

Craig Cooper Oral History

CAF: OK This is Craig Cooper on the line and Carol Fowler and Donald Shankweiler here in Storrs on March 7, 2016. And Craig, we thought we'd be open-ended at least to start with just to ask you about your recollections of your father at Haskins.

CC: OK. I'll be glad to share thoughts with you and experiences. I guess, let me start at the beginning and give you some idea of historically and you can have an idea of what age my impressions as a boy were, since most of my impressions of the Lab physically and the people there were from a young age. I was..Mother and Dad were in Schenectady, New York and Dad worked for General Electric. I was born in Schenectady in January of 1938. We lived on Rankin Avenue. I think it was 1939 when Dad left GE, and I believe we moved to Dobbs Ferry, New York, which is just outside of New York, outside the city. And about a year later, we moved to Hastings on Hudson, which is about 200 yards from the house we lived in in Dobbs Ferry. And we stayed there from, I'm going to guess, 1940 through 1950. So most of my recollections of the early years at the Lab and my dad were that of a very young boy. Lot of the memories...I'd been to the Lab a large number of times when it was located on 305 East 43rd St. I recall the loft building they were in. They had two floors, I think it was the third and fourth floor; they may have had the fifth floor for a while when the Lab owned National Photocolor. And I'm not sure which floor had the main offices, but there was a large freight elevator that provided access from the street level up to the Lab, and it was, at that time, staffed by an elevator operator who was there all the time. When he wasn't there, you could walk up. But when he was there, you could ride up.

DPS: That was the arrangement when I was hired in 1965. So I've been there quite a while.

CC: Ok you know the building quite well.

DPS: I know it, yes, and I took Carol by it a couple years ago, and it had changed so much, I could hardly recognize the face of the building because it had been altered so much architecturally.

CC: mmhmm. Well, it was a loft building at the time. The Lab had built out and finished a large conference room. It was just off the elevator. And then there was a row of offices that faced on to East 43rd St. And dad's office was, oh I guess, three or four doors down from the conference room, and the window opened on to East 43rd St. I'm not sure if the offices were on the third or the fourth floor...

DPS: Well, Frank Cooper's office was on the third floor, but the Laboratory offices were on the fourth floor, I think. And there was another laboratory space on the fifth floor. So..

CC: I thought there was lab space on three floors..

DPS: Yeah.

CC: ...and the main offices were on the fourth floor, and dad was on the third floor. And the main conference room was on the fourth floor, I believe.

DPS: No, that was also on the third floor.

CC: Third floor.

DPS: Yeah.

CC: There was a...

DPS: But you're doing pretty well.

CC:..There was a huge table in there. Must have been, what 16 feet by 16 feet? Was my recollection, and the walls were lined with bookcases and windows. And every afternoon, sometime between 3 and 4, they had afternoon tea. Everybody gathered to just share thoughts of the day, compare notes, debate questions, what have you. And that was a regular part of the working day was the afternoon teatime gathering, just to discuss [what was] going on, problems being encountered, what have you. I don't know if that still was persistent when you were there or not Don.

DPS: It had been abandoned shortly before, I think.

CC: OK.

DPS: So I didn't experience that. But did you actually do any work at the Laboratory. Were you pulled into the laboratory activities at all as a..?

CC: No, I was there purely as a visiting family member.

DPS: Uh huh, right.

CC: At that time I was, it would have been Hastings...I left Hastings when I was 12 years old. So I was a young boy when I recall the early years at the Lab. And I went to high school in Westport, Connecticut. After high school, I went off to college and into the service, so didn't have a lot of contact with the Lab. So my recollections are the very early years of the physical surroundings. The large machine shop, wood shop that I think was on the third floor in the back. There was a sound room that was a floating sound room to obtain absolute quiet. And there was a room that that looked out onto that I called a "clean room" that had all the recording equipment what-have-you in it.

7:00

Those memories are somewhat vague.

CAF: Not bad!

DPS: Yeah, you're doing very well, I should say. So you joined the service, what around '56 or so?

CC: I went into the service in 1960.

DPS: 1960.

CC: Yeah. I graduated from college in '59, spent 6 months youth hosteling in Europe, came back and applied for Officer Candidate School to avoid being drafted. So I went into the service in the fall of 1960. I was in the service until 1965. And after that time, we lived in Maryland, upstate New York and Atlanta, primarily. Did you attend college in Connecticut?

