of those. So, when we were talking about seating people up there, we took sticks and we taped the actual cut outs onto the sticks and put those in Jugs on each table inside the reception tent. When people came, their table was a Brown Jug winner. It was just one of those things where we needed to do that in honor of my dad. We just happened to have a pacer going around the track when we were up there. It was very special.

Leavy: How would you say the Jug has changed? You've seen it when people dressed up, you've seen it when there was a festival. It's not either of those things now. I'm not trying to shape your answer, but what are some of the changes you think you...

Schaefer: I think the dress is a big thing, because then all of a sudden it was – for the last few years – it's been real hot up there, really hot. So, now it's shorts and t-shirts or whatever to make yourself comfortable up there. So, that's one thing. We have also noticed the attendance has gone down quite a bit. We attribute that to the fact that there is online betting. You don't have to be there to bet. So, there's online betting and people are betting from the outside. That's kind of made a difference as well. Some of (the changes) are good though. It's definitely a party atmosphere still on Jug day. The other days might be kind of sparse, but it does pick up on Juliette day on Wednesday. You know there are still people that you see there, that you don't see all year long and it's kind of fun to know – you know where people's boxes are that have been in the family for years and years. It's still a fun thing to do and my brothers come, which now is like once a year, either all of them or at least two of them will come from Minneapolis, St. Louis or North Carolina. It's kind of our tribute to our parents, to do that.

Leavy: Do you think there are other families in Delaware for whom the Jug turns into a kind of family reunion?

Schaefer: Absolutely, absolutely.

Leavy: Then it is special.

Schaefer: Absolutely.

Leavy: Are there some traditions, are there some habits of doing the Jug, that you would want to see remain for all time?

Schaefer: I appreciate that question. One of the things I would think that they need to do, and I think they are working on this, I am not judging by any stretch of the imagination, because I am just very grateful that it's been able to be in Delaware as long as it has. The restroom facilities do need to be upgraded and when you think about people that are coming from all over the world in some cases, I know that is one thing that we hear a lot from the people around us. The restrooms could be upgraded. The facilities. I know they are working on some of the buildings that are up there for the sake of the fair. I think just maintaining what we have because, you know, there are glitzy places all around us that do it in a different way, a big way. I just think that this is pretty special that it comes from a little county fair and it's part of that. Whatever can be done to keep it there I'm all for it...definitely. It's important to Delaware.

Leavy: Well, that is what I was going to ask you about. I think there is something special for the city, the county. Is it that it is a county fair, or is there something else that you think makes it a special event.

Schaefer: It is a renowned horse race to begin with. It is something in the horse race community, it is well known, and the fact that we've called – at this point it used to be, well at one point it was just the Hayes Pacers and now all these elementary schools and middle schools all had different mascots – well now everybody is a Pacer in Delaware City Schools. I think that says a lot for the fact that this is important. To be able to combine Rutherford B. Hayes and the racing that are very specific to Delaware, I think that's special. The economy definitely benefits. I can remember when the Holiday Inn was here – it was on Henry Street over in there – my aunt and some of her friends would come from Louisville. It was my dad's sister who would come from Louisville and they would come and stay and there would be a big party there after, and the directors would all go and many times we were allowed to go as well when we got older. It was great fun because it just didn't stop at the racetrack, it went – my point is it went other places- and that was pretty neat to see that kind of spread out into the community. So, that was a part of it. Like I said, it has become Delaware's mascot. It's definitely a social event, that means a lot to the people who still attend.

Leavy: So ironically it is the signature event and there are people who go to the fair and they will not go to over where the racing is taking place. What is your thinking about that?

Schaefer: I think that a lot of it is – we have a different – people go to the fair for many different reasons first of all. I think that it's become a lot of families; I think there are a lot of kids that go up there and kind of go off on their own. They may know that it is going on, but for some reason, I think because of the wall, because of whatever, it feels like it is kind of a hands-off place for some people. Which I wish it wouldn't be, because now there isn't a dress code so to speak, anybody should be able to go in there

and enjoy it even if you are not betting, just to be able to enjoy the races. And there are lots of empty – they took down one set of bleachers because they were not being used – and now they have these hospitality tents which really has turned out to be a really good idea, where people can pay one money, they get into fair, they get into this tent, they get some betting money, they get food, and I think that's a good way to do it because some people don't necessarily want to sit in the bleachers or don't have a box or whatever and they would rather be away from the potential elements or whatever. They are right there along the track as you make that final turn and I think that's been a real positive thing for the fair to do.

Leavy: You mentioned that some of the changes – attendance seems to be down and I don't know, I guess nobody knows what the future holds for this race. If you could wave a magic wand, what sorts of things, what changes, would you want to see in order for this to go into the future?

