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University of California
Berkeley, California

Don Hardison

Rosie the Riveter World War II American Homefront Oral History Project

A Collaborative Project of the Regional Oral History Office,
The National Park Service, and the City of Richmond, California

Interviews conducted by
Jess Rigelhaupt
in 2003

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Interview with Don Hardison
Interviewed by: Jess Rigelhapt
Transcriber: Lea Barker
[Interview # 1: March, 10, 2003]
[Begin file Hardison1 3-10-03.wav]

00:00:15
Rigelhapt:
It's Monday morning, March 10, 2003. We're here in El Cerrito. I'm about to do an oral history interview with Don Hardison. So if I could just start by getting you to say your full name and date of birth.

1-00:00:37
Hardison:
Donald Leigh Hardison; March 23, 1916.

1-00:00:44
Rigelhapt:
Since this interview's focused on Richmond at some level, are you from the Richmond area?

1-00:00:54
Hardison:
No. I was raised in Southern California, little town of Fillmore, which is largely a citrus and avocado ranching area. My dad, my folks had a ranch.

1-00:01:12
Rigelhapt:
Could you talk a little bit about what your childhood was like on the ranch?

1-00:01:20
Hardison:
It was really a wonderful experience. We had to go to school about three or four miles away. Picked up a bus every morning. Walked about half a mile to the bus stop down on the highway. We lived up on the slope of the valley. We could oversee the valley, which is really a very beautiful part of Southern California. Interestingly enough, it is very much today as it was when I was a kid. In other words, this particular town had not developed subdivisions like has been so common in Southern California.

1-00:02:00
Rigelhapt:
Where is the town of Fillmore located?

1-00:02:01
Hardison:
It's about in the middle of Ventura County between Santa Paula and Piru. Ojai is around the corner through Santa Paula. It's in what is called the Santa Clara Valley because the Santa Clara River runs right through it. You were asking me about my childhood. I was not too much involved in social activities as a child because we had so many personal opportunities on the ranch. We would hike a great deal. We had horses. By horses, I just mean my brother—my immediate brother—and I each had horses, which we rode a lot, so we didn't feel it was

necessary to join the scouts, and it was easier for my folks not to have to transport us over to the scout meetings. But later on in high school I became active in sports. I wasn't very good at it, but I got active in it because it was a small school and they desperately needed guys my size. So I played a bit of basketball as the heavier team, the main team. Then also I was very active in a band, and music, I loved music and early on learned to play the saxophone.

1-00:03:36
Rigelhapt:
Could you talk a little more about your family? Who was living on the ranch?

1-00:03:46
Hardison:
I had three younger brothers. All of us were born in Fillmore. I was born in my grandfather's house, which had been converted from the first schoolhouse in Fillmore, so I can say I got my first education upon birth. Later, we lived three miles out of town. It was sort of a rural area called Sespe, which is now prominent for the presence of the last wild condors in California—the so-called Sespe Preserve. It is there that we used to hike as kids. But now it is prohibited, because of the preserve.

1-00:04:59
Rigelhapt:
Could you tell me a little bit about your parents. Where were they born?

1-00:05:08
Hardison:
My parents were from Maine. My mother was born in Nova Scotia but met my dad in the little town of Caribou, Maine, which is one of the most northerly towns in the States. It's great potato country—Aroostook County, and before Idaho and California potatoes took over the market, Caribou potatoes, I mean Aroostook County potatoes—on the East Coast at least—were known as the best potatoes in the country. And the current California Hardison clan, started from Caribou, way back to the 1600s. We have not been able to go back further into Europe. They all were interested in agriculture. However, some got sidetracked into oil in Pennsylvania, and left Caribou to go into the oilfields, and some gained enough wealth that they decided to come to California, which was at that time another opportunity for oil. And the town adjacent to Fillmore, in Ventura County, Santa Paula was the place where the Union Oil Company was co-founded by a Hardison. Stewart and Hardison started Union Oil right there, close to where I was raised. Subsequently a lot of things have happened in the oil business and most of my family got involved in citrus in Ventura County and were part of many initial citrus and avocado organizations. For example, Sunkist, which was a co-op for marketing oranges and lemons. They were also involved in the early avocado business. Colavo Association. Although background in my family was agriculture, early on, when I was fourteen, in a drafting class, actually a mechanical drawing class. We were supposed to be drawing gears and all kinds of mechanical things, but I was much more interested in architecture. I asked the teacher if I could draw a house. So that's where my architectural career started. And, I subsequently went on to Cal, [University of California at Berkeley] and except for visits—never returned to Southern California for any length of time.

1-00:08:27
Rigelhapt:
The family that you had in Fillmore, did they move to California via Pennsylvania, or did they come straight from Maine?

1-00:08:38
Hardison:
From Caribou, Maine. My folks were married there in 1912 and came to California shortly thereafter. My dad worked on a ranch that was called the Hardison Ranch Company. It was owned by a combination of Hardisons who had come from Caribou. Subsequently, my folks bought their own property of ten acres, that eventually grew to160 acres.

1-00:09:12
Rigelhapt:
So you had a lot of extended family in the area?

1-00:09:16
Hardison:
Yes, there were a number of Hardisons including an uncle—my dad's brother—who had a dairy, which today is designated as a historic place, and has a silo with a large "SD"—Sanitary Dairy—between Fillmore and Santa Paula. And there were other Hardisons at this Hardison Ranch that I mentioned, including my dad's cousin who managed it.

1-00:09:46
Rigelhapt:
So what was a typical day like for your mother and your father when you were growing up?

1-00:09:54
Hardison:
Well, I'm sure they worked hard. My mother was a mother to us and a housewife so she, to my knowledge, did not do any work outside the home. My mother maintained the house, and Dad was very active out in the orchards. Early on, we had a young man—in fact, I think he started with us when he was only fourteen years old and living with an older brother. A Mexican, probably an immigrant, I wish I knew just exactly where he was born. So dad did have some help on the ranch, and eventually this young man became a very valuable part of our family, married and lived in a house on our ranch. His name was Camilo Pulido and it after he had learned all the trades on the ranch he left us and went to Los Angeles as a mechanic for Greyhound. But we'll always remember that early relationship with an immigrant from Mexico.

1-00:11:23
Rigelhapt:
Could you talk a little bit about what was the work on the ranch?

1-00:11:30
Hardison:
In those years, the technique of maintaining irrigation and cultivation of the orchards were quite different from today. In those years, they would cultivate between the rows of the trees and irrigate with ditches that were formed once a year by plows that ran through the rows. Then, large amounts of water were run through a concrete irrigation pipe system, serving those ditches. But it took a tremendous amount of water, and then at the end of the rows, a lot of so-called

wastewater would go down the roads and—. Actually, Southern California didn't have that much water, but a pumping system was available to the ranchers—a cooperative system—provided the water. Nowadays, irrigation is all done by a drip system, which takes just a fraction of the amount of water, and they seldom, if ever, cultivate between the rows. I remember Dad plowed some rows near the house, and would planted corn. He'd plant corn and string beans, and we even raised some pigs. It was sort of a well-rounded ranching operation with always a tractor that did the heavy pulling work. An old truck—it wasn't too old then, but seems old now—on which I learned to drive when I was just a kid of probably twelve or thirteen. It was a Ford truck with a bed and Dad would haul the fruit over to a Sunkist packinghouse, where the fruit would be stored, packed and shipped out.

1-00:13:43
Rigelhapt:
Your family was part of the Sunkist cooperative?

1-00:13:49
Hardison:
Yes. In those years all of them were. There was one other competing organization, but Sunkist was the overwhelming choice for distributing fruit. Of course, today it still exists, and you'll find Sunkist labels on boxes in grocery stores, but now there's a vast number of other distribution means for ranchers.

1-00:14:26
Rigelhapt:
Could you talk a little bit about your experiences in school. Elementary school.

1-00:14:37
Hardison:
Today we would consider it unfortunate, because my initial elementary schooling was segregated. I should have described Fillmore as a very interesting small community. In those years it probably had a population of maybe three thousand. Mexican immigrant labor was very common on all the ranches. I knew of no black families in the town. There were two or three Japanese families who had their nurseries out in the valley, but it was largely Caucasian and Mexican. My experience as a child did not include kindergarten, and I went to first grade in a school that was entirely Caucasian. The Mexican children had separate schools, many of which were out in the countryside. There'd be small schools—maybe two or three classrooms. My life in elementary school was very pleasant. We'd get on the bus to ride to and from home, and I got very well acquainted with the bus drivers and made friendships, of course, with classmates that exist to this day. Some went on to Cal with me, and live in the Bay Area—in Northern California. We still see them regularly. Seventy years, eighty years ago. Let's see, I remember I learned to play tennis as even the elementary school had tennis courts. I wasn't very good at it, but I enjoyed it. I did not belong to any youth organizations. Until later in junior high and senior high. So it was just an idyllic life, that's the way I would describe it compared to some of the experiences that young people have today.