CC: No, I went to Penn State.

DPS: Penn State.

CC: My undergraduate work was at Penn State. And graduate work at Georgia State University.

DPS: What did you study?

CC: Business. I'm the nonscientist in the family.

CAF: Ah.

DPS: Ok. Did... I had the impression that you had been a pilot. Is that....

CC: No, I worked for the airlines for hmmm twenty, twenty five years. But I was in administration. I was in the opposite end. I did all the airport [fares or affairs?] work. There's a natural reaction when you say "airlines" to say: Oh! Pilot. Thankfully no.

CAF: You mentioned that you lived in Hastings on Hudson from 1940 to 1950. Your dad worked in Washington during some of those years, right?

CC: Yeah, yes. During the war, he worked in...he spent a lot of time in Washington. But then we stayed in Hastings on Hudson in an apartment building. Dad still went into the office in New York. He spent a lot of time in Washington and during his time in Washington, I believe that he lived at the Cosmos Club.

DPS: So your family didn't move there at any time.

CC: No, we stayed in Hastings. Dad was home maybe two nights a week and weekends. We didn't see an awful lot of him. He was very, very busy.

DPS: Did he talk at all about his activities there?

CC: Not in Washington. I have...All I know is a few stories he's told, of funny events over the years and, having read all of his biographies, I've gotten a pretty good understanding of what he did, what he was doing. I found it interesting, when you read his biographies, there are any number of them, and there's a lack [lot?] of consistency between them in the war years. If you read enough of them, you get a pretty good picture of what he was involved in and what he did.

DPS: Now can you tell us what you're referring to here?

CC: During the war years, he spent a lot of time in Washington. He was with the Office of Science Research and Development, as you know.

DPS: Yeah.

CC: Before the OSRD was formed, he appears to have been involved in an industrial survey that FDR had folks undertake, in I think, 1940, maybe early '41. According to his biographies, he was the Liaison Officer with the OSRD. And then became [,,] Liaison Officer in Charge. My recollection, I mean this may not be factual, but that he was a principal Liaison Officer with Great Britain for OSRD during the war, in the later part of the war. I know that, after the war, he went to Europe for three or four weeks and he went in uniform, but he was a civilian. I guess they all had to travel in uniform just to get access to things and get around. He told a funny story that has always stuck with us. You may have heard this story, Do. So I just may be repeating old, old news. But the flight over went from New York to [Gander] in Newfoundland to Prestwick, Scotland. And when the flight got to one of those places, I'm not sure whether it was Gander or Prestwick, there was a band on the tarmac waiting for the plane. And dad was curious and asked; "Why is there a band out there?" And he was told by the flight crew that there was a general officer aboard. And so the band was meeting the general officer. Well, turns out that dad was the general officer.

DPS: No, I hadn't heard that story. I'm glad you told it to us.

CC: Evidently, to get overseas and to get access to what he had to have, he had to have the rank of General Officer. I don't know whether it was Brigadier or Major General or...I suppose Brigadier. But that was what the band was for. I do recall when he came back from overseas that we met him at the Pan American World Airways seaplane port at LaGuardia. He came in on the PanAm clipper. We saw the plane arrive and met him there. We were quite happy to have him back.

CAF: No band though.

CC: No bands.

CAF: Oh, gee.

CC: I don't know if he was in uniform then. I don't recall that. I was kind of young at that point.

DPS A few minutes ago, you referred to biographies. Could you tell us what you were talking about there?

CC: Yeah, there are...As you know, dad received any number of awards and recognition.

14:19

And going through my files I found I have copies of most of them. And Alan...you probably have them in the Lab too, I would suspect, in the museum. Most of those had pretty detailed biographies with them, kind of describing his background, education, and so forth. There was one I found the other day that I found to be quite interesting and probably more comprehensive than some of the other ones. This is one from the American Speech and Hearing Association from...well Dad was being presented honors of the association and there's a page long biography of him. His was November of 1996...I'm sorry, 1966. I don't know if you've seen that one or not.

DPS: I'm not sure.

CAF: I definitely haven't seen it. We probably could have access to...could find it. As you say, it might well be in the museum. But I haven't seen it.