Schaefer: That's a good question. First, I would fix the restrooms [laughing]. I would make that whole part down there just be a little nicer and not so primitive. Some of it is kind of primitive. That would be one thing. I think it would be nice to somehow advertise racing to the whole community. I know it's coming because I get a letter every year that says it's time to renew. "Do you want to keep your box," blah, blah, blah, "this is how much it's going to cost." Well, it's expensive to get a whole box, so you can get individual race day tickets, but it would be kind of nice if those could be in the boxes and not necessarily up in the bleachers because the bleachers, like I say, are up there, up high, they are very warm when it's been hot - the last few years it been really stifling. I have seen people faint and they had to be carried out or the EMTs had to come in, because it gets too hot up there. I know there are people that split boxes and kind of go together on that, but somehow the word needs to get out and advertise to the whole community that this is for everybody, it can be for everybody and not just a few people.

Leavy: Children, adolescents? OK.

Schaefer: Yeah.

Leavy: Ok, let me turn the question on its head. Suppose that there were no more Little Brown Jug. How would that effect you, personally?

Schaefer: First of all, it would take away a good reason for my brothers to come home and visit – and sisters-in-law – which would make me sad. That would be the first thing. I would feel – even though I am not on the board or anything like that – for some reason I would feel like my parents had been let down, especially my dad. He answered the call from Ohio Wesleyan when he was at Ohio Wesleyan that they were having this fair and people needed to come up – they needed workers. He got his fraternity brothers together and they all went up there and – it goes back that far in our family – back to the 1940s.

Leavy: The very beginning of the fair and the Jug.

Schaefer: Yeah. I would feel badly knowing that that had happened, you know, in my lifetime. So, that would make me sad. It would also make me sad to think that we would have lost something that has made Delaware special and has basically put us on the map. I don't want to see that happen. It would make me very sad.

Leavy: And I think for the community, in general, there would be an economic hit.

Schaefer: Absolutely. Absolutely.

Leavy: Are there other topics that we haven't covered? You have prepped for this (interview) and I don't know whether or not I have asked the questions that you wanted me to ask, so it is your time.

Schaefer: I think the dedication. So many people have had over the years that I remember. I remember a woman Erma Mendenhall that always took care of one particular restroom on the fairgrounds and she made sure it was clean and stocked and whatever. You could count on going to certain places and seeing certain people. I think that goes back to a memory of just being up at the fairgrounds. I look back on the people that I know over the years have put a lot into making the Jug and the racing and the fair what it is. I just have a tremendous amount of respect. I know there for a while they stopped racing on Mondays, which was one of those kinds of things. I am not really sure what happened there but, it used to be – I taught at Olentangy for many years – and it used to be (Monday) used to be Olentangy's day off to go to the fair, because there were so many students that were in 4-H. (Olentangy) was definitely more rural when I first started to teach there. So, we teachers throughout the county, if we taught for the county, we all had that day off and we would go up there and we would see our students and their work. Well, my mother used to give me the Monday race tickets and say, 'you've got all of these friends that are off, would you like to have the race tickets on Monday?' I would say sure, so I would fill the box with my friends and fellow county employee teachers and we used to have a great time up there. And then they decided, well, we can get the kids off for that day – which Monday is still the day off for Olentangy and many of the county schools – but we're going to turn it into a work day, a professional day for the teachers. So, I was really bummed when that happened [chuckles]. A lot of my friends were bummed, too. I mean we lost our fair day, our race day. That was one of those things that showed how it has evolved, not as many people involved. The other thing I've noticed in the flower building, the building that the arts and crafts are. That used to be choc-o-block full of flowers, baked goods, jams and jellies, and homemade items and outfits that had been sewn by people. My dad would go over there and help judge some of the baked goods and jams and jellies, because he was all about that. That was one of those things where it was a vivid memory when you go in and you see some things, and the quilts and some of the things that are back there are beautiful and the flowers, but it's not as full as it used to be. Something with some 4-H. There is something for everybody, you just have to look around and spend time up there. It's still a special time for us.

Leavy: I think it is important for the county.

Schaefer: Yes, absolutely.

Leavy: Any other topics, any other things that you would like to...

Schaefer: I think I have covered everything I wanted to.

Leavy: Who do you think this project really needs to interview in order for it to be a full oral history of the Jug?

Schaefer: ...definitely Bill Lowe and his wife Sandy, Rex Welker, my dad worked with Frank Welker, Tom Wilson, George Hoffman, John Brown, Mr. Thomson of course, who's not around anymore, those are the men that started – another person would be the Hackett girls, they are grand-daughters of Curly Smart. There's Cheryl Ross, there's Sue Kriner, who lives right down the street from me, and I think it's Lisa Shaw, she lives right around the corner on Elmwood. But those girls – there was a Tim – they grew up and they would remember Curly, so I think that is important. Any of the Wright family – Tom and Cheryl Wright. There are many of us who grew up with this. Mike Hoffman, of course who has worked up there for many years. The whole Wilson family, when we talked about boxes, you know whose going to be at a certain place. The Wilson box is still – I know right where it is.

Leavy: It was a number, but also a name with it.

Schaefer: Oh yeah, yep.

Leavy: Thank you very much Laurie. I appreciate you taking the time to do this.

Schaefer: You're welcome.

Leavy: If anything else comes to mind, let us know.