1-00:17:20
Rigelhapt:
Just for clarification, where were you in relation to the order with your brothers?

1-00:17:26
Hardison:
You mean in age?

1-00:17:29
Rigelhapt:
Yeah.

1-00:17:31
Hardison:
My immediate brother was Richard, who was a year-and-a-half younger. He was particularly enamored with ranch life and much more help to his dad than I was. Also loved horses and cattle and he was also a hunter. Of the four boys he was the only one that really liked to hunt. I enjoyed target practice as a high schooler, and owned a pistol. That's the limit of my relationship to arms. Richard died prematurely a number of years ago, but until his death he was very interested in the open country, the animals and everything that's involved in farming. He did not complete college but attended Chaffey Junior College in Southern California, which is known for its agricultural, and particularly citrus, training programming.

1-00:18:50
Rigelhapt:
And your other brothers?

1-00:18:54
Hardison:
I had two other brothers, one of whom never got into any illegal trouble, I should say, but Jim was really a rascal. I was in college when he was just making a lot of fun out of life. He went off to the oilfields when he should have been in college. I think it was the oilfields in Wyoming, where he had heard one of our distant relatives had an oil lease. He just tried so many different activities. You could write a whole book on what he was up to. Never went to college. My younger brother, Bill, graduated from UC Santa Barbara in engineering did have a very successful career in engineering with a company in Riverside, California. I guess he was probably more inclined towards technology—like I was—than were the other two brothers. We were all quite different even though we were raised under the same roof and given the same attention by our parents.

1-00:20:21
Rigelhapt:
Jumping back to your experiences in school, do you have some favorite memories of elementary school—classes you really liked, teachers you really liked?

1-00:20:39
Hardison:
Yes, I remember certain teachers more than others. I can remember the ones that gave me opportunities that encouraged me to do certain things. I enjoyed sketching and doing artwork, and not all kids are interested in that. I do remember one teacher, Mrs. Richie third grade, who was very helpful to me when I did a sort of a stupid thing: I was playing on overhead handlebars, that you hang on, I fell and broke my arm. She was very sympathetic and helpful to me during that recovery period. There were other teachers who got me interested, for example, in literature and writing. It's a little bit hard for me to pick out influential elementary school teachers,

whereas when I got into what they then called junior high and high school, there were specific teachers who impressed me in ways that I'll always remember, because they were sort of specialists in certain fields. For example, I'll always remember my chemistry and physics teacher, Mrs. Hill. While most of the kids in my class were not interested in that subject; however, there were three or four of us in my class—all of whom went on to be either engineers, physicists; architects—who were really interested in what that teacher was talking about and I really enjoyed that very much. And then, of course, there was a math teacher whom I will never forget: Mr. Thornton, who just kept banging away at us to get us to learn algebra and trigonometry. In those years, we didn't go as far as they go today, but geometry and algebra were sort of tough. He just kept pressing us, and I'm always appreciative of his efforts.

1-00:23:33
Rigelhapt:
What would you say your favorite subject was in high school?

1-00:23:43
Hardison:
That's a tough one. I guess it was probably math, probably math. I remember another teacher, who taught civics, it's sort of political science, but that's not what they call it in high school. It's really about attitudes of the public and voting and political issues that are on ballots. I found that very interesting, because even in those years, when I was probably seventeen years old, we were already beginning to form attitudes towards public policies and things. Of course, we never heard anything about the environment—that's something that came up in later years—but we did hear a lot about good government and how cities, counties and states should be run, and I'm always appreciative of that course as well. Even though I was not interested particularly in pursuing a public career, I found it fascinating and I do, to this day. I am very interested in knowing what's going on with our various politicians.

1-00:25:10
Rigelhapt:
So you were a teenager during the Great Depression.

1-00:25:17
Hardison:
That is true. I graduated in '34, which was either the bottom of it, or one year from the bottom of the Depression, and I can well remember the difficulties that we were all having in those years. I remember, I told you we were in the orange production business, and the local orange packinghouse board of directors elected to dump oranges rather than market them because the price was so low that they could not get enough out of the marketing process to pay for the shipping. Our big market was always in the East—The East Coast loved California oranges. In fact, it was a well-known fact that Florida oranges made the juice, but California oranges were the ones that everybody loved to eat. So shipping them was very costly, and from our ranch up on the slopes of the valley we could look down on the—. There was a creek, really a small river—called the Sespe River, and we could see the slopes where the packinghouse had dumped virtually tons of oranges that the poor and the hungry could have used in Los Angeles or somewhere. But there was no government agency that would even pick up the fruit that was dumped. That was my most spectacular memory of the Depression. We were not in the city or

community where there were long breadlines or anything like that. Everybody had little home gardens where they could survive. But it was a very difficult time.

1-00:27:13
Rigelhapt:
Do you remember much about how that decision was made to dump the oranges?

1-00:27:19
Hardison:
No, no. I would've been too young. Well, maybe not too young, but I wasn't in the loop of any information. My dad was on a lemon board. I don't recall them every dumping lemons. I remember Dad was just as distressed as I was that they had to dump the fruit. But also my dad was on the school board that built a new elementary school. I should mention that, which I'm very proud of, because it still exists today, whereas 90 percent of the schools that were built in those years have failed seismic tests and have been rebuilt. But this, which my dad's name is still on the "corner stone". The building bears his name along with other board members. That was the first integrated elementary school in Fillmore, I went there in the third grade. I mentioned the segregated school that we went to in the first, and second grades. So my first experience of having Mexican classmates was in the third grade. I should also report, since I'm talking about the little town of Fillmore—my grandfather, in whose house I was born, that I mentioned earlier—as a former schoolhouse—was the mayor of the town in 1922. So there is a family history in the little town where I was raised.

1-00:29:23
Rigelhapt:
How long did he serve as mayor?

1-00:29:26
Hardison:
I believe it was four years. Under his tutelage, the town initiated its first water system with a tank on a hill. I really don't know how they did it before, but I presume everybody had wells because hey built a tank up on the hill, and this was the first water system for the town.

1-00:29:52
Rigelhapt:
You mentioned that growing oranges on the ranch took a lot of water. Do you know, were there fights over the water, where it came from. Do you remember {inaudible}?

1-00:30:04
Hardison:
Yes. Oh, yes. We were up on the slopes of the valley, and the water source that was most dependable was down virtually on the shores of the river that ran through the valley. So there was a big pumping facility that the ranchers on our side of the valley operated as a cooperative, and the water was pumped from that source. Some ranchers had reservoirs that they filled with water, just so there would be adequate storage volume during their actual irrigations, which usually took place every thirty days during the summer season.

1-00:30:58
Rigelhapt:
Did you have any jobs while you were in high school?

1-00:31:09
Hardison:
That's an interesting question, because I mentioned earlier that my uncle had a dairy, the Sanitary Dairy, on the highway and in order to make ends meet, he sold gasoline and he also my aunt had a little drink stand right at the dairy, right on the highway. This stand sold milk and orange juice, which I used to squeeze with an electric squeezer. Then we also sold candy that was made by one of the family members, and I hand pumped gas. I did that probably when I was a sophomore through my senior year. So I was probably fourteen when I started working. Otherwise, I used to help my dad, on the ranch, but of course I didn't get any pay for that.

1-00:32:20
Rigelhapt:
You just said that you worked to make ends meet. Was this money that you were able to use as spending money as a teenager, or did it go back into the family?

1-00:32:35
Hardison:
I don't recall what I did with it, but I probably spent it to maintain an automoble. Let's see. I remember when I was probably a junior or a senior—. First I should say that the laws have changed, at least in California, concerning the age when you can get a drivers license. Back when I was a kid, you could get one when you were fourteen. I think I mentioned earlier, I had driven the family truck on the ranch—not on the road—when I was probably twelve or thirteen, and then the very day that I got to be fourteen, my dad drove me to Ventura County Courthouse, and I took my exam and got a driver's license. Of course, I always wanted a car, but this was the Depression. Finally, in a blacksmith's shop with my dad in Fillmore. (Incidentally, the blacksmith's shop not only did horseshoeing, but they did a lot of structural work for trucks and wagons and things that the ranchers needed—) I spotted a 1923 Chevrolet. I asked how much the blacksmith wanted for it, and he didn't know whether they wanted to sell it. Well, I went back another time and he said, "Okay, $35." So, I'm sure that some of my earnings from making orange juice went to buying a $35 automobile. I really enjoyed it. It was a touring car; in other words there was no top, a seat in back, and it just took an awful lot of maintenance. And of course it had no starter—had to crank it. I got in trouble— I don't know what we were celebrating in high school—but I remember going down Main Street where the school was located with guys hanging all over this car. There must have been eight or ten hanging on my car. They were standing on the running boards when and I got stopped by the local police chief—who was our one and only cop and who gave me a ticket. I managed to avoid going to court, but that experience discouraged me from breaking the law from that point on.

