



LITTLE BROWN JUG ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscences of Russell Martin

October 3, 2019

Delaware County Historical Society
Delaware, Oh

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PREFACE

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Sheriff Russell Martin, conducted by Richard Leavy of the Delaware County Historical Society on October 3, 2019 at the Delaware County District Library.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been created by Jay Wolf and has been edited for clarity only.

Transcriptionist	Jay Wolf
Transcription Date	June 22, 2020
Interviewee	Sheriff Russell Martin
Interviewer	Richard Leavy
Interview Location	Delaware County District Library
Interview Date:	October 3, 2019

Russell Martin Transcript

Leavy: Sheriff Martin, I just want to say thank you very much for being willing to be a participant in this. Let me just start at the beginning, the first Jug that you attended, about how old were you and what year was that?

Martin: Well, I have been in the community now 38 years, so it would have been 38 years ago when I first attended the Brown Jug and at that time I was a “wet behind the ears,” new, young police officer, so that whole experience was brand new to me. My wife and I had moved here from Auglaize County and we were not familiar with the Little Brown Jug. In my role as a young police officer, patrolman, we were all assigned to work that day to manage the traffic. We were all assigned different intersections, so my earliest experience with the Little Brown Jug is working in partnership with my co-workers to make sure traffic got into the event safely and then out-of-town safely as well.

Leavy: When it comes to being a police officer at the Jug do you spend any time seeing the races or anything else that’s going on?

Martin: As I considered this oral history, I was reminded of a scene from the original Jaws movie and it was about the best analogy I could make. In the movie the chief is on the beach on a major holiday and he’s been directed to open up the beach so that everybody can enjoy the beach, the holiday and the weather. While everyone is enjoying the holiday, beach balls and is in the water, the scene shows the chief, almost in a state of anxiety, as he’s watching the beach, surveying all those in the water and you can see that his primary concern is for the safety and welfare of those at the beach. Really, I think in law enforcement the reality of it is while we may have seen portions of some races or listen to the call of the races, most law enforcement officers are charged to be vigilant, to be situationally aware. They really don’t get a chance to enjoy what everybody else is enjoying. Their primary responsibility is to make sure everybody is safe.

Leavy: Since that first Jug, how frequently...has it been every Jug that you’ve attended?

Martin: Well, I have been to every Jug in some capacity and in 38 years I think I’ve probably only had two where I was just off (duty) of the day, either as the way my schedule fell as a patrolman. I can only recall one time going to the Jug as a spectator and primarily that was

because our neighbors at the time actually had horses and they invited us to share that experience with them. The reality of it is, that in almost four decades, and participating in some level for 39 Little Brown Jugs I have only been there one time as a spectator.

Leavy: Would you say you look forward to the Jug or not really?

Martin: I think that it's a part of Delaware County, there's no doubt about that. The Little Brown Jug, this area is known for it, so I can't imagine a September without the Little Brown Jug and the Delaware County Fair. I do appreciate the significance of the event in creating the distinction that is Delaware County, but I will tell you that I think in general law enforcement sees it as a job and sees it, as I said before, their primary concern is making sure people enjoy the day, they enjoy the day safely and that they arrive and get out of town safely as well.

Leavy: Over that almost four decades, have you seen some changes in the Jug?

Martin: I certainly have seen changes over the several decades. It was a pretty signature event in all of Central Ohio early on. I think there was less off-track betting, the crowds were much larger and as a result of that more spectators came in from at least the eastern seaboard and Florida and Canada. I will tell you that, 35 or 40 years ago, the downtown really kind of rocked on the night of the Little Brown Jug and the night before. Those events have changed over time. Now I think that the crowds are a little bit smaller because I think of the availability to bet off track. More people can keep track of the events on the internet and as a result of that the crowds have kind of gotten smaller. I think too that we don't quite have that party atmosphere in downtown Delaware that we had 30 or 35 years ago, which is probably OK, you know, as a police officer.

