

**VOICES OF THE CAPE FEAR
INTERVIEW OF
JAMES C. PENNINGTON AND ANNA FEENSTRA PENNINGTON**

AUGUST 22, 1995

INTRODUCTION

This is Sam Bissette. This is Tuesday, August 22, 1995. I'm here at home at 1939 South Live Oak Parkway and I have two people with me today who I'm going to talk to. One is Anna Feenstra Pennington and the other one is "Skinny" James Pennington and these folks have information and history about aviation in New Hanover County that we want to find out about and we'll ask a lot of questions and have a little conversation between the three of us.

INTERVIEWER: So we've got to lay a little base here to begin with so I need a little biography. They say you're not sensitive about your age so I'll ask Anna, where and when were you born?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Born in a little town in the northern part of the Netherlands, December 26, 1922 and came to America in 1923.

INTERVIEWER: All right, the very next year. How about you, Skinny?

MR. PENNINGTON: I was born November 22, 1915, in Wilmington, North Carolina.

INTERVIEWER: And you've been here ever since except for your four years in the service. All right, we've got that. Tell me about your family, what you have in the way of children.

MRS. PENNINGTON: We have one child, a son, Alan. We have two grandchildren, James and Elizabeth.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, well she took care of that so you don't have anything to say about that. Let's start out now with you Skinny – where did you go to school here in Wilmington, grammar school and so forth. Tell me a little up to high school.

MR. PENNINGTON: I went to grammar school in Wilmington and New Hanover High School and that's it for education.

INTERVIEWER: Anna?

MRS. PENNINGTON: I went to the Forest Hills School and to Wrightsboro School and New Hanover High and graduated from New Hanover High in '39.

INTERVIEWER: All right, well we've got that. I know all about New Hanover High School. Knew a lot about it, anyway. What happened after that so far as you, Skinny, after you came out of high school. Tell me what happened.

MR. PENNINGTON: I worked at the airport, eventually learned to fly and flew enough to get my license. In 1937, the depression had things so bad that my brother gave it up and I took over the airport and operated it from then until January of '42 and Uncle Sam called.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. While we're at it, let's get your military history. What happened, where did you go after you went in?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well I volunteered as a pilot for the Air Corps and my first base was Baltimore, Maryland, as a civilian and flew Martin B26's. In about two months, they decided they had to make us all officers in order to control us. As a civilian, we were not under control. Then they sent me off to a four engine school and sent me to Long Beach, California, the orders called for it. I hadn't married yet.

INTERVIEWER: We're going to get to that in a minute.

MR. PENNINGTON: And with California, carried new airplanes from the factory to all over the United States. In the fall of 1942, went to O.T.U. which is Operational Training Unit, teaching instruments and twin engine flying to other pilots. Then we stayed there two years and three or four months and they sent me to China. I came home from China and that was it.

INTERVIEWER: Who and where were you flying in China?

MR. PENNINGTON: We flew B24's and Z109's, the first 30 days...

INTERVIEWER: These were Air Force units stationed in China?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well they were stationed in India. I was there for a month and then I went to China. In China I was a training officer, a chief training officer for the China wing of ATC – Air Transport Command. Once in China, we did a little bit of everything from carrying survey crews to hauling a little cargo. As the Japanese moved back, we moved with them and found out what was going on. Got to fly all the way from the Great Wall down into Indochina and all over China.

INTERVIEWER: That's quite an experience. Let's leave you in China for just a minute. Now Anna in the meantime, after you got out of high school, what was your path and then how did your two paths meet.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well after I got out of high school, I worked at Saunder's Drug Store. I shouldn't say worked because that was a pleasure. You were right downtown and saw everybody in town you know at that time. And where I lived was right across the road from the airport. My daddy bought a farm right across the road from the airport. I'd always been fascinated by airplanes and so there I was, right by the airport and I started spending a little spare time over there more and more and eventually learned to fly, got flying lessons.

INTERVIEWER: Well what were you doing with your spare time over there (laughter).

MRS. PENNINGTON: Chasing him (laughter).

INTERVIEWER: Oh you were (laughter). I thought you were trying to learn how to fly.

MRS. PENNINGTON: I did (laughter). I accomplished that and soloed.

INTERVIEWER: When were you licensed?

MRS. PENNINGTON: I soloed in June of '39 just a couple of weeks after graduating from high school and then I got my private license in October of 1941 and we were married in May of 1942. He was getting sent out to California and I wasn't about to let him get out there without me.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, I thought it was the other way around. I thought he was awful lucky to get you (laughter).

MRS. PENNINGTON: So then from California, we went to Missouri and were stationed in St. Joseph, Missouri.

INTERVIEWER: Well when did you end up back in Wilmington after that was over? End of the war?

