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## C. Dale Hopkins interview for the 1913 Dayton Flood Oral Survivors Histories Collection

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**WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**1913 Dayton Flood Oral Survivors Histories (MS-296)**

Interview date: December 11, 1995

Interviewer: Jeff Moyer

Interviewee: C. Dale Hopkins

**Jeff Moyer:** Okay, we're ready to roll. If you want to tell us what happened that morning with your brother?

**C. Dale Hopkins:** Well, that morning my oldest brother asked if uh we wanted to go down to and see the river. We said sure. So, we got into the Traction Car. We lived out in Belmont, had to come in on the Traction, come in to uh the Traction office on fourth, and uh, the Arcade building and we got off there and went over on Main and come up main. We got just about this far when the levee broke.

**JM:** That was right behind you here?

**CDH:** Yeah. Yeah. Though the fire engine was horse drawn then, come running down the street ringing a bell and a big wave of water right behind them. So we ran in the store here. I was trying to think of the name of it and the one up on the third floor. I looked out and the water was covering the street then. So, we decided this would be a poor place to be if there's gonna be a flood. So, we came down and we came down and went down Main Street, weighed down about ankle deep then. Down to Fifth and we went East on Fifth to Wayne Avenue. Then we went South on Wayne Avenue and when we got onto Market House, that's the lowest spot down there, why, it was waist deep. We waded through that and immediately, why, Wayne Avenue goes up that hill, you know. So we were up on high ground. We got up to Wyoming Street and decided we'd go back down to Fairgrounds and see what was going on there that was a high point. So we went down to Fairgrounds and sat there all day and watch the flood come over Dayton. From there why we saw some awful sites; people come out their second story windows on the roof, onto their roofs. The NCR put all our factory into making rowboats and they brought them over there and put them in and starting to rescue people from these rowboats and bring them back to Hickory Street School there. And, uh, we sat there all day and watched the proceedings that time the water was well up in the small homes that were down, lower part of Main Street there at Apple Street; had floated down and hit the canal bridge and just splintered to pieces.

**JM:** Really? The boats or the homes?

**CDH:** The homes. So we had a, a view of it there from the Fairgrounds. From then on we uh we were in the flood actually that, that first day. We were right up there when the levee broke. We went up in a building here and then uh Johnson Shelton I think it was then and uh we looked down here on Main Street and saw the water coming up over the curb, decided this was a poor

place to be if you're gonna be in high water. So we came down and waited down Main to Fifth and then East to Fifth to Wayne then that Wayne we got caught in the low spot down there to (unknown).

**JM:** You were about eleven years old?

**CDH:** I was eleven years old.

**JM:** Uh-huh. So you were in junior high school or what we would call finishing...something like that?

**CDH:** Yeah.

**JM:** So you came out here just for the, out of curiosity?

**CDH:** Well yeah. My older brother had a pass. Then you had to get a pass from the National Guard, you know, if you wanted to go anywhere in town. And he finagled a pass someway. I don't know how he got that. He wanted to know if we wanted to go down and see the river, which we did. And then he let us go. He stopped at a delivery stable. That time there were a lot of delivery stables. He was helping a man release his horses so they didn't drown. And he didn't get out of there for five days, so...

**JM:** Really? He was trapped there for five days...

**CDH:** He was trapped there for...

**JM:** ...in the stable?

**CDH:** Uh-huh. So...

**JM:** You're dad worked in the, in the Traction Company, the power company?

**CDH:** Yeah he was in the street; he was on the car line. And he happened to be on the other side of town.

**JM:** Oh really?

**CDH:** Yeah.

**JM:** You mean the North Side?

**CDH:** Yeah. Salem Avenue side.

**JM:** Uh-huh.

**CDH:** So he, he was caught on that side, couldn't get across. So...spent five day wondering where he was too.

**JM:** My goodness. You feared for the worse for your dad perhaps?

**CDH:** Yeah.

**JM:** Well this, there's some sites here that were present during the flood. The Victoria Theatre there behind you. Did you ever get a chance to see any shows at the Victoria back then?

**CDH:** Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

**JM:** They got flooded out pretty bad, I believe.

**CDH:** Oh yes, they did. You know the water was up about the second story down this part of town. Thirteen feet, I think it was.

**JM:** Thirteen feet the water was the second story.

**CDH:** I think up to the second story.

**JM:** Well, anything else from that particular day that really strikes you? That um, that fateful day that you, were ever afraid for your life?

**CDH:** Oh, only to sit there at the Fairgrounds and look across on those homes down the lower area there and Main Street. See people out on their roofs and hoping to be picked up; get out of there. And I saw two men straddle the telephone wires and pull themselves on the telephone wires from about a block till they got to a higher building. It was...