Leavy: Again, this may be a question that relates more to the person who would attend the Jug for the races and so on, but are there some traditions that you think should be retained as a part of the Jug...something that shouldn't be let go?

Martin: While it is not directly associated with the Little Brown Jug there is no doubt about it, the All Horse Parade, which is a week before the Jug, I think that is a tradition that needs to continue. I think the community and people travel to see all the different horses. That is a special event. Overall, I would be disappointed if the race itself migrated away from the fairgrounds.

That partnership between the fair and the Little Brown Jug makes it certainly a unique experience in all of Ohio. So, just the tradition of having a leg of that Triple Crown during our fair week, I hope that's something that's always there.

Leavy: That is one of the special features.

Martin: Absolutely. Hopefully that will remain, during the course of time there's always been discussions about taking that race to one of the local racetracks in Central Ohio. I think that the fair has a distinctly different flavor as a result of having a leg of the Triple Crown as a part of it.

Leavy: In order for the Little Brown Jug to continue into the future, to be sustained, what changes, if any, do you think could be or need to be made?

Martin: First and foremost, I think that fairgrounds in and of itself should be one of the premier county fair destinations. Frankly, the recent passage of the bed tax has provided a revenue stream to keep the fairgrounds up, adding new facilities, improving old facilities, improving the infrastructure. I think the sustaining of the fairgrounds, keeping the facilities looking nice and safe. That revenue stream is important that because this race is so significant that it has a destination worthy of a leg of the Triple Crown.

Leavy: Again, your principal focus has been security and I am wondering that if in the history that you have with the Jug, have there been some particular challenges that are memorable for you?

Martin: Yeah and I think this speaks to how law enforcement sees the world in which it lives in. I think most law enforcement officers see themselves as guardians or protectors. So, when we think about an event at this scale of the Little Brown Jug, I look back over the course of my professional career, I can remember early on when the Delaware Hotel was open on South Sandusky Street. Their bar and reception area was always packed on both the Wednesday and Thursday nights of fair week with people from all over the country, Florida, Canada, the eastern seaboard that came in for that race. Frankly, as a young police officer, I can remember responding on numerous occasions to patrons that had too much to drink and those classic bar fights we used to walk into. We'd have to separate the locals from the visitors and on some

occasions we had to make arrests. Those were exciting times as a young police officer. We had some occasions at the downtown bars as well. I do remember a gentleman from out of state that pulled a knife on a police officer one night. He had to be arrested. It was a pretty harrowing event. Fortunately, the officer didn't get stabbed and we were able to subdue that guy. Those aren't your classic Brown Jug stories, but I think they speak to what law enforcement has to deal with. When I look back, again, there have been events that impacted law enforcement. I think about the potential threat of tornados coming through, high winds. We've had to contend with that. How do we get those patrons out of there safely under those circumstances? I think most of us, who were around a long time ago, will never forget the unfortunate circumstance when the starting gate did not close. As that starter's gate pulled to the right and the gate didn't (close) it struck several patrons and they were seriously injured.

[Coughing – Takes A Break]

I think one of the significant memories in law enforcement, again it speaks to that issue of public safety and dealing with tragedy in some level, was the event where the starter's gate failed to (close) during the start of a race. I was working that day and when that (car) pulled to the side to allow the race to go around it and unfortunately the gate didn't (close) and it struck several of the patrons who were watching the race along the fence line - the response to those serious injuries – just the tragedy of the event at such a special occasion. It's been a long time ago, but I remember the injuries, the impact even on the first responders as they were administering first aid. Again, it's a great community event, but when your primary focus is public safety you have less of an opportunity to enjoy the party atmosphere because you are more focused on the people and their safety, so they can enjoy it.

Leavy: I know traffic is an issue and I am wondering, over the years, has that changed?