1-00:35:20
Rigelhapt:
When you were in high school, or sort of a teenager, did you have any idea—for lack of a better way to put this—what you wanted to be when you grew up?

1-00:35:37
Hardison:
As a matter of fact, from that very moment that I turned in that little house plan in mechanical drawing as a junior high kid, I decided I wanted to pursue architecture. Which I think my folks had quite a bit of trouble understanding because I did love the ranch and they, of course, were taken by ranch life and living out in the country. They couldn't quite understand why I wanted to

go into architecture, because, frankly I didn't know anything about it. It's a small town. I didn't see any good examples of it. I finally met an architect, Roy Wilson in the neighboring town of Santa Paula, who during two summers, while I was in college, allowed me to work—and I mean "allow"—allowed me to work as an apprentice without pay. So, it all started right there in Fillmore, and, other than just remembering my excitement with being able to draw and produce something that could be built, I just don't have any other recollection of why I got into that particular field.

1-00:37:02
Rigelhapt:
Could you talk a little bit about your experiences at Cal—the years you were there and what you remember about it.

1-00:37:09
Hardison:
They were great years. I remember, the first trip to Cal my folks drove me up to Berkeley, and what a tedious route we used to have to go. The Ridge Route was a real obstruction between Bakersfield and Los Angeles. It was a long drag to get up there in a day. But my folks and I managed it. They let me off at a fraternity. I had no idea that I would be interested in a fraternity, but—a classmate of mine, Jean Sturgeon, who also came up to Cal the same year; had a brother, three years older, who was the president of the Theta Kappa Nu fraternity on Haste Street in Berkeley. He invited me to join the fraternity and, even be his roommate, which was a great opportunity for a kid from a small town who was very concerned about going to the big city of Berkeley. So my first experiences were handled by Marvin Sturgeon, who became sort of my mentor, and I've always appreciated that. He's still around, and I'm still in touch with him, even though he's more than ninety years old. There are so many memories connected with Berkeley that it's just hard to put them in a short form. I should say that the Department of Architecture in those years—and, of course, even today—is relatively small. In those years, it was a department under Letters and Science, so only—students in Architecture—were in that particular department. Whereas, since the early fifties, when Dean William Wurster headed up a new college to be known as the College of Environmental Design—which included three other fields: Landscape Architecture, Planning and Urban Design and Design. As architectural students, I met members of my class and formed lifelong relationships. The faculty—Mr. Torossian, our freshman professor, I will never forget. There were many others: Michael Goodman, and Warren Perry, who was the head of the department. Architecture was a very close-knit type of school, which became famous for all-night sessions before students turned in their plates. It was considered one of the hardest-working fields at the university, and friends and others would say that they went by the school at two o'clock—. The school was right there at the North Gate, and used to be called the Ark. It's now a different department. It's been restored to its original shingle appearance, but it's no longer architecture. And people would go by there at two or three o'clock in the morning and they'd say, "See all these lights in the classrooms." We were all working on the boards trying to get out the projects. So, my early memories of Cal was a lot of hard work. I was one of only two of us in my class who got into any activities early on. One of them was Jack Kent, who went on to be the first planning director of the City of San Francisco. Jack was interested in—what's the swimming, where you play ball in a pool? It's an Olympic event. Water polo. He was very interested in water polo, so he would break away sometimes from this long tedious work session we had to play water polo. And I would also break away to

go to the band rehearsals. On Saturday morning we would practice for the field events, whereas now, being in the band is almost like being in a profession. In those years it was rather a short-term commitment during football season. I played in the band for four years—. Maybe that's the reason my grades weren't as good as they should have been.

1-00:42:56
Rigelhapt:
Do you remember any sort of famous architects that you admire while you were in college?

1-00:43:07
Hardison:
Very good question, because we were in class in which virtually all of our professors were Beaux-Arts trained traditionalists. They either had been to Paris and trained there, or they had used that concept in their college background studies in the States. So we were the first—one of the first—classes to really be inspired Frank Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier and Gropius, who came from Germany to the States about that time. These Modernists were influencing our lives but not our professors. I will never forget one plate that on which we were supposed to be doing the four classic orders and we had to show illustrations. Classmates Jack Kent and Sydney Williams—were the rebels in our class. They were so impressed by the Modernist movement that they refused to do the classic Greek and Roman orders and instead did modern concepts that were a reflection, probably, of Corbusier. They each got an "F" grade on their plates. That episode became sort of the symbol of what we were to experience during our professional careers. Our work has been a clean, straightforward type of expression that was such a contrast traditional classic orders and features that were being used in prominent buildings, including city halls and bank buildings, all of which seemed to have these columns and caps. I was determined to change that throughout my career. Nowadays the pendulum has swung back and a lot of designers are returning to that characteristics of the tradition. Happily now others are going even farther out then we did with very wonderful, conceptual shape of structures that computers draw and would be all but impossible to do manually.

1-00:46:05
Rigelhapt:
I wonder if you could talk a little bit about what you did right out of college. Right after you graduated.

1-00:46:24
Hardison:
I graduated at the end of '38 because I had to go back for one additional course but I still graduated in '38 because the semesters end in December. It was an extremely difficult time. I also visited every prominent architect—. Well, I should say I visited a lot of architects who were not so prominent. [laughs] I remember going to William Wurster's office, and many others in San Francisco. None of them had any opportunities because the Depression had really pretty much closed their practices, except for government work that some of them were doing. Of course, we didn't know it, but we were approaching war. So, after trying for six months to get work up here in the Bay Area, I went home to Fillmore, pretty depressed, and through a friend—. During high school, I was active in a YMCA group called High Y—I don't even know if it exists today—but it was a group of my fellow students, and their director was very helpful to all of us in a number of ways. I called him he lived in Santa Barbara, and asked, "Do you have any idea

of whether there'd be any opportunities for an architect graduate in Santa Barbara." He said, "I just happen to know an architect." It turned out to be a very prominent firm largely responsible for the work at the university of Santa Barbara—UC Santa Barbara. The architect told this fellow that he didn't have any work but, he said, "I happen to know an architect in Los Angeles and who might be interested in giving you a job." So, I was excited about that, went to Los Angeles and, met the architect David Witmer, and it was a great experience. He said, "I do not have a job in the drafting room right now, but we've got this big housing project called Wyvernwood out in east Los Angeles. And I think I can get you a job there as an apprentice carpenter." But, you'll have to join a union."—and that was an interesting experience. I worked as an apprentice carpenter for a number of months. Got acquainted with some carpenters who were very helpful, showing me how to detail framework by hand saws, before the area of the Skill saws. Then I was called back to the office and worked there for a number of months. This was the firm of Witmer and Watson, David J. Witmer went on to become very prominent, because the Pentagon design had been started but was apparently in chaos—they couldn't seem to get the drawings out, or something. So, Mr. Witmer, a World War I vet reservists, was called back in service to be the architect on the Pentagon, and is credited with completing that building. I was very pleased to have that professional experience before I returning north. I wanted to come back to Northern California if I could possibly find another opportunity, and it finally came.

1-00:50:56
Rigelhapt:
Where did you find this opportunity in Northern California?

1-00:50:59
Hardison:
A fellow—Cal graduate—called me and said, "Don, there's an opportunity for an architect to work in Alameda at a contracting firm called the Hawaiian Raymond Turner Company, contractors on the Pacific air bases, and it was really a marvelous opportunity because the bases wee all designed by the famous architect Albert Kahn, who had been doing work in Detroit for all the major automobile manufacturers. He had designed these bases, which ultimately were all subject to Japanese attacks but of course we had no idea of that. This was 1940 and my job was not designing—which I would like to have done—but rather, it was checking shop drawings for the steel that was shipped to these islands out of the Alameda air base. This conglomerate the Hawaiian Raymond Turner Company—was made up of huge firms: Turner Construction of New York, Hawaiian Bredging Company of Hawaii, and the Raymond Pile Company—had the job of doing the building on the bases, and they wanted to be sure that the steel that was being shipped out of—. It was pre-fabricated steel, incidentally with all of the bolt and rivet holes pre-punched— and they wanted to be sure that that work had all been done accurately checked before it left Alameda. It would be very difficult to make changes out there in the Pacific. So my job for a number of months was to check shop drawings, the originals of which were prepared by this prominent architect. As the work in Alameda, was tapering off—it looked like I'd only have a few more months of work—I was urged to go to the Mare Island Naval Shipyard. They were looking for architects and engineers who could sort of adapt to naval architecture and to work on the hulls that were being either designed or repaired. Ultimately, when the war came, we repaired a great many—we did the designs for the repair of many destroyers.

