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MRS. MARY HAZARD COLLINS OF WILMINGTON, DELAWARE BY MRS. GEORGE
(MARY SAM) WARD IN MARCH 1974.

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MRS. MARY HAZZARD COLLINS

Mary Hazzard Collins
This is an oral interview with Mary Collins, March, 1974.

MSW - Mrs. Collins, can you tell me where you were born and when you first came to this area?

Mrs. C. - I was born, in let's say Churchill, Md., I was born in a little place called Salem, a little place on the Eastern Shore.

MSW - When did you come to Delaware?

Mrs. C. - They brought me here when I was a little girl, in 1900.

MSW - And where did you live at that time?

Mrs. C. - I lived with my aunt; my mother and aunt lived together.

MSW - What type of work did you do before you went out to Hagley?

Mrs. C. - Well, I didn't do very much of anything at the time, no more than babysit or something like that. But I heard about Hagley, then we went out there. My mother didn't want me to go because it was a powder plant. At that time there were so much explosions out there. I wanted to go and I got two other girls to go with me. They had no other women out there and I was chosen as a forelady. My work was going to the office, getting the time slips and taking them to the men that worked there. The powder men worked in the magazine; magazines where they made black powder. Well I used to go in and out the black powder magazines, take them their time slips and then in the evening I collected them and then when they made the powder it was packed in boxes, in wooden crates I mean, and there was always a freight train out there. You know, not the engine but the freight car, box car, and the men would bring the boxes to the car and we would pack them in the cars. And they were shipped away to the war. It was during wartime. It was shipped away so they could get them and I took the numbers of the box car that they were in, how many boxes was in this and that was my job. And then I went around, the other girls went around, but my job was going to the office and then when the girls come in or even the men I would have to search everybody. There was a man there to help me but I was searching the girls to see that they had no cigarettes, no matches or anything to take on the ground with them. I had a little house where I would sit all
day and then what else did I do? Then after that-I did that I went to the office and
told them how many girls was there and took in their slips and go around to the men and
get their slips and take them into the office. In the meantime I heard that later on
they were going to hire girls in the building and I wanted to leave the powder plant.
I didn't especially want to go in the building for this reason. I was always afraid of
an elevator - a country girl, I didn't want to go up and down in an elevator because I
was afraid of it so when I found out what it was I wasn't in no hurry, but in the mean-
time they had this big explosion out there and quite a few of the men were killed but
before it happened I went to the magazine and collected the time slips and I stood and
talked to them for a while and then I went on to the office. I had no sooner got in
the office than the explosion occurred. On the way out I said to one of the girls,"Oh
let's go back and help them and see what the trouble is." She said, "No we won't go
back. Our mothers will be wondering if we were hurt. I think we better go home first."
And we did. And the next morning we went back - 2 or 3 of us - we went back and all
the others that had been hired they refused to come back because of the explosion. We
went back and the men were picking up arms and legs. Some was in the trees.

MSW - Do you remember what year this was?

Mrs. C. - 1918 - so we didn't pick up any of the flesh, they didn't want us to do that
but we was there and I took their slips for the time in which they worked. We did go
back the next day but things were so torn up that we didn't stay. Then I heard that
they were going to employ girls at the Du Pont Building for elevator operators and my
cousin begged me to go but I was afraid of the elevator but I finally decided I would
go and I went and I was there for 28 years.

MSW - Now, where was this, which building was this?

Mrs. C. - 10th and Market. The first Du Pont Bldg.

MSW - Now let's get back to the girls where you worked when you first went out - do you
remember just approximately how many girls were working out there?
Mrs. C. - I think it was either - about 10 - 8 or 10 but it has been so long I don't remember.

MSW - Now, what did some of these other girls do? You mentioned you took the slips around. Did some of them help in the packing of these crates or boxes?