CC: Yeah. Well the other things...If you wish, I can scan them and email them to you if you would like to see them.

CAF: That would be great.

CC: I'm not sure it will scan very well, because it's a copy, and the picture on it is very faded.

DPS: Sure, but if we can read it, that'd be great.

CC: Yeah.

DPS: So what...which other ones do you have.

CC: Oh golly. I must have half a dozen of them from various points of time. There's one from Acoustical Society where he was given the Silver Medal in Speech Communication. That was 1975.

DPS: I have seen that one, but I'm not sure that I have a copy of it. So maybe you could scan that one too.

CC: Yeah. I made a list of some of the things last night that I had found in going through my family history files in the basement last week. There's not much in the way of work papers with two exceptions. Most of these are simply articles, copies of awards, copies of biographies. Some of them are...when he passed away, the obituaries.

DPS: Yeah, we...

CC: But you have those.

DPS: We have the obituaries, but I'm not sure that we have all these other things. I would...we'd be grateful if you would send us your list at least. And we can check it against what we have.

CC: Yeah. Well, I'll be glad...I didn't list them all when I was doing this. I just picked out some that came to mind. I'll go through it and make an inventory and email the inventory if that would be helpful.

CAF: That would be great. That would be very helpful.

CC: I had asked for, for my own use, this one I just mentioned, the American Speech and Hearing Association biography. It covers the years 1940 to 1964 in some detail. And probably is one of the more complete ones. I also came across a photograph that Caryl Haskins sent me

after dad passed away. It's undated but appears to be from the 1940s. He was a very young man then.

CAF: Just of your father or was he with some people?

CC: No, this is just a picture of my dad. And there's no notes with it. Just an 8 x 10 photo that was in a binder that he had and sent to us. I did find some General Electric in-house publications that you may or may not have seen. There's a..

DPS: No, we don't have any of those.

CC: OK. This is about the time the Lab was started. There was a General Electric in-house publication called Monogram. That was 1937, and there's a picture of dad on the cover of it. He is working on a new high-voltage rectifier as a part of X ray research. There are no articles in that particular magazine, just the cover photo. There's another General Electric magazine that's called the General Electric Review, volume 40, number 9. September, 1937. On page 438, there's an article by Dad and a Dr. E. E. Charlton, C-H-A-R-L-T-O-N. It's entitled "Dielectric strength of insulating fluids." That tracks with the work that he did, because he obtained a patent for GE on a high-powered transmission line that was encased in fluids.

DPS: I want to get that title; "Dielectric strength of ...

CC: insulating fluids.

DPS: insulating fluids

CC: Yeah, I can copy that and email that to you.

DPS: That would be very helpful Craig, because we don't have these things. And it's possible that some of them were in boxes that were sent by Alan to...that landed up at Caryl Haskins' home just before he died. And, unfortunately, those things were lost, because the house had to be vacated; it was being razed. And the person in charge was overwhelmed by the deadline and a lot of the things that should have been gone through and looked at by people like Carol and me ended up in a dumpster. And this is a tragedy, unfortunate, but we're just trying to get as many things together that might have been among those papers. Alan still has some as you know. He has boxes in his garage. And he's agreed to look through them and send us things that might be of interest.

CC: Well, I'll scan these and email them to you. I have...What I have are the original...they are original magazines. They were published by GE in 1937. There are obviously other copies, but somehow I got them.

DPS: We know very little about the circum...about the founding of the Laboratories, the circumstances, very little about that and so we'd be delighted to have anything that you have that's relevant to that.

CC: OK.

DPS: Is it possible to scan the photo of your father as well, that one that you mentioned?

CC: Yeah, I'll scan those things. We'll see how well they come out. The alternative is I can photograph it and send you a jpeg file on it. That's an alternative as well.

DPS: Great. Great.

CC: I found a Newsweek article from October 23, 1950, page 58 called "Speech cartoons."

DPS: 1950, did you say?

CC: 1950, yeah. Page 58. It's called "Speech cartoons," and it was taken from a presentation dad made in October, 1950 to the National Academy. And it features the Pattern Playback,

CAF: Ah!

CC: And there's a photograph there of one of the expressions, I'm going to guess it was "Never kill a snake with your bare hands"

DPS, CAF: Yeah.

DPS: There is a publication from the National Academy probably from that year. We do have that.