1-00:54:19
Rigelhapt:
I'm going to ask you more about Mare Island, but I'm going to have to change the tapes.

[End file Hardison1 3-10-03.wav]

[Begin file Hardison2 3-10-03.wav]

2-00:00:15
Rigelhapt:
We had just gotten to your experiences on Mare Island. Shall we talk a little bit about your work at Mare Island?

2-00:00:23
Hardison:
Yes. I was assigned to the hull department, headed by a fellow by the name of Gibbons. Of course, I was on the drawing boards and got my first instruction, you might say, in how to modify hulls, which of course is a little bit unusual for an architect they are all steel. I got acquainted with welding and welding techniques. Adjacent to us in the hull department were the mechanical and electrical departments that took care of those aspects of ships. Mare Island has a long history, going way back to the mid-nineteenth century, both in building ships and repairing ships. It was really a very proud operation for all those who worked there for so many years. See, I started working there in the spring of '41, and of course, December 7th, '41 was yet to come. The drafting room was in a three-story building right across from the very large power plant, which had huge arch windows which at night the glow of the fire in those boilers was just terrific, just lights up the building and almost seemed to light up the sky. There was almost terror when this occurred because everyone was so sure that the Japanese were going to bomb the coast of the States, because we had virtually lost our navy, so we imagined that these big glowing windows of that building would be the first target of the Japanese bombers. Well, fortunately, that never happened, but that was our fear at the time. Also, within what seemed like a matter of days, "barrage balloons" were put up in the sky, held by cables, to discourage dive bombing the naval base, because it was assumed naval bases or ports of that nature—would be the Japanese targets. So it was a spectacular time and we occasionally worked overtime in order to accomplish our work. Once the December 7th bombing had occurred. I was rooming there, having moved from Berkeley, and I can well recall the relief of being able to live there rather than commuting, because in those years,—what is now highway I-80—was then U.S. 40—a three-lane highway all the way to Vallejo. So, of course, in the morning, we were all trying to dominate two lanes going towards Vallejo and you had to really be alert because there were so many crashes, resulting from competition for that middle lane. Then, upon returning, it would just be the reverse. Those of us driving home to the Bay Area from Vallejo would try to dominate the two lanes that were going that way. Shortly after I moved up there, I became socially very courageous We used to park on the Mare Island, and as we were heading out a very attractive lady—I thought—was often seen in a crosswalk, from our building, had these drafting rooms above, and it was in the shop superintendent's office below that this lady worked. One of the fellas in my car—a friendly engineer commuting from Berkeley—said, "Oh, I know that gal. That's Betty Decker." I said, "Gee, I'd like to meet her." Anyway, to make a long story short although, I was a rather modest sort of guy, I did get up the courage to call the Decker residence in Vallejo and ask for Elizabeth Decker. A man answered, who turned out to be her dad, said,

"We have no Elizabeth here. We have a Betty." I said, "Well, maybe it's Betty." So anyway, I met my future bride in that way. On June 14th, 1942 we were married at the Presbyterian Church in Vallejo, and subsequently took up residence in Richmond because during the time that we were engaged I was pressured— really pressured by Kaiser which was desperately looking for someone with my type of engineer-architect background to help them with their ship engineering, drafting, and naval architecture in Richmond. I debated long and hard whether to make the move, because there was a real possibility, regardless of whatever I did, I was about to be drafted. But both Mare Island and Kaiser assured me that they were so desperate for this kind of help that arrangements would be made for deferrals. So I decided to take Kaiser up on its offer. It was a private company, and I felt that maybe my opportunities in the future would be better with that company. So I moved to Shipyard One and had worked there for several months before Betty and I were married. Then she came to Richmond and we moved into one of the—now historic—housing projects, Atchison Village, which is on the list of sites of this new national park in Richmond. We moved it's a brand new apartment. So, we're quite experienced with what one goes through as a new resident of that housing project, and became very familiar with its design. That was our stepping stone to Richmond.

2-00:08:55
Rigelhapt:
Could you talk a little bit about what Atchison Village was like, maybe even more from the perspective of its architecture, and then, too, sort of its broader social life.

2-00:09:07
Hardison:
Atchison Village is a very well-planned—I say "is" because it still exists—a very well-planned community. There were two parts to it. One was the basic plan, in which the architecture not only included a layout of streets with very interesting curves and patterns, but also the variety of building types and the manner in which the general layout was made. We were very fortunate to be able to find a place there, and now there is a lot of talk about how the community of Richmond accepted the new employees from across the country—many of whom were minorities—because, as we discovered after we moved in—. Well, first I should say that, while most people seeking housing at Kaiser went through the Kaiser housing operation, which was actually constructed and originally maintained by the Maritime Commission later, it was assigned to the Richmond Housing Authority to administer. This was an early part of the Kaiser operation as I arrived. Even though it was after Pearl Harbor, the only work being done at Kaiser at that time were on thirty cargo ships that Kaiser had contracted with the British Government to build. They were Liberty ships and it was anticipated that there would be future contracts for the U.S. government. But this was for Britain, which was really under a terribly serious German attack at that time. While other shipyards were under construction, they were not yet operational, I was one of the early employees. Shipyard Number One had been in operation for a year or so when I got there, but the major part of the Kaiser operation in Richmond was yet to come. So it was the early part of the influx of people. As a couple that came to Richmond, just like a lot of other people, we were so fortunate to be able to find housing—through a college, friend who had been our best man, whose father Fred Newsom was manager of the Richmond Independent and a member of the Richmond Housing Authority said, "Why don't you call Dad? Maybe he can help you find a place." I had already befriended some people at First Presbyterian Church in Richmond and before my marriage rented a room from a member. Then, of course, we moved to

Atchison when we got married. This was our great fortune because Mr. Newsom had said: “You know, we’re just getting ready to take renters at Atchison Village, but,” he said, “the pressure is just so tremendous, I don’t know whether I can help you. But I’ll give it a try.” So, lo and behold, a couple of weeks later he called me back and said, “Don, I think we’ve found a place for you.” We were delighted with our apartment in a one story, fourplex. We were at one end and, as coincidence would have it, friends of ours from Cal were in the unit at the other end, and they had also just gotten married. He worked at Standard Oil, which is now Chevron-Texaco. Our immediate neighbor was a Richmond fireman, and across the rear court from us was one of the Kaiser superintendents. All of us were Caucasian. It was at a time the heavy influx of people was just adding pressure for housing and Atchison Village was quickly filled. So that’s how we got into Atchison, which we found very but tiny. I think it had something like 530 square feet, including a small bedroom, but it was a space that was ours. It had a rear yard with a clothesline and later, under that clothesline, we raised some vegetables in what was called a victory gardens. Another thing about Atchison: it had a central community center, which was an opportunity for social contacts, and there was also the administrative office. I mentioned earlier that Atchison was built in two parts. I don’t remember exactly when the second section started, with—as I recall—something like two hundred units to Atchison, which were done in sort of typical wartime designs, unlike the original Atchison design, which was done by local architects, administered locally, also constructed by a contractor locally. This addition, the Annex, as they call it, consisted of stock duplexes. Quite different from the design original of Atchison, which, for those years, was really well done. For example, we were in a one-story fourplex, but there were also one-story duplexes, and two bedroom, two-story duplexes. In other words, the whole idea was to create an atmosphere that was not overly congested. There was a lot of lawn space in between the buildings, and there were play yards for the kids. For a congregate living situation, it was very pleasant.

2-00:16:57
Rigelhapt:
Jumping back to your role at Kaiser, could you talk about your job at Kaiser shipyards, and any sort of new techniques or things you developed, or was developed in the larger workplace at that time?