MRS. PENNINGTON: I came back when he went overseas. See he went overseas and I came back to Wilmington with Alan. Alan was born in Missouri and I came back then.

INTERVIEWER: Well when did you all get settled in?

MRS. PENNINGTON: He came, he got back December 31, 1945, at Fort Bragg.

INTERVIEWER: I beat you by six days. I got there the day before Christmas.

MRS. PENNINGTON: He was supposed to, but storms in the Atlantic held up troop ships so he didn't make it on time. He was supposed to be here before Christmas.

INTERVIEWER: That's strange. I was in the same storms, the December storm in the Atlantic that disabled the Queen Mary...

MR. PENNINGTON: Disabled a battleship.

INTERVIEWER: Yep and other things. We've got a lot to talk about to get through this tape. Anyway, you're back in Wilmington and you settle down here. Did you go back to the airport then?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well we had an airport at Carolina Beach and as soon as the Air Corps turned it over to the county, the county turned it back over to us. Of course, it wasn't the same airport, but we started operating again in '46 until '66 when we sold out to Colucci.

INTERVIEWER: Now let's go back for just a minute and tell me, based on your being involved in aviation, what is the history of the airports and aviation in New Hanover County going back as far as you know.

MR. PENNINGTON: Well as far as I know, of course, we read things that happened from...

INTERVIEWER: Let me put it this way. As far as your knowledge is because we only want to go back as far as we can.

MR. PENNINGTON: The first airport that I was on here was Audobon Field which is just a mile from here and my brother operated out of there barnstorming and when he came back home, they landed at Audobon and all the airplanes, which there were very few, would land there. There were no operations of any kind.

INTERVIEWER: This was in what time?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well, my time, it would have been about 22 or 23 the first time I remember ever going out to the Audobon Field. Before that, it was started about 1920.

INTERVIEWER: That was just a single airstrip, wasn't it?

MR. PENNINGTON: It was just a swamp (laughter).

INTERVIEWER: Okay a swamp (laughter).

MRS. PENNINGTON: If you read some of the stories of landings there, it said it looked like it was on a lake.

INTERVIEWER: It is low out there. What other airports were there here as they came along?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well before that in about 1910, they landed at Winter Park and Sunset Park and an airplane would come in and they normally would come in by railroad car and they'd demonstrate, charge people and after that, Audobon was the first real airport. They built Oleander Drive and cut right through the middle of it so they had to get another airport and at that time my brother, Warren, and a few friends pushed the county to do it and they finally picked a location where we are now, or where the airport is now and it's been there since '27.

INTERVIEWER: That's what has changed from Bluethenthal Field and New Hanover County Airport or whatever.

MR. PENNINGTON: They had so much against them, they had to do it.

MRS. PENNINGTON: The demonstrations he was talking about, the flying before even the Audubon Field was done at racetracks, Highwood Park Racetrack and another racetrack in that area, general area. They would have automobile races, old Curtis airplanes. They were crated and shipped in and assembled and flown and then shipped to another town for another exhibition they called it. They sold tickets for people to come.

INTERVIEWER: That's interesting. I didn't realize about the shipping business. They didn't fly between places.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Oh they were too flimsy and wouldn't have carried enough gas.

MR. PENNINGTON: The engines would not run long enough to go from here to Wallace so they had to haul them.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, then we got an airport started out there which today is an airport that's a jet airport and we graduated to the point where we have modern conveniences as far as getting on and off aircraft and things of that kind.

MR. PENNINGTON: The original airport had two runways, 1750 feet long. The airport, as it is today, has one runway 7000 feet and one 8000 feet, so there's no comparison to the old original airport and the new because now we've got big terminal buildings and whatnot.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any names that you associate with early aviation here in New Hanover County?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well we had one...

INTERVIEWER: Other than yours.

MR. PENNINGTON: Well my brother started flying in 1920. Of course, he would be.

INTERVIEWER: He would be the category I'm talking about.

MR. PENNINGTON: He's the original and he had a friend that...they were going in World War II and the friend was a little older. He made it. Warren was too young so when the friend came back after the war, Kenyon Woody, that's a family down Masonboro, and so the two boys that had been close before the war, then they, Warren started working for him. I wouldn't say work, but anyway. Then he learned to fly. Kenyon Woody gave it up.

INTERVIEWER: What were some last names?

MR. PENNINGTON: McIntyre was...E.D. McIntyre bought an airplane and they did whatnot. McIntyre was in the electrical business here in Wilmington. They would fly around this area and they would go as far as Florida.

INTERVIEWER: Well tell me a little about barnstorming. What would a normal barnstorming exhibition consist of and when would usually be the time they'd have it.

MR. PENNINGTON: Well normally barnstorming is an individual with an airplane and a barn who would fly say from here to