CC: OK. That I've never seen. This is probably based upon...The news pickup on the presentation he made.

DPS,CAF: Right.

CC: That brings to mind...I do recall Pattern Playback play Never kill a snake with your bare hands.

DPS: Well it's a...The Pattern playback still exists, and, in principle, it still works. But I think it needs some component right now. But anyway it's in our little museum at Haskins Laboratories. There was talk about sending it to the Smithsonian, but I'm glad that we kept it.

CC: I think it probably is a better location for it. The Smithsonian would love it, but it'd probably be put in the building someplace and stored.

CAF: Right. So, you were very young at this time, but it interests me a lot that your father underwent a huge shift in his research area because of World War II. Do you recall him talking about giving up on his work on the X ray radiation topic and shifting over to sensory disabilities and reading machines? Did he talk about that at home?

CC: I'm sure he did, but as a seven or eight year old boy...

CAF: But you were very young. Yeah.

CC:...I probably didn't have any idea what he was talking about.

CAF: Yeah.

DPS: We tried to cover...to write about the beginnings of that research at Haskins Labs in the little article that we sent you.

CC: Yeah, I liked that article. It was a good article.

CAF: Thank you.

CC: I appreciate your sending it. I enjoyed reading it.

CAF: We enjoyed writing it.

DPS: Yes, we would love to write more of the history of the Labs, the earlier history of the Labs, but we just have very little information to go on at this point.

CC: Yeah, well, I can understand that. My understanding, and this mainly comes from reading biographies and putting together various pieces of information is that it was recommended to dad that, after the war, that he get involved in speech research and developing a reading machine for the blind.

DPS: Right.

CC: And this was, I suspect, it was suggested by people in Washington at the OSRD. And I'm going to guess it was a way to try to retain scientific talent and put it to use in solving problems that arose out of the war.

CAF: That's right. Yeah.

CC: And that's why he got involved in it. It was a way to, and I'm just speculating now, it was a way to find employment for the scientists who were involved in the war effort. And to [stick?] them in directions that were in the national interest and to retain their capabilities and also kind of channel it to needs. A way to find jobs, really. Because that was a problem after the war.

So I suspect that was, in large part, one of the reasons he got involved in that. Because there was certainly a need in that and other areas. I know he spent a good deal of time with Bell Labs in New Jersey. And working on new machines, the spectrograph, the Pattern Playback, and sharing experience and notes with them. I recall discussing about dad being at Bell Labs off and on as part of the work week conversation, but what he did I couldn't tell you.

DPS: Right. We have a pretty good idea of what he did there.

CC: Yeah, you will have a much better idea and probably have seen a lot of articles and more of the papers and so forth.

DPS: Thinking about other people who were his colleagues. Do you remember Paul Zahl?

CC: Yes, I do. Paul Zahl also lived in Hastings; he lived about, I'm going to guess, a mile from the apartments that we lived in. In fact you know, Paul Zahl was a biologist...

DPS: Right.

CC: ...and an explorer. And in the late 30s, he put an expedition into the upper regions of, I think, the Orinoco; it was to to Mount Ror?—I'm going to find a note here—yeah Mount Roraima, R-O-R-A-I-M-A. And was the first person to fly over King Edward the VIIIth falls. And he wrote a book, "To the lost world" about his trip. He was the first white man to visit Mount Roraima and the King Edward the VIIIth falls. In the 1940s, he gave mother and dad a set of photographs of King Edward the VIIIth falls and Mount Roraima. They're large black and white photos, oh I'd say they're 14 x 17 or a little bit larger. I still have those photos, and they're hanging on the wall in my hallways. I had them restored and put under [...] glass a couple years ago and rematted. But they are...Mother and dad treasured them, and I've treasured them and still retain them.

DPS: Well, that's interesting.

CC: The Zahls and [them] were quite close

DPS: And they lived in, what was it?

CC: Hastings on Hudson also.

END OF FIRST FILE

DPS: Do you know anything about...or, what he might have been working on with your dad earlier? Because he was involved in the Laboratory before they began to do..to work on the reading machine.

CC: Yeah, I know the Lab had a biology section.

DPS: Right.

CC: I think it was on the fourth floor.

DPS: Right.

CC: Dr. Seymour...