2-00:17:16
Hardison:
Okay. That’s a very good question too, because Henry J. Kaiser’s greatest achievement, of course, was the technique that he developed and expanded to prefabricate the ships, and thus speed up to a great degree the time it took from keel-laying to launch. My future part in that became evident the day I started working, because of the introduction by John B. Moore—my first supervisor and of course his staff there, in a small drafting room. I remember they laid out for me the large drawings of the ships that were designed by George G. Sharp in New York City. He was the major naval architect for the Maritime Commission. These huge drawings were very cumbersome. And, of course, there’s a lot of wind in Richmond. If you take one of those plans out on the ship that’s under construction, it tends blow all over the place. So they showed me how, instead of those large drawings, we were to make what they call subsection hull drawings, which were probably on sheets that were—maybe 18 by 24 inches. I’ve really forgotten. But they were relatively small sheets, and on each one, we would put an element or a subsection, and working out systems for identifying them as part of the whole. You start with the bow and go

back to the stern—a whole series of these subsections, and also starting with the double-bottom sections, and then adding deck sections. Well, first, the drawings were taken to the mold loft, where as a part of the shipbuilding operation, wooden molds or patterns were created for the steel that is going to be used on the ship. So, our drawings would show each element each piece of steel that would make up each small subsection. The mold loft would take those drawings and lay out, each piece of steel and shape them in wood. Then the wood section—this wood "mold"—would be taken down into the plate shop, which normally was below the mold loft. There, plates would be first cut to match the molds, usually with burning torches, and finished off. Then they would be run through rollers to provide the shaping that was necessary for, particularly, the sides of the hull. They would be using our drawings also to show how they'd be assembled after they would be run through this process. And they had these assembly decks out by the ways, where the ships were being assembled, and on these decks, or "skids" they were called, —the shipfitters, welders and burners—would lay out exactly what our drawing showed. Our drawings were, you might say, a mechanic's interpretation of the original design. And from that they would then put everything together in a single piece—a single section—aligned in such a way that four giant whirly cranes could pick up the four corners and, on tracks, wheel them over to the ships on the ways. That was my experience at Yard One, which was not too long, because shortly after I got there Mr. Moore said, "You know, they're getting ready to finish yard number three, and that's going to be for building an entirely different kind of ship. It's going to be a troop ship, that's called a C-4. It's more than twice the size of a Liberty Ship." Mr. Moore and a number of us from Yard One went over to Yard Three to do that operation, which was different, because, while the fabrication process was identical—the way the ship was assembled was quite different. At Yard One, and later at Yards Two and Four, there were sloping ways upon which the ship was assembled and then launched into the Bay, whereas Yard Three had dry docks, the only yard in the country so built during the war. So there were five dry docks into which these ships were built. The Prefabricated sections would be lifted by four whirly cranes off these "skids" and brought over to the dry dock where the ship was being erected. In other words, after erecting all of the sub-units, the ship was launched from the dry dock, by just filling it with water. The ship would rise up and they'd open the gate and the ship would float out with the help of tugs. Whereas, at the other yards, with conventional ways, the ships—when launching time came—they would pull out the wedges and the ships would slide into the water. Ships from all yards would then be moved to the outfitting dock. In other words, after the launching, they would outfit the ship with all the machinery, electronic and mechanical equipment that would make the ship operational. And you asked what newly created ideas we helped produce, and I think we were all in this together. I learned about prefabrication at Yard One, because they'd already started doing that, but as the months went on, during the war, we refined this technique to a major extent and more and more stuff could go into the sub-assembly unit, so that it would take the time off of the ways or the dry docks, and make the production of ships so much faster. While I was not involved in the record-breaking ships that were built at Yard Number Two, this was all a part of the technique that we at Kaiser developed. A group of engineers and architects, and hull people, made it possible for the sub-assembled cabins to be painted and have all the switching and wiring in place and so when they were set on the ship, they were already connected up. There had to be connecting links. The fastest ship, of course, was built in just slightly over four days, which is a record to this date. And it was only possible because these sections were practically complete when they were assembled on the ways. Those were big ships, perhaps 460 feet long, and almost 10,000 tons. That's a big chunk of metal.

2-00:26:30
Rigelhapt:
One other person that I believe you worked with, was C.P. Bedford. I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your interaction, the strengths you saw working there, the kind of person he was. How would you describe him?

2-00:26:56
Hardison:
Kaiser ultimately was given the opportunity to build ships in two locations; one was in Richmond and the other was in Vancouver, Washington. The Richmond operation was headed entirely by Clay P. Bedford, he was also involved in the construction aspect of the yards. He had an assistant whose name was Einer Larson, who was in charge of the actual construction of the shipyards, and he headed a large engineering department, located in Richmond, that produced the documents used by the contractors to build everything in the shipyards, including the ways and the huge warehouse that exists today at Yard Three. I think Mr. Bedford was over all of this early on, but then when the shipbuilding started, it's my understanding that he was transferred to the administration of the shipbuilding. Mr. Larson continued in the construction area for a number of months before he, too, came to administer the shipbuilding. So, Mr. Bedford—in my opinion, was sort of a technical genius that produced the results that were achieved in Richmond. Mr. Kaiser, obviously, is credited–very properly—with the vision of doing all of this work at two different geographic locations. He also had a reputation for amazing work in building dams and heavy construction early on. But the actual on-site work, and particularly the prefabrication that we achieved in Richmond, was a pioneering effort that should be credited to Mr. Bedford. And it's through his leadership that the Richmond Kaiser Shipyards—competitively exceeded the records of the Vancouver yard that was managed by Mr. Kaiser's son, Edgar. The fun aspect of doing such tough work was that we were competing with another shipyard within the same top management. Mr. Bedford chose very skilled administrators or leaders, foremen who did the actual work. Shipyard Number Three I became well acquainted with yard. Superintendent O.H. McCoon, Shop Superintendent Victor Cole; Outfitting Dock Superintendent, Kenneth Flood and his assistant, Jim McCloud. The superintendents were experienced construction people with Kaiser, and both were ingenious in the way they adapted their style—their construction technique—to shipbuilding, which was so vastly different from pouring concrete and building dams and structures. So, I think Clay P. Bedford should be largely credited with that accomplishment, because it was he who was in charge. On rare occasions Kaiser would appear if some outstanding honoree was launching the ship or a specific ship justified Mr. Kaiser being present. My relationship to Mr. Bedford was of course, as a lower level department head. During the most active period, my department had seventy-two draftsmen, and only on rare occasions when there was some policy involved on how we were to do our work or maybe an issue with the Maritime Commission was a meeting with Mr. Bedford justified. The Maritime Commission kept changing their plans shown on large drawings from Mr. Sharp's office in New York, and we would be the ones who would have to quickly modify our shop drawings to record the changes. And sometimes there was the issue as to whether we would make the change on one hull or wait for the next. On rare occasions I would have the opportunity, with other supervisors, to be in meetings with Mr. Bedford in which these things were discussed. But most of my work was through Mr. Einor Larson who was Bedford's assistant in the same office. I just didn't have occasion to have much contact with Mr. Bedford.

2-00:33:11
Rigelhapt:
Switching gears a little bit to the larger social setting in Richmond during World War II, what do you remember most about how Richmond changed during the war?

2-00:33:25
Hardison:
This is the story that I think is most significant in connection with this relatively small town of 23,000 people, which was selected by Kaiser and the Maritime Commission to start these shipyards. It's my impression, because I did have some contact through Richmond friends that I knew before my time in Richmond, so I associated myself largely with the old town. We were the early ones to arrive, and we were accepted very readily as part of the old town—with a few exceptions.

But our observation was that Richmond was extremely ill-prepared to function as the support community for shipyards that at one time total amount 100,000 employees. Because transportation was difficult, it was hard for people to drive—not only because the roads were limited in their access, but fuel was hard to come by. You could get an allotment of fuel for commuting, but it was very difficult. They finally built a streetcar rail—between Oakland and Richmond but, for various reasons, that was not very successful. So really, what Richmond was supposed to do was provide housing for virtually thousands of families that came into the community. The community didn't have the resources and the federal government was slow to act. Atchison Village was the only project—which was very small in terms of the need—and so everyone had to wait until the Maritime Commission had gotten their projects under way. Thousands of apartments were eventually made available in Richmond. Very emergency-like techniques were utilized in the acquisition of property. If the owners of open land could not be found the property would be condemned and assembled for six unit stock apartment houses on these properties. So Richmond, as a community, whether you're talking about the grocery store, the banks, or the theatres, or medical community, was just very—very inadequate. Richmond's response has been criticized by a number of authors who have written either articles or books, and there was even an exhibit in Washington DC that we visited several years ago that suggested that Richmond was just not equal to this task. And I must agree. Now, as time went on, everything was expanded, and the fire department was a local organization—in other words, the Maritime Commission would build the buildings but the fire department would be expanded.