Mrs. C. - I don't think they worked in the magazine and yet they brought them to the area. Some of them was in the coach with me helping me to pack them. You know and the men brought them to me. Now there was one man there and he had been there quite a while and that was a Lester Polk. I do remember him and he would bring the powder boxes to us. And they would put them on the floor of the coach and then we would pack them.

MSW - Now were these in small containers?

Mrs. C. - Oh about like that, about that high.

MSW - Were they very heavy?

Mrs. C. - No, they weren't heavy - just light powder. The men would bring them to us and we would pack it. Then I would take the number of each train that went out with them so they would know what coach they were on and how many was in that freight coach.

MSW - Sounds as though you would have to be real accurate in what you were doing.

Mrs. C. - Oh yes. I had to take the number of it and name of the coach and the number of it - you know those freight cars have those numbers on them and I had to take the numbers and also the numbers on the bombs - what they called bombs - that they would put on the coach.

MSW - How long did you work there in Hagley?

Mrs. C. - Well, I went there in the - I can't seem to remember - I didn't work there too long. It wasn't a year because most of the girls left and just we two - two - or three of us was there to go back and of course my mother didn't want me to go back and work there any longer because of the danger because she thought they would have another explosion.

MSW - Do you remember how you got to work? How did you get out there?
Mrs. C. - On the trolley. The one he was talking about. I think we got it at 8th and Market. Rising Sun. I think it was Rising Sun.

MSW - Yes, it went out that way.

Mrs. C. - And we went so far and then we got a little dinky to the yard.

MSW - Do you remember what time of day you went to work?

Mrs. C. - We got there early - I don't remember. I left home about 7:00. We must have got the 7:30 bus. We got there around 8:00 o'clock.

MSW - And then I suppose you had to work until 5 or 6?

Mrs. C. - 5:00 - Same trolley to go back home at night.

MSW - Do you remember the names of any of these other girls that were working there?

Mrs. C. - Well, I was talking to two of them and they didn't want their names mentioned because they - I don't know why they didn't want me to name them. But these three I didn't know but I did know a Mrs. Mayo, a much older woman. They were the ones that were afraid. Mrs. Mayo and a Mrs. Jones - Mary Jones I think they called her.

MSW - Is she no longer living?

Mrs. C. - She is at Bacon Center. A little woman. She has been sick for a long long time.

MSW - And we mentioned Mrs. Ball who just recently died.

Mrs. C. - I don't remember her being with us.

Well, she had said that she worked out here in packing boxes so maybe she was on a different shift.

Mrs. C. - Well she might have been - was it she herself. Did you talk to her before she died?

MSW - Yes, I talked to her on the telephone.

Mrs. C. - Maybe she was one of them that helped to pack the boxes - and packed the bombs. That's what they called them. Maybe she was one. And her name was Irene Ball.

I forgot all about her. And then there was others but I don't remember their names now.
And quite a few of them have passed.

MSW - And you say Mrs. Jones is out to the Bacon Center. Have you talked with her recently?

Mrs. C. - Oh not for two years. But she is still out there. Now these girls, they were only there for a short time cause they were trying to make enough money to go to college and the two girls had been art teachers but they are retired now.

MSW - Did they teach there in the Wilmington area?

Mrs. C. - That's right - right here in Wilmington.

MSW - It would be interesting to talk with them. They were probably doing the same sort of thing, packing crates or boxes, as the others were doing?

Mrs. C. - Uh - yes. They helped me to do that. The three worked with me. Because I encouraged them to go with me. I didn't want to go alone. They went with me.

MSW - Do you remember how you happened to hear about the job in the first place?

Mrs. C. - Well I just met a friend on the street and she told me, she said, "You know, I hear they are employing girls out to Hagley Yard. But I wouldn't go out there - it is too dangerous." So I spoke to one of the other girls and said, "Let's go out there." I spoke to my mother and she didn't want me to go for anything because she said I was all she had and she didn't want to lose me. But we went. So I went and we'd be all right. And the very day of the explosion I went in the back where this girl encouraged me not to go - not to stay - then I decided we would go home because she said our mothers would think we were hurt in the explosion. Instead of that my aunt went to the front door and I went to the back door and she asked my mother "Did you hear that explosion?" Mother said, "Yes, is Mary home?" "No, and I bet she's in it." I said, "No, I'm not - I'm home," and I went in the back door.