CAF:Hutner

CC: Hutner worked up there and so did Paul Zahl. They had a lot of white mice, white rats and some other experimental animals. I'm not quite sure what they did, but they were experimenting.

CAF: Did you know Seymour Hutner?

CC: Yes I did.

DPS: What memories do you have?

CC: They're quite vague. I recall talking...as I recall he was a very jolly person, and very outgoing and very pleasant. But I don't have a lot. You know, I met him as a young boy, didn't have a lot of contact. I have just rough impressions of him from that time.

CAF: OK

DPS: Anybody else that you remember?

CC: You know, there are a number of people who were involved with the Lab. Of course, you know Alice Dadourian who was his long-time secretary. To dad...

DPS: Yes.

CC: And also to Caryl Haskins. There was a gal in the early forties, Ann Gallagher.

DPS: Yes, I remember her. She was head of the office staff at the time I came to the Laboratory.

CC: Yeah, I thought she was probably an administrative assistant. She lived in Hastings in the same apartment complex we did for a while. With her family. I knew Dr. Liberman; I recall him. Luigi and Rose Provosoli. They were fairly frequent visitors to our house in Westport. Luigi was a classic European gentleman.

DPS: Yes.

CC: He was a very courtly person, very, very pleasant. So was Rose. I've met, but don't have a lot of memories of, Pierre Delattre. Those probably were...There was [Arthur?] Abramson. He was also there, I think, at one point in time.

DPS: Yes, he was there from about 1955.

CC: Those are the ones that come to mind.

DPS: Any other of the biologists possibly?

CC: No, I don't recall any other ones.

DPS: So...You probably were aware that your ...Frank Cooper was involved in the analysis of the Watergate tapes.

CC: Yes, I was. Quite so.

DPS: Did he talk about that at all?

CC: Yeah, he talked a little about it at the time. Just the fact that he was there. Had to make a report to...I don't recall the judge's name. Dad did one thing though. He obtained original signed copies of the report for both Alan and I. So we have original signed copies of the report on the analysis of the tapes. I can't say as I could say much about it because the technology is way beyond me.

CAF: I don't remember what conclusion was drawn in that report. Do you?

CC: No, I think the conclusion was it wasn't accidental.

DPS: That's right that there was deliberate erasure involved, I believe.

CC: I don't recall what the conclusion was and, quite frankly, the report is very intact. It doesn't have much wear to it. It's a treasure!

CAF: OK. Right.

DPS: We might ask to have that copied at some point. It's a little bit peripheral to our main interest, but it is a document that's important in Frank Cooper's history.

CC: That would have to be done professionally. To disassemble it and copy it.

DPS: I see. It's bound and..

CC: It's bound in pl...one of these multifingered plastic binders.

DPS: Uh huh.

CC: And it takes professional equipment to unbind it and rebind it to be sure...

CAF: Don't trouble yourself right now. It could be that we could find it on the web at this point.

DPS: Maybe. Yeah.

CC: You may well be.

CAF: Yeah, so don't do it until we ask you to.

DPS: You've been very generous in sharing all of this. And we would certainly appreciate having scanned copies of things or anything you want to send us in any form.

7:06

CC: Are there questions I perhaps can help you with?

DPS: Can you think of anything? [to CAF]

CC: Our questions are vague because it's been a few years and I was...

CAF: You were very young.

CC: Yeah, I was young at the time.

CAF: No, it's just a difficulty that we didn't start this about 40 years ago, I think, when your father was alive and Caryl Haskins was alive. It's very hard to go back that far in time at this point.

CC: Yeah.

DPS: There are tapes that were made at the end of the 1980s, and the transcripts of those tapes are on our website. It's possible that you'd be interested in...

CAF: This was an oral history that Patrick Nye took of your father, and Caryl Haskins and...

CC: I do recall Pat Nye. The name is familiar. I've met him, but I don't have a lot of clear memories. I noticed on the website you have a link to the Charles Collingwood See it Now series. There was a TV segment done on the Lab in 1953, I guess.

CAF: Yes I think I know what you mean.

CC: But the file has been corrupted and can't be played.

CAF: Ah, ah.