So even the firemen, who are traditionally a rather close-knit lot, would include people from out of the community. The schools were terribly overburdened, and there are many teachers still around who remember their difficulties with overwhelming sizes of classes, and the double sessions that they worked on a morning and afternoon—because there just was not enough space to accommodate the kids. The fact that many of the people who were arriving to work on the shipyards had never lived in an urban situation, even as modest as Richmond. Richmond was a big city compared to—. Hundreds of people who arrived in Richmond, some of whom did not even have toilet facilities at home in their place of departure, and so there was a tremendous cultural gap between many of the arrivals and this small community that was supposed to be so accommodating to them. I can probably speak to different areas of difficulties. We were not particularly plagued by this, because we were in the new community of Atchison Village that was largely made up of people who had lived in this community, or had come to work in

advanced technology, such as various manufacturers in Richmond. Incidentally, Richmond was a truly manufacturing city in those years. It had the Standard Oil Refinery, large Rheem Manufacturing; a very large American Standard facility, one of which they made bathtubs, at another of which they made basins and fixtures; and the Pullman car plant in Richmond, one of the largest in the country, where they maintained Pullman cars, and during the war refitted as troop trains. These people were already in the community, and you can imagine the competition, or the attitudes between these industrial workers and the type of farmer or person from other fields coming in from Oklahoma, Tennessee or Missouri. There are many stories on where these frictions occurred. But, I think it's understandable, considering the kind of community Richmond was before this huge responsibility was imposedt.

2-00:41:13
Rigelhapt:
You just mentioned some of the frictions with lots of people coming in. Could you describe a little bit more where some of those frictions took place and what they looked like?

2-00:41:26
Hardison:
Well, for example in housing. There were several small contractors who made their living building houses—a few duplexes, small private housing. They were all rather reluctant to market those properties to either investors who might rent them to a shipyard worker, or to a shipyard worker that could put down enough to purchase a property. I really believe that these local businesspeople thought that when the war was over they would return to—essentially—normal. That was in some ways encouraged by positions that Mr. Kaiser took himself, when of the four shipyards he gained Maritime Commission's approval and budget for a permanent facility. And Mr. Kaiser, on several occasions, indicated that after the war there would be a modest shipbuilding industry in Richmond, which would have been very easy for the community to absorb.

It was Shipyard Number Three, which had dry docks. That did not happen, as when the war was over, Mr. Kaiser found that there were surplus ships all over the world, including Victory ships, Liberty ships, and even larger cargo vessels—like our C4s we'd been building—so the market for a substantial shipbuilding industry in Richmond faded. There again, the hopes and, you might say, the energies of the community were directed towards normalcy after the war. And that is a whole story in itself of how first they didn't have enough housing and then after the war, the community, with its agencies, particularly the redevelopment agency, made agreements with the Maritime Commission that permitted it to demolish virtually all of the wartime housing.

There were just a few units left which were all built under a different program from Atchison Village, which was to be retained. But to illustrate the desire of the community to get rid of as much public housing as possible, the Housing Authority made arrangements to see Atchison Village to its tenants who formed a private condominium group. That's because the Authority just wanted to get away from public housing. But people were still around, living in very difficult situations after that public housing was demolished. My firm was the first one to have an opportunity to design a post-war housing project. It would be called Easter Hill Village. That's a whole story in itself. I'd become licensed in 1948, and I received several major projects in Richmond in my early years as an architect. But the first two major public projects was Easter Hill with the Richmond Housing Authority in 1950, and the West County Court Building on

Thirty-seventh Street. So that's where I started my postwar experience of helping the town convert to normalcy, which it really wasn't enjoying at the time the war ended.

2-00:46:39
Rigelhapt:
Could you talk more about your firm and anything you designed that's in Richmond, from schools to housing, to courthouses. How you would sort of discuss your experiences there?

2-00:47:01
Hardison:
Well, when the war ended—. In fact, about the middle of 1945, it was evident to all of us in our production drafting department that there were not going to be any more ships built, and they were not revising ships any more, so obviously our department was being phased out, just as were the shipyard workers at each yard. As the keel of the last ship would be laid, then they would start laying off shipfitters and welders and the burners and so forth. The same thing happened in our department, which actually came earlier because we were the ones that did the drawings before the work was done. So it was obvious I had to start thinking about what I was going to do with my future, and we had been very fortunate to have been deferred from military service during those years—and I'm very appreciative of that opportunity—but we also, as did all of us who had graduated in my class, had difficulty during those war years of relating to architecture.

So I was looking forward to getting back to it, and I left the Kaiser organization in December '45. This was well after the war was over but they were still just finishing up the last C4s. Two others George Rhoda and Ted Moist, all three of us in the same department there at Kaiser, and all three of us were Cal guys, and decided we would start a design firm in Richmond. There was only one architectural firm in Richmond, and the architect was very ill, and unfortunately died, I believe in 1946. So it was a small community with virtually no architects. It looked like it would be an opportunity for us to do work in Richmond.

So we rented a little storefront office on Twelfth Street, and proceeded to receive interest from a lot of different sources—not much of any money, but a lot of opportunity to think about postwar work. The city was desperate for everything from new stores to public buildings, schools, and just virtually everything. So the opportunities were there if we could just get the work. Some of the earliest work, for example—one of the proudest things in Richmond—the Richmond Arts Center, was getting ready to build—. As part of the Civic Center designed by the prominent San Francisco firm of Flueger & Flueger. The lady who headed the Richmond Arts Center organization, before there were any real buildings, Hazel. Salmi, asked me if I—our firm—would do a sketch of the Art Center how that might be incorporated in the Civic Center complex. We did a sketch, which was given to the Fluegers, and the arts center was incorporated almost identically to our layout, which still exists. It was added as a wing to the auditorium, and is one of the most prominent nonprofit organizations in Richmond. So that was one of our first little opportunities, but I don't think we received anything for it. Maybe they paid us for the prints or something.

Then the Chamber of Commerce said, "You know, we haven't changed a store around here all during the war, for five or six years, so how about doing something that would show how we could—." They decided on some kind of a program to get the business community to get

involved in a seminar on how a business block in Richmond might be remodeled. So we took pictures of one city business block on Macdonald Avenue, between Eleventh and Twelfth Street, and redesigned the front of every store. This was in the years when aluminum was just coming into use, and companies like Kawneer Company created great details of aluminum that could be used on storefronts, and neon was also getting into play.

So we had a lot of fun doing a series of stores. We didn't change any of the dimensions of the stores— just their frontage. It was very well received. There were a lot of merchants who were interested in moving ahead on remodeling like that, and we got a few jobs out of it. Remember we were not licensed and only allowed to be called "designers" limiting our work to remodeling houses and non-structural things. Well, when I got my license we considered whether to continue as partners. For a while I practiced alone, then Ted Moist joined me. Mr. Rhoda had found an opportunity in Monterey, and went to that community, where he became a very prominent architect. So anyway, for a number of years, it was "Donald Hardison and Associates" and under that firm name, our first real jobs were the First Presbyterian Church, which was relocating from downtown to out on Barrett Avenue; and the YMCA, which asked for a very unusual plan. They wanted to join with the YWCA in a building, which would be known as the Memorial Youth Center, honoring those in the community lost during World War II. We got the job in '48 and completed it in 1950. In 1950, the big opportunity for designing government work, which I mentioned, was the Easter Hill Village project, which was a project of the Richmond Housing Authority. Then the County of Contra Costa was planning a court building, and we were interviewed for that. And I may say, that in both of those opportunities, there were five votes to be cast and we got three out of the five—but that did it. It took us a while to obtain school work even though I was well acquainted with the longstanding superintendent, Walter Helms. It would be two superintendents later before we really had an opportunity to design a number of schools, including Richmond High School, which was quite a new concept in terms of circulation. It had a huge mall as part of the central activity area for the students, which included a cafeteria and library. We also did a number of elementary schools, a junior high in Berkeley, and a swim center in Berkeley.

2-00:55:57
Rigelhapt:
Excuse me, I'm going to change the tapes.

2-00:55:59
Hardison:
Sure.

[End file Hardison2 3-10-03.wav]

[Begin file Hardison33-10-03.wav]

3-00:00:02
Rigelhapt:
Okay, the audio's back on. Okay, so you were talking about designing Richmond High.

3-00:00:23
Hardison:
Richmond High came later in our experience with schools, and that was very interesting because this was during a time that the district felt that they wanted to change the manner in which the teaching process was done, and they wanted a school to reflect that. This involved what they called "team teaching", in which each classroom was to have two teachers, and they had respective roles that they would work out between them. Instead of having enclosed classrooms, with the usual door, they wanted the classroom open to the corridors. So you could actually walk down a corridor and look in and see the activities in each classroom, including any music or sound or anything that was going on. Also, because Richmond was already becoming a troubled city in terms of vandalism, they didn't want any windows. And thirdly, the original high school was a very attractive building, which was affectionately held by all those who had graduated from the school. It was a brick building with terracotta columns, and it was just a handsome traditional school. It had been designed, of course, for natural ventilation, whereas the new school was air-conditioned and—I've already mentioned—no windows.