MSW - They were happy about that. You mentioned that you had been afraid of the elevators but not afraid to go to the magazine.

Mrs. C. - Well, I'll tell you. My mother used to send me in one of the buildings to
pay insurance and every time I was all right going up but when I'd come down I'd hold my stomach as though everything was coming out of me. And that's why I was afraid of the elevators. Finally, my cousin trained me and told me not to be afraid going up and down. I soon got used to it and then later on I was made a starter and I came in contact with everyone that used the elevators on the 10th St. side.

MSW - Do you remember any people that you met while you were working in the elevator there at 10th and Market?

Mrs. C. - I met Mr. Lammot du Pont and Mr. Irénée; they knew me and Mr. Frank du Pont. He's the one who died, didn't he? That was T. Coleman's son. And oh, at Christmas time they'd always give me a nice gift of money.

MSW - Do you have any distinct impression of any of them as they were coming in? What they looked like or what they were like?

Mrs. C. - I thought they were very pleasant and they were, of course. Mr. Lammot du Pont used to ride a bicycle out to work and even though he had a chauffeur he used his bike.

MSW - I guess he was ahead of his time because they are telling us now we had better travel by bikes instead of a car.

Mrs. C. - Oh I knew Miss Sybil Ward. Are you related to her? And her brother. He was always in the building. I can't think of all of them because it has been so long. Mr. Frederick was our head boss and he had charge of us. He sort of employed the girls.

MSW - Now were you employed by the Du Pont Company at this time?

Mrs. C. - Yes, yes.

MSW - Were you interviewed for this job? - Do you remember who talked to you?

Mrs. C. - I think - of course he has been dead...a Mr. Hertesaw. He had his office in the basement and he interviewed us.

MSW - Mrs. Collins, what do you think are the biggest changes between that period back in the war times and now?

Mrs. C. - Well, I personally feel that I worked there for 25 years straight and I was only out sick once.
MSW - That was a great record!

Mrs. C. - And I had sciatica and I couldn't hardly walk - couldn't walk and then different ones stopped to visit me and then when I did go back the Doctor said it was all right to work and I worked just part time for awhile. I felt fine. And I did.

MSW - Do you mind telling me how old you are now Mrs. Collins?

Mrs. C. - Oh dear. That's something to tell you that. I reached my 81st -

MSW - What do you think has been the secret of your good health all these years?

Mrs. C. - Well I just thank the Lord that I have good health. I don't have an ache or a pain. My only trouble is my eyes and that happened right here in this building. I was here four months and I went across the street to a diner and a car swung around the corner, a big truck, and hit me - threw me way up in the air and knocked me down to the pavement and the Doctor said that was the trouble - my eyes. Of course I went to the hospital and the doctors took care of me and he was a friend of Dr. Heacock's and at that time I was with him just one day a week - taking care of his house - and when I went to the hospital this Doctor was getting ready to go home and he turned and looked at me and said, "Oh, she's in a bad condition, I think I'll look at her." He took his coat off and then he come to me and he was the only one I had and he was a bone specialist and he found that I had a bone broken - my pelvis bone was broken. So then Dr. Heacock's secretary, Mrs. Fisher, he was abroad - Mrs. Fisher cablegrammed him and told him what happened to me. He got a plane and came home and when he walked in the hospital the Doctor looked up and said, "Walter, what are you doing here?" And he said, "You've got my girl and please take care of her." He said, "That's just what I'm doing. I'm trying my best." And I was in the hospital six weeks and after that he called me his prize patient. That was no other person than Dr. Strange. You know him?