Martin: I would say again, having been a part of the community for almost four decades, I saw several iterations of ingress and egress, traffic into and out of the fairgrounds. I can remember when our supervisors would experiment annually with different ways. We would capture where the bottlenecks were. I will say over time, I think that they captured a plan that safely gets people in with cooperation from the local police, the sheriff's office, the state highway patrol, we are able to manage a lot of those intersections and get people out as well. I do think there has been a vast improvement in preparation for those events, as opposed to thirty years ago, and our communication has obviously improved. It also speaks to the fact that – I worked the

intersection of Central and Sandusky Street for many years – you just knew going into the event, because you worked that intersection previously that was going to be your intersection. Local law enforcement took some pride in working their intersection efficiently and trying to get cars through without accidents. I think law enforcement, again, sees the value that they bring to the event by just managing the traffic.

Leavy: Does the fact that horses are involved – does that have any impact – does that pose any kind of interesting problems for your staff?

Martin: I think over the course of – again, almost four decades – there are probably stories out there where they've had to move the horses. Sometimes it's an unpredictable animal and even on the fairgrounds there's been events where maybe a horse has gotten loose and had to be corralled. Again, I know it's a law enforcement perspective, but two years ago as the county sheriff, I was on the backstretch and I was on a golf cart with another deputy and we were kind of surveying the people at the event and making sure things were safe. A horse got temporarily loose and ran into the crowd. There was a small gathering of people seated on a blanket. As the horse stomped through, it broke the leg of one of the patrons. So the squad had to arrive and administer first aid. He was not a young gentleman, he was older and it was a pretty significant injury. Your dealing with a strong, several-hundred-pound animal who is sometimes unpredictable and even that can provide challenges for public safety.

Leavy: I can see that. In your opinion, what are some of the positive contributions that the Jug has made for Delaware, for the county, in general?

Martin: I certainly think that the Little Brown Jug has helped put Delaware County on the map. As I have had the opportunity to travel and as people ask me where I am from, on many occasions, people from other states or even in Canada have said, 'isn't that where they run the Little Brown Jug, a leg of the Triple Crown?' It has put Delaware County on the map. It makes this a very unique fair, unlike any other county fair in the state of Ohio. I think as a result of that, it separates our community from a lot of other communities and gives it – adds to the uniqueness of Delaware County.

Leavy: Are there any other topics, stories that you would like to include so that this would be an even better oral history?

Martin: I think there is a measure of satisfaction at the end of fair week or the end of the Little Brown Jug for law enforcement. We know that people travel here from great distances to participate in this event, that it is an annual event that brings out a lot of people in the community. Our local business shut down obviously at noon on the day of the Little Brown Jug. Despite the fact that law enforcement is charged with the duty to make sure people are safe and that the traffic flows safely. My fondest memories are when traffic is finally done and law enforcement is rounding up the traffic cones. So many officers have been dedicated to that day and the safety of people, when they finally all gather at their respective agencies, there is a certain comradery and a feeling of accomplishment that, once again, local law enforcement has worked in the background to provide this special and unique event to the community. I think there is a sense of satisfaction in that service and I've seen it a lot of times as we have retreated back to headquarters, at the end of a long day. Somebody has inevitably bought several pizzas and the guys and gals will stay just a little bit longer to indulge in those pizzas, tell stories about the day, give each other high fives, brag about how they managed their intersection, perhaps give their co-workers a rough time because they didn't manage their intersection so well. From a law enforcement perspective there is that sense that we've contributed to a special event in this county. I think, by and large, police officers and deputies feel good about that.

Leavy: It's a source of pride.

Martin: Yes, absolutely.

Cameraman (Brad Cowan): Have you ever ridden in a sulky?

Martin: I have never ridden in a sulky. I have been invited a few times and I need to make that a part of my checklist, my bucket list. Someday I'll do that. Frankly, this year I considered riding in the back of the starter's truck. I guess you get a perspective of the race. I'm not done being sheriff yet, so there's still a few things I would like to do associated with the Little Brown Jug.

Leavy: Thank you very much for making time for us and I very much appreciate it.

Martin: You're welcome. I am glad to be considered a part of the