Well, the first thing that I did was to talk them into having very minimal windows, just so that you'd know whether it was rain or shine outside from each classroom. While this was accepted by the school board, it wasn't long after the school was built when they even covered those windows up with plywood just so that the vandals wouldn't break the glass. The school was a very simple design. I wouldn't say that it would have matched the work of Frank Lloyd Wright or Le Corbusier, but it was very clean. And it was liked by some people, and virtually hated by others, particularly the traditional teacher, who not only liked the old school appearance, but liked the idea of being able to close his/her classroom door and have the privacy of teacher and students. Whereas that opportunity was not present in the plan that was devised by the district—with our cooperation, of course. To accomplish this new type of school, they actually retired the former principal, David Gray, and called in a new principal who was an advocate of the open classroom type of teaching. But there was a great deal of discontent among the staff and so Richmond High, which I proudly boasted as our finest architectural school job, really had its problems, and they still exist today. There has been some remodeling to return to the traditional classroom, but of course, nothing works, since it wasn't designed to work that way. It was just not a very happy solution.

I'm still very proud of what we did in designing the original, however. We also did a number of, you might say, non-traditional elementary schools, one of which was Grant School. It was because of the quality that resulted from that, those very simple lines that impressed the Berkeley school board giving us an opportunity on University Avenue to do a major addition to what was then called the Burbank Junior High. It was subsequently renamed, because it's now a senior high school for adult education. We also did the Berkeley swim center, which is right behind it. That was very well received by the city of—by the people in Berkeley. We also did a major junior high—when they were called "junior highs"— the Downer Junior High, which was west of the new Richmond High, was really a very useful and practical, as well as handsome, school with colorful panels part of the window fenestration. For reasons that have never been clear to me, many years later, the District converted it to an elementary school, claiming a shortage elementary schools.

But, as you know, elementary school requirements and those of the intermediate school level are quite different. It's very unfortunate that they're using shop space, for example, for conventional classrooms. My early respect for the way the school was being used has been changed materially. Let's see, what other schools have we done? Our firm has done numerous schools, including some in Marin, and most recently—just shortly after I retired—our firm did the Alhambra High School, just outside of Martinez. The firm has also done schools in several other cities.

3-00:07:40
Rigelhapt:
The housing project you did—the name has slipped my mind for the moment—

3-00:07:48
Hardison:
Easter Hill Village?

3-00:07:50
Rigelhapt:
Easter Hill. Could you talk about your goals in designing that, influences, what you hoped to accomplish with the set-up of the community, and when you did the project.

3-00:08:04
Hardison:
At the time that I received the commission for doing Easter Hill housing project, wartime housing still existed throughout the community. There were literally hundreds of units everywhere, within a few hundred feet or up to a mile or so from Easter Hill Village, but the community was already requesting that that such housing be demolished to make room for what they thought would be normal development of the community. So Easter Hill was technically the first housing done in the City of Richmond following the wartime housing that was, of course, done in the early years of World War II. It was to be administered by the Richmond Housing Authority, with funding from the federal government through the Public Housing Administration, which it was called at that time. The goals were to—a 300-unit project, which is sizeable—on an ideal site. So the first assignment that I was given was to look at several locations within the community that might be available for a project of this nature. It appeared to me after reviewing a number that the site of Easter Hill, which originally was a small hill where Easter sunrise services had been held on its summit, and that's how it got its name. But during the early part of the war, the Kaiser people needed—desperately needed—landfill material in order to create the site of future yard number two.

So after tons of material were removed from the hill, a very unsightly quarry brought down to grade level with ridges almost like a volcano around it. Of a number I considered, this was the site initially recommended to the housing authority, and they bought it, and were very interested in the concept. As a young architect; this was a huge challenge in the housing field. Although I had done homes, I had not done any multiple housing, and in reviewing where I might gain consultant help to do the work, I was reminded that a fellow by the name of Vernon DeMars had just arrived in Berkeley, with William Wurster, from MIT. to be on the faculty of the architectural department. I called Vernon—we had never met, and he came over and we looked at the site. He was very excited about it, because he had considerable housing experience, both

before the war and during the war, with the Farm Security Administration. He had worked in their offices for some time, and then at MIT he and a partner did a couple of very nice high-rise housing developments.

I first engaged him as a consultant, but as we got into it, it became more and more obvious that Mr. DeMars was bringing a good many of the novel ideas to this project, and had also introduced me to Lawrence Halprin, a landscape architect, who was responsible ultimately for designing the landscaping and, particularly, suggesting how we could architecturally the huge boulders that were left on the quarry site. Larry had the idea that they would make great compositions within the project, and we could put plants around the boulders, and so forth. So I bought that idea, and it became very much a part of the character of the future Easter Hill Village. With regard to Vernon, I finally felt obligated to invite him to be an associate, even though so ultimately all the work was done in my offices, and I make virtually all contact with both the client as well as the federal government. The firm became known, for that particular project as Donald Hardison and Vernon DeMars, Architects Associated.

The project was unique in that, probably for the first time in public housing, there was a very real effort made to create identification for family units. So, not only were the apartments identified from one another by either offsetting their floor plans so that they formed sort of a jagged pattern, but we often changed color and materials of individual row houses, and then all the family units—which were about, 95 or 96 percent, had designated yard space of their own and fenced in so that they could plant a garden, secure their children, or have a puppy dog. There was certain privacy provided for each family within the unit. The street pattern developed also made it truly a neighborhood rather than just a grid system, block pattern, which is the way the rest of Richmond had been laid out. So that in that respect, Easter Hill Village, was laid out as a custom community—in the same manner as Atchison Village, which we thought would strengthen the relationships between the tenants. But in actuality, as the project housed more and more very low-income—federal aided people, with many single parent families—continued over a period of several years, the project failed for the very reasons that we thought it would be successful.

Later, the police would claim that because it was a neighborhood, the crime that was occurring there because the streets didn't lend themselves to either access or egress. Once you got into the layout, you were sort of in a confined neighborhood rather than in a block system where you can go any of four directions. So the qualities that we felt were in the original project were largely depreciated as time went on, and it truly became if not one of, probably the major, crime centers for the handling of drugs. It's just because a very serious problem. The early response to the project nationally was terrific. During a special program for the hundredth anniversary of the American Institute of Architects in 1957, which was funded by Kodak, "Ten Buildings, in America's Future", selected and photographed by a very prominent photographer. Included were one Frank Lloyd Wright building, the St. Louis Airport, done by HOK [Hellmuth Obata & Kassabaum], and Easter Hill Village. We were very proud of that. It was displayed at the National Gallery in Washington, which I visited. I've got a photograph of myself beside the beautiful exhibit, and we were given other recognitions, published in Life Magazine and several professional magazines The exhibit also traveled to Russia.

But in terms of the community and the police problem, it was a doomed area—doomed village. Much to my sadness and shock, it looks today as though virtually the whole project is going to

be demolished and replaced by a mixed-use, which will include some low-income housing and some—privately owned houses. I maintain that the qualities for which it was originally designed still exist, and Vernon DeMars fully agrees with me. He's ninety-five now, incidentally, but he still is very sharp. Right now the community has already designed what they hope to build there, and have not been responsive to my suggestions that they could create home-ownership there by just converting some of those four- and six-unit buildings to condominiums and there could be home ownership and government rental units side by side. But they are seemingly not interested in this, except that before they demolish the project, which is now considered historic—it's been more than fifty years since we started the work—an EIR [environmental impact report] must be developed to confirm that everything has been considered before this demolition occurs. Part of the EIR is a historical study and report, and historians have interviewed me and they are very enthusiastic about the project, and do not understand why it's being demolished. I have not seen their report. As required, it has been filed with the state office of Historic Preservation and if it accepts the request of the city, apparently, it will be demolished. On the other hand, if the office in Sacramento decides that there is insufficient evidence that this historic project cannot be maintained in a practical way, very remotely we may be able to save Easter Hill. So that is the good news— bad news.

3-00:21:29
Rigelhapt:
When did Easter Hill open?

3-00:21:32
Hardison:
It was opened in 1954. There were 300 units. I believe that it was '55 before the last of the last units were occupied. But, as I said, we started working on it in 1950.