CC: I don't know whether it's possible to correct that problem or not. I wanted to see it. I did some looking. I thought the documentary was by Edward R. Murrow. And I did some research on the web trying to find the TV programs that Murrow did in the '50s, and found a lot of them, but couldn't find anything that [...]to the Lab. The only one I found in those documentary programs was the Charles Collingwood.

DPS: And what was that...what other identifying information about that?

CC: It was the See it Now series, I think it was September of 1953.

DPS: So I didn't hear...

CAF: See it Now

CC: See it Now

CAF: I dimly remember this, and I think the problem is just that no one is really attending to the history part of our website very closely. I think...But I suspect we can revive that [film].

DPS: Well I asked Arthur Abramson about an Edward R. Murrow film and he seemed to say "Oh, yes." So maybe it does exist.

CC: I thought it was Edward R. Morrow and CBS, but, in digging through the web, I couldn't find any description of a program of that nat...of that being done at the Lab

DPS: I think I've seen it many, many years ago. I'm going to look into it and when I find out, I'll get back to you.

CC: Yeah. As I recall, there was a 16 mm film that the Lab had that Dad brought home. And We looked at it any number of times. It was very interesting film of a TV show. But I could be mistaken. Maybe it was Charles Collingwood. And his See it Now series. But Charles Collingwood is the one that is shown on the Lab's website. It has a link to it that is corrupted. Not Edward R. Murrow. There's a big question mark there.

CAF: Yeah. We'll have to check into it.

DPS: Well, we'll try to get back to you on that.

CC: I would appreciate it. I'm interested in what you're doing. My children and my grandchildren would love to see and hear some of these things and know more about their great grandfather and their grandfather. My son David Craig did work one summer at the Lab in New Haven. You may remember him, Don. You too, Carol.

CAF: When would this have been?

CC: He was...after he graduated from high school, before he went to college. '86, '87, in that time frame.

CAF: Do you know who he worked for?

CC: No, he was a very young intern and I don't know who he worked for.

CAF: That's interesting.

DPS: We can look into that too.

CC: I just...He may have...He was actually there; he may have some memories. He's a scientist now in Idaho.

DPS: What kind of...what sort of work?

CC: His PhD is in oceanography. But he is now a limnologist. And is a scientist in charge of the Lake Coeur d'Alene water management program. Lake Coeur d'Alene Idaho is the Superfund site, and they have a team of people with the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality that monitor it, report on its health, what have you. And he's the scientist involved with that project.

DPS: I just have one other historical question that I meant to raise with you earlier.

When...going back to World War II days, we think that it was Vannevar Bush who recruited your father and Caryl Haskins to work for the OSRD. He was the person who created the OSRD, developed it. Do you have any...did you know him or have any impressions?

CC: No, I know of him. I don't know him. I have tried a number of times to do web searches and run down some activities of the OSRD and have come to blank walls. Which I think are probably pretty intentional. I think you're right that Caryl Haskins and my dad were recruited by Bush to work at OSRD. I don't know who else was involved. Some place I saw reference to dad working with a chemist, who later became President of Harvard.

DPS: Conant.

CAF: James Conant.

DPS: Yeah, James Conant.

CC: James Conant, yeah. But I don't...that doesn't ring a bell.

DPS: OK.

CC: I know that the war effort followed dad throughout his lifetime, because he, as you probably know, was never able to leave the country without getting the OK from, I guess, the State Department.

CAF: Huh! I didn't know that.

DPS: We didn't know that.

[long pause]

CC: Are you still there?

CAF: We are; we're just...thinking

CC: The telephone buzzed.

DPS: But I think we are done. Carol?

CAF: Yeah. I think we're pretty much through our questions.

DPS: We thank you very much for your helping us out here.

CC: I'll make a list, an inventory of a number of these copies that I have and articles and what have you. And I'll scan the American Speech and Hearing Association item and the photograph and email them to you.

CAF: Great.

DPS: Thank you. That would be wonderful.

CAF: Thanks so much. Thanks for taking the time.

CC: You're welcome. Thanks for your interest in the history of the Lab. I know it's near and dear to your hearts.

CAF: Oh yeah.

CC: But it is to us also.

CAF: Well, we'll send you anything we put together. We'll send you a copy.

CC: I appreciate that very much. And, if you have any questions, or if I can be of help, feel free to call upon us.

CAF: We'll do that.

DPS: Thanks.

CAF: Thanks very much.

CC: Good bye.