**JM:** And then there was fires later on?

**CDH:** Oh yeah, course we could see that from home cause they really lit up the sky for about four or five days that we had fires. Yeah. It was...

**JM:** Overall, how would you appraise the flood? Was this an event that really changed your life, or had a major impact on it? Would you remember it for the rest of your life?

**CDH:** Oh I'll remember it the rest of my life, that's for sure. But I was glad to see them do all the conservancy work they did cause I've seen water behind the dams clear up to the top since then you know. It would have been the same thing over had they not done that conservancy work. So... it was really... a marvelous project that they put on.

**JM:** Well if you don't mind we'll chat a little bit more inside.

**CDH:** Okay

**JM:** Let's get you disconnected here so you don't run away with the cable here. Umm...

**[Inside]**

**JM:** Well Dale, we talked out on the street about your memories of 1913 that, uh, fateful March. Tell me a little bit about March 1913 it was, reports say it was about forty degrees out there. Does this; was what you remember, pretty cold?

**CDH:** Well I was just a kid then. I don't remember what temperature was. It was cold. It was...but uh disagreeable. And we uh, brother, oldest brother asked if we wanted to go down to see the river and we said yes. Then we were living in Belmont, had to take a Traction Car into Dayton and we...Traction Station then was at Fourth Street entrance to the, to the Arcade building. So we went from there right over Main Street, then up Main Street we got just about where Rikes is now when the levee broke. And uh, fire engine was coming down the street, ringing the bell and a big wave right behind it. So we went up to this uh Johnson Shelton, I think was a store then. We went up there on the third floor, looked down Main Street and saw the water come up over the curb and over the sidewalk and we thought we better get out of there so we went back down Main Street; it was ankle deep then, went down Main to Fifth, east on Fifth to Wayne. Then we got tired, up to Wayne to the low spot there was the Market House and Wayne- Xenia Avenue. It was... we waded across there, it was waist deep and it got over on the other side, we were on high ground, we were alright. So we went on up to Wyoming Street and decided to go back to Fairgrounds and watch it from the Fairgrounds. So we went back to Fairgrounds and sat there the rest of the day and watch the flood down in Dayton. We saw the people in the low, low homes down along Main Street, had to, well they went to the second story and then if they had a third story they were up on the third story or out on the roof till they were rescued. NCR started making boats and um, putting them in there...Hickory Street School and they picked up a lot of people around that lower area and brought them back to Hickory Street School.

**JM:** You said before that the fire engine station where this truck came from, the fire engine came from was uh...

**CDH:** That was right up Monument Avenue, right on the corner of Main and Monument.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**CDH:** And that's where the levee broke right there.

**JM:** How big was the wave of water that came down the street? Do you remember?

**CDH:** It look like it was three foot high.

**JM:** About three foot high. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. It was enough to make the fire engine...

**CDH:** Oh yeah.

**JM:** ... gallop at full steam towards you. Uh-huh

**CDH:** After it leveled out down in there, why, when we could back down out of the store and try to get on home, it was about ankle deep till we got down to Wayne Avenue and Xenia Avenue that was a low spot and it was waist deep when we waded across there.

**JM:** Now several levees broke. You must have seen the first wave, uh, that came downtown. When you got to downtown was the water in the street already? Was there some leakage?

**CDH:** Yeah, there was a little water in the street but uh it wasn't high.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Did you see any subsequent waves hit the, hit downtown? You saw the water get higher and higher but the ....

**CDH:** Saw the water get higher

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**CDH:** So the effect of the water down on Apple Street there uh, the bridge, the canal bridge, some of those low, little 'ol homes down in that area they just floated off their foundation; went down, hit that Apple Street bridge and just shattered.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Now there were, unlike today, there were quite a few canals that went through downtown Dayton. They were at one time gonna call Dayton the Venice of the Midwest, I think. Got so many canals here. Umm, did you see the effect of those as the water went up uh, on the canals?

**CDH:** No but there wasn't one canal area that went through there but Warren Street, that's where we tried to get across. My sister lived on Green Street and we got down there, the canal there at Warren Street and that was... we couldn't get across that... it was... water was too deep there.

**JM:** And your dad, your father was umm...worked on the uh, the Traction Car line you said.

**CDH:** On the uh...he worked on the city line on the uh Wayne Avenue line, which ran... out to uh Dayton View, so he was caught on that end. He was over on that end when...for five days.

**JM:** Did you fear for his life? Not, not seeing him for five days.

**CDH:** We never...didn't know where he was, that was for sure.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**CDH:** Course that high ground, it was high on that side too. So he was alright till water got down enough that he could get across.