MSW - Yes I do.

Mrs. C. - He took care of me. I have been planning to call him up and tell him I haven't had an ache or a pain and I can walk as good as anyone can. For months I couldn't hardly walk. I had to use a walker.
MSW - Did that bother your eyes right away?

Mrs. C. - He said the fall hurt my eyes but before that I did have an accident in my home with my eyes because I slipped on a rug and I had hardwood floors and the floors was waxed and I slipped on this rug and I fell against the table and the sharp edge of the table punctured my eye back - just punctured right in. I didn't have nothing but that hole there. My right eye. Then Dr. Heacock was going somewhere and he said, "Now don't get in trouble for the time I get back." And before he got back I had punctured my eye. And my cousin happened to be at the house at the time - it was night - and she rushed me to Johns Hopkins Hospital - I mean Wills Eye Hospital, in Philadelphia and before the Doctor could bring my eye out it popped out itself. He said, "Well, I never saw anything like that happen before. You certainly must live right." I said, "I try to." He said, "Well, that is unusual. I've never seen anything like that." I had a cataract on the left eye and I think in his excitement he must have damaged that eye because now I don't see at all by this eye. But I did see for about five years or a little over five years with my left eye, my right eye that was punched in. He didn't touch it because he said it was alright and then when I had that fall from the automobile he said that hurt my head and I hurt my eyes. I had been able to see just a little bit but now I can see day and night and sometimes if I look at it hard enough I can see the hands of a clock.

MSW - Well, that's encouraging, isn't it. Through the years Mrs. Collins what have been your interests and activities other than your work experience that you told me about?

Mrs. C. - Crocheting, knitting, making pocketbooks.

MSW - And you still do some knitting and crocheting?

Mrs. C. - Yes.

MSW - That's very great.

Mrs. C. - I have some I made. Arthur, are you available? (Her husband)
Arthur - She made one of these, afghans.

MSW - Did she make this one?

Arthur - Not this one.

MSW - Mr. Collins, when did you first meet Mrs. Collins and what was your impression of her as a young lady?

Arthur - When she was young she was so hoityed toityed that I never even got to speak to her. Then I met her after finding her handicapped and after knowing the condition that I were in, like I just said a while ago, I just asked her if...when I used to do things for her she used to pay me to do it. And I thought to myself, that lady is handicapped and I'm not going to charge her anything so then I told her any time you want me to do anything I'd be only too glad to do it. Anything you want me to do around your apartment - I had my own home then - on Madison Street. I'd be only too glad to do it. So, what broke it, she said to me one time - she could see a little enought to prepare her own food - you said you go to the restaurant to eat - when you come out here why not eat with me - I'm fixing something for myself, why not fix something for you and I said all right I'll do that. A few weeks after that I asked her that question and then my relatives, my immediate relatives on my mother's side they just loved her, so they have us periodically for dinners and they are happy for me too. I have a daughter, a girl that I raised - she has a daughter - a very good nurse out at the State Hospital and things got so that everything was high so I thought I'd better come here, so we got married and come here a nominal sum for rent but when I come here they boosted it up to $100. Well, I didn't mind that because I was getting a good railroad pension.

MSW - When did you first start working for the railroad?

Mr. C. - Six of March, 1923 and I worked there and retired - the same year my wife died I retired and when I retired the railroad don't pay Social Security but I retired. I got two more jobs. I worked for Mrs. Ryan out here on Centerville Road and I was taking care of her launderette. I done that in order to accumulate Social Security.
I only done it for 18 months and I quit.

MSW - You mentioned earlier that you worked for the grocery that delivered -

Mr. C. - 7th and Market - F.B. Turner - anybody that's been in Wilmington will know of that because that was one of the stores that catered to the Carpenters, the de Ponts, and I was one that delivered there. J.W. Bush used to be out on Broom St. and at that time there where the Greek Church is on Broom Street there was a du Pont lived there then.