3-00:21:57
Rigelhapt:
And you mentioned that at some point—. Do you remember when some of the problems you mentioned with Easter Hill started occurring?

3-00:22:13
Hardison:
Yes. Initially, there were no particular issues. The administration of the housing authority, as was full understanding, wanted to have a mix of family incomes. So there would be low incomes and some moderate incomes. But a situation developed after the war when thousands of other units, were demolished and the pressure from, not only the poor, but the minority community, became tremendous to find housing. Initially there were a number of two-parent families, I should say; both parents—but shortly after—when I say shortly, I'm talking about ten or twelve years—the national authority, which I guess was still PHA [Public Housing Administration], or it might have been the successor body, during Johnson's administration, urged that they not continue to balance the incomes of the occupants, instead accept only the poorest. In so doing, they inherited all the problems of those people. The kids were unsupervised a good deal of the time, as usually the parents were working, and more often than not, they were on federal aid, so that despite what the local authority believed in the best in the interest of the neighborhoods, the order to house the poorest of the poor, created inevitable social problems for the occupants. For twenty to twenty-five years, our firm was in very close contact with the housing authority and as problems

occurred in maintenance—. For example, the wonderful boulders that formed such great visual objects, created a problem because—, we never dreamed that—kids would take such an interest in these boulders that they'd dig under them to make caves. Some boulders became unstable and so one of our contracts was to stabilize the boulders, which we had assumed that once in the ground they would stay there. But the kids loved to play around them. So we had many remedial projects. For example, another minimum thing that was required by the federal government at the time we designed it was, in the little laundry unit, just off the kitchen sink, we had a laundry tray and room for a washing machine, but no connections. In other words, federal standards had not permitted it to be set up to use a modern day washer, so there had to be some plumbing corrections. The original design would not allow doors on a great many of the closets and cabinets. For example, in the bedrooms the wardrobes were not covered with doors.

So, I guess, the tenants could put cloth over them, but it was just very economically designed originally, all standards that we were required to use as a guide during the design. So we were involved in upgrading. However, the last project we did completely discouraged us and we said that we were no longer interested in helping. Of a number of modernizations to be made, which were badly needed, the Housing Authority decided that the most important thing to do was to bar the windows to prevent intruders. In order to do this legally, very elaborate hardware must be provided to allow a release that even a child can activate in the event of a fire. If a child's in a room and there's a fire, we had double-hung windows, originally, which they could very easily be opened for escape. But when bars are installed over them, release levers must be very carefully integrated into the interior so that a burglar or intruder cannot release the bars, yet at the same time they must be easily released by a child, in the case of emergency. It was just so discouraging to see this attractive housing, which originally had different colors and textures on the outside, having these black bars added. We just decided our firm didn't need that kind of work, so we stopped serving the housing authority at that time.

3-00:28:31
Rigelhapt:
Do you think some of the problems that occurred at Easter Hill were representative of the problems that the larger City of Richmond faced after World War II?

3-00:28:45
Hardison:
Very definitely. The only difference, I would say, is that whereas Easter Hill was concentrated in a single neighborhood, accommodating a certain economic level, in the City of Richmond as a whole—people were trying to maintain their properties and had very good relationships with their neighborhoods. There were isolated areas where two or three houses or more would have problems, but basically the city housing was not bad. However, Richmond changed from a largely Caucasian city, with many Japanese who had wonderful nursery systems, as well as a few Afro-Americans during the years before the war. But generally speaking the changes in this community during and after the war occurred because of the differences in culture from where the people had originated as well as the change in racial texture that virtually overwhelmed this small community. Whereas there was a healthy downtown business district in Richmond when we came to city, which extended well into the fifties, a combination of pressure from a new minority community, together with some very unfortunate policies of the redevelopment agency funded by the federal government, that allowed or permitted—or encouraged, I should say—the

demolition of commercial buildings before there was any plan for their replacement. Downtown Richmond had some major stores such as a large Macy's, and a multistory Penney's and a number of other very good retail establishments. These were bought up by the redevelopment agency, buildings were demolished, and vacant lots stood there for years. Under those circumstances, the business community was not interested in putting investment back into that area. Meanwhile, these price of, the value of, the properties dropped so much that the newer community was able to purchase these buildings, but many properties still remain vacant today, and there are still vacant lots. The original business community them became interested in the newer area, which became was land owned by the Standard Oil Company, which became the Hilltop Shopping Center. And that was all new. It allowed a lot of flexibility, and so first Macy's moved, then Penney's moved. Downtown Richmond was virtually demolished by the policies of the redevelopment agency. Whereas communities of Oakland have gone through a lot of the same problem. Oakland's downtown buildings still exists and was not demolished. Also Berkeley has survived very well, because of all its pre-war buildings which largely still exist on Shattuck Avenue. So, Richmond has taken a beating as a result of this influx of a new population.

3-00:33:07
Rigelhapt:
You mentioned the Japanese community in Richmond before the war. What do you remember about after Pearl Harbor and in the months following, where Japanese-Americans were interned? How do you remember Richmond reacting?

2-00:33:25
Hardison:
Well, I had a more personal recollection, that I really failed to cover properly early on. One is that one of my first acquaintances and first friends that I developed when I went to the University in 1934, was Shigego Richard Komatsu, who was a freshman architectural student like myself. We got along very well at Cal. In fact, we did a senior project together. He subsequently went to work for a San Francisco architect. When Pearl Harbor struck he was—like all of us devastated of course, but within a matter of just days after Pearl Harbor. He and his folks, who lived in San Francisco, his dad was a painter—a painting contractor—by profession or field—. All were forced to leave their home, and subsequently his dad lost his business. I think they even lost their home, but I'm not quite sure what happened. I know that Shig, like myself, had Studebaker Champion and he gave his car to a friend when he was forced to leave San Francisco. He went on to do some very important service to the country during the war, which made it all the more ridiculous that they considered the Japanese-Americans such a hazard. Shig not only worked for a housing authority back East, but actually invited to serve in the armed forces as a planner. To this day, he can't understand how they could have encouraged that after they had condemned him as being a threat to the nation. But anyway, our paths crossed again after the war when he asked to be called "Rich," and was again working in San Francisco with Architect—Charles Strothoff. During the war Strohoff had closed his practice and was actually the administrator of the Richmond Housing Authority. So, Rich returned to work for him, but Strothoff was getting close to retirement, and my firm was going strong. About 1952 or so I'd had these jobs we've been discussing——so he agreed to come with me. First he was considered an associate, but later he became a partner. The tragedy that I experienced with him was that he wrote me some very sad letters during the war about how he just couldn't understand it, and I'd write back and

say I couldn't understand it, but I didn't know what I could do. I was working at Kaiser shipyards, I had no influence or contact, and so I'm very well acquainted with what happened to the Japanese community. As Japanese families in Richmond, I was not acquainted with any at the time. After the war, several prominent Japanese families that have been here for years and owned large nurseries we got personally acquainted with, both as friends, and customers, and we also became acquainted with some of their problems. Mr. Komatsu brought into the office work for one of the nurseries, and we did two major nurseries for them, Adachi's, one of which still exists in El Sobrante. I should say that—typical, I guess, of their culture,—they are, with few exceptions, amazingly uncritical of what we, what the government did. I know that in their hearts they feel it, but the friends that I have are not activists in terms of demanding, you know, retribution or something for their suffering. So, I think the Japanese personality has a lot to do with the way they've been reintegrated into our community.

3-00:39:26
Rigelhapt:
You've really touched on a lot of the questions, so I don't have anything really specific. I think this actually might be a good time to wrap up. So is there anything you'd like to add that you haven't said?

3-00:39:40
Hardison:
Well, I'm a part of the local organization that's trying to help the National Park Service with their new park. I'm very enthusiastic about it. I have information and recollections about several of their important sites, the most important of which, I think, is Yard Number Three. However, the Ford Plant is considered to be the place where the national park will have their visitors center. My firm did a lot of work on that old building, a number of years ago—thirty years ago, I guess—when the University had it and used it as a warehouse and a facility for a number of different departments for both Berkeley and at SF Med Center. So we're very pleased with the progress that's being made. We have an awfully long way to go, and Judy Hart as the superintendent, is very active providing the leadership that's going to be necessary. It's an unusual park in that the sites all have to be maintained by others, than the National Park Service. I'm also very active in the restoration of the Red Oak Victory, which was launched at Yard Number One, where I first worked at the shipyards, and currently the Richmond Museum of History is looking for funding in order to get the ship operational. It is destined to be one of the most valuable sites, marvelous in the National Park Service.

3-00:41:42
Rigelhapt:
Okay, I think we'll stop there.

3-00:41:49
Hardison:
Okay.