**JM:** Did he have tales to tell? Do you remember anything he remembered from that flood?

**CDH:** Oh yeah. Course. All had different experiences. That's for sure. My oldest brother, he, he stopped at a delivery stable to help a guy release his horses and he got stuck there. He was there five days. And finally, he come riding out on a horse after five days. But, uh, we never did get to our sister's house. We could see it but we couldn't get across the canal there at Orange Street.

**JM:** You were talking about horses, uh about 300 people were killed in the flood but they say about tens of thousands of horses were killed...

**CDH:** Well...

**JM:** Did you see a lot of horses...

**CDH:** Oh yeah. Yeah.

**JM:** ...in the water trying to get out?

**CDH:** Yeah and people were trying to release them, you know to...so they would be free to swim and when the water run down, there were dead horses all over and in the store windows...it broke in the windows...horse in the windows.

**JM:** And now did you yourselves have an automobile at this point or were you still working on a horse drawn carriage?

**CDH:** No we didn't. We didn't even have a horse.

**JM:** Really?

**CDH:** No. No, had no automobile or a horse either.

**JM:** Mm-hmm.

**CDH:** We depended entirely on the Traction Car to get into town.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Otherwise you walked?

**CDH:** Yup.

**JM:** Anybody have a bicycle? I heard those were quite popular.

**CDH:** Oh yeah. My dad had a bike. And he, he was a conductor on the Wayne Avenue car line and rode his bike all the time from our house in to the car barns...Wayne Avenue car barns.

**JM:** And you said you live out on Smithville?

**CDH:** Umm-hmm. Where the Catholic Church now stands. It...it took...tore our house down and they built the Catholic Church.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. On the uh, on the east side of Smithville then...mm-hmm-the street there. And you said that quite a few flood victims came and stayed with you. You had like twenty people in your home...

**CDH:** Yeah.

**JM:** ...or something like this?

**CDH:** Well, you seen these pictures of war countries when the people were coming out carrying what few belongings they could carry you know, and wheelbarrows, and wagons. They just streamed out Dayton and hunting for higher ground. Just look like those pictures you see of war time when people are evacuating the territory.

**JM:** Did you lose any friends or know of any people who perished in the flood?

**CDH:** No, not really. I...nobody close. No.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**CDH:** I'm very lucky that way. Didn't know where my, my brother was for five days. He was in the delivery stable somewhere.

**JM:** Well it supposed to be pretty cold then. Was the, was the, wa...you had to wade through the water at one point you said...almost waist deep to get out...

**CDH:** Yeah. Waist deep.

**JM:** ...there at one point?

**CDH:** It was cold.

**JM:** Pretty darn cold?

**CDH:** Yeah it was pretty cold, if I remember right. I don't know.

**JM:** And the dies broke on Tuesday morning as I recall and I think about Wednesday night the fires began. Did you see many of those?

**CDH:** Oh yeah. We...that was terrible. Yeah, we could see the fires from home and they lit up the sky. The storm really got bad.

**JM:** They say it snowed Wednesday night that helped to control the fires. Do you remember that?



**CDH:** No, I don't really remember that.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Well the person who supposedly saved Dayton was John Patterson.

**CDH:** Yeah.

**JM:** Did you get a chance to see him out there um greeting the boats or seeing the boats go off... those NCR boats?

**CDH:** I saw the boats...plenty of them cause he put the whole factory into making them...making those rowboats.

**JM:** Mm-hmm.

**CDH:** And they put them in the Hickory Street School and at the Fairgrounds. They put some into Fairgrounds. He saved a lot of people with those boats in that area down there...in that little area...on Main Street down there.

**JM:** You said you remember someone actually escaping by straddling the telephone lines?

**CDH:** Yeah, I saw two men came out of their upstairs windows and they got up on the telephone wires and straddle that two telephone wires and pull themselves on up Main to the higher building up there, you know.

**JM:** A lot of people escape by, by...

**Background voice:** We're out of tape.

**JM:** Okay great. Just a few more minutes then? That's good. Thank you.

**Background voice:** one of them hits the frame cause I have no clue....you were gonna say something...

**CDH:** No. I say that's good.

**JM:** That is good.

**[Changing Tapes]**

**JM:** About John Patterson, the man who started the National Cash Register Company and supposedly saved Dayton during the flood, did you ever get a chance to see him?

**CDH:** Oh yeah. I used to see him a lot. He used to uh, ride his horse out Patterson Road. That's where it got its name. And he used to ride his horse out Patterson Road, which is right near our house out there. Used to see him and his daughter, both rode through there quite a bit.