MSW - That was T. Coleman du Pont.

Mr. C. - I carried a box of groceries in there - I've had really about two steady jobs in my life. I spent time out here in Augustine - you know, Augustine Mill - nine years - I went there very young. I done the first job out on the Marine Terminal out there for 25¢ an hour and after leaving there why I had been to Augustine Mill and went to Philadelphia to a paper mill there. That job only lasted two weeks and I came back and begged for my job at Augustine and they took me back again and I stayed there until I went to the railroad.

MSW - What did you do in the Augustine Mill?

Mr. C. - Well, I worked in the cutter room. I worked on a stack of calendars and when I first went there I went there as a laborer and I finally worked up and went to the calendar room and I worked in the cutter room.

MSW - What were they making at Augustine?

Mr. C. - Paper, magazine paper, and that sort of thing. Girls worked there at the time. I don't know what they are doing now.

MSW - Who employed you at that time? What was the name of the man...

Mr. C. - Well, the man that was boss there was - did you ever hear of Chief Black, chief of police here in town, his brother William Black - the superintendent for that mill was Adam Lindsey. They had a mill at Augustine and they also had another one.

Mrs. C. - I was president at one time of the Women's Society of Christian Service.
MSW - What church did you go to?

Mrs. C. - Ezion, 9th and French but now they have it torn down. Now they are connected with Ezion-Mt. Carmel at 10th and Lombard but they are building and the church will be finished at Walnut between 8th and 9th. It will be open for all to see. Well they are going to have a big dinner on the 28th of April and everybody will be able to see the new church. I've asked several people if they would like to go.

MSW - It sounds like it will be a wonderful thing.

Mrs. C. - The opening of the new church.

MSW - Have they been working on it for some time?

Mrs. C. - It is complete now - they are putting things inside. I have asked Dr. Heacock if he'd like to go because I know when I came out here he came out here and investigated this place before I come.

MSW - This is a very nice place.

Mrs. C. - He said it was and he never misses a month that he don't come out here. He takes care of all my bills.

MSW - That is nice.

Mrs. C. - Since I haven't been able to see he takes care of my bills.

MSW - Can you tell me about some of the volunteer work you do now Mrs. Collins?

Mrs. C. - Well, I told them I would teach them how to make dogs - little children love dogs. Now I did start with them in knitting but the knitting is hard to do. If they got something wrong I'd have to pick it out and I couldn't see. I'd only feel it out and get it straight for them but the children were very lovely children. I liked them very much and they liked me. If they got anything wrong they would be running to me to show me what the work was and if they got it right they wanted me to see how well they did and I thought they were a most interesting bunch but the Doctor felt that it was too close work for me to do and he felt it was too much of a strain on my eyes since I only had the one eye to work with you know. And then when it came to crocheting they
wanted to learn to do that and I got some samples for them but I finally gave it up. I told them I wouldn't be able to work with them. So they got another girl. The lady told me they weren't satisfied with this girl now and she asked if my husband and I would work with the smaller children, so I did. Now they are too small because they are between two and five and they are not old enough to do that kind of work. I was showing one of the teachers that works with them to make the dogs so she can help when they get older.

MSW - How long have you been working on your afghan? It is so pretty.
Mrs. C. - Not quite a year. I just pick it up now and then you know. I think I have red on it now and I want to finish the red out and then I want to put an edge on it and I think I'll finish it.

MSW - Well, it certainly is a lovely - I like your color scheme so much.
Mrs. C. - My husband brought one on the back of the couch. He paid $8.00 for it and the lady who started me back on crocheting made it. She gave me that little one on the arm of the couch so then I said I want to make one of my own, so she got me started on that and I have been working on it ever since.

MSW - I certainly have enjoyed talking with you and if you think of any other things, you can get in touch with me and we can see if we can get in touch with the other people.
Mrs. C. - I'll tell the girls about you.