**JM:** How would you describe him as a man? What you saw physically anyway?

**CDH:** Oh, I don't know. Never saw him real close.

**JM:** Was he an impressive looking gentleman on his horse?

**CDH:** Oh yeah, he was. So was his daughter.

**JM:** He was also supposedly a speechmaker. Uh, I think after the flood he made a couple of speeches down the courthouse and so forth. Did you either hear those or hear about those?

**CDH:** No.

**JM:** Helped to form the water conservancy project.

**CDH:** Yeah he was one of the backers in the conservancy.

**JM:** Well what those boats he put in the water? He built 200 boats in about two or three days. You were describing earlier how the NCR factory was able to turn around and mobilize and put out 200 boats. How did they do that?

**CDH:** We just put everybody to building boats and they had quite a lumber supply because they made the five drawer cabinets, you know and they had a good lumber supply.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. The cash registers they built back then were built on a kind of platform, kind of a desk and they had a lot of wood built in.

**CDH:** Well, the one type they had, it had five drawers in...was a Bigman with a register on top. And that's where they had the lumber for building these cabinets.

**JM:** And you saw them coming in with boatloads of people then, those NCR boats when they came in during the flood?

**CDH:** Oh yeah.

**JM:** Mm-hmm.

**CDH:** Yeah they were rescuing those people down that low area of Main Street and bringing them over to Hickory Street School.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm. Do you remember seeing any of these people coming through on the boats, either the victims themselves or the people rowing boats?

**CDH:** Oh yeah. Yeah. Some of them landed there to...to Fairgrounds at high point to Fairgrounds there and some of them went, most of them went to Hickory Street School. Many had kind of a station there...made at Hickory Street School, housed a lot of them during the war.

**JM:** Remember the expression, “Promises in the Attic?”

**CDH:** Yeah, I’ve heard that.

**JM:** Those were for victims who climbed up their second and third story and got stuck in the attic for a couple of days and uh...

**CDH:** Yeah, promises they made.

**JM:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Was also a theme when they were raising money for the conservancy. Do you remember any of that when they were out there raising money for that, they’re trying to mobilize the city in this major effort to build dams and so forth?

**CDH:** Yeah. I remember.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. Well how would you describe the floods’ impact on Dayton and on your life in its totality? Was it a major event, a formative event in your...

**CDH:** Oh it was a major event. It shows what water can do and have no chance...

**JM:** Well what about Dayton before the flood? Do you have memories of that as a child? I mean it was an amazing, what you might call a hotbed of creativity. They had the Wright Brothers here and Kettering were making inventions for the car and Patterson with the cash register. Um, uh, uh, how was it before the flood and after the flood? Did the flood really change the way Dayton looked? Uh the way people behaved? The way people thought about Dayton? Do you remember that at all?

**CDH:** No. I don’t recall any big changes. Course I wasn’t very old then.

**JM:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And you went on to work for Frigidaire and left town? Uh...

**CDH:** Yeah I worked for Frigidaire for what fifteen years. Then I went and war came along and started war plant, propeller plant up in Vandalia. I went up there when that started and I was there for twenty-five years I think.

**JM:** And your brother was with you at the time of the flood, Kenneth? Uh, what did he do then after the flood? Where did he go?

**CDH:** after the flood, he worked NCR but he died when he was fifty-four, I think it was.

**JM:** Mm-hmm. How much older was he then you?

**CDH:** Seven years.

**JM:** Uh-huh. You were born uh, January 18<sup>th</sup>, which is also my birthday.

**CDH:** Is it?

**JM:** Uh-huh. We're both Capricorns. 1902 was it? So you were eleven years old at the time of the flood.

**CDH:** Yeah.

**JM:** Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well good. Do you have any other further thoughts to share with us about the flood? Any other memories or uh, umm, things that stand out to you about the flood?

**CDH:** No. the memories I have are a little house on Smithville Road and just a little five room cottage. We had about twenty people in there. I can remember my mother making toast in the over; they had the cold stove oven completely full of toast.

**JM:** Uh-huh. And normally you were a family of what six? You had two older brothers and a younger sister?

**CDH:** Well they weren't at home. No. My...just my next older brother and I were the only two at home.

**JM:** Oh I see at that time just the two of you with your parents. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well I want to thank you for this chat.

**CDH:** Okay.

**JM:** Hopefully if uh, if we get some interest, the result of the press coverage will get more survivors of the flood to come and we'll talk/interview with those. But I'll...

**CDH:** Okay.

**JM:** I'll see. Eventually we'll get you a copy of the interview though to keep and cherish. Thank you so much Dale.

**CDH:** Okay. Thank you.

**JM:** Well thank you all for putting up with a long...

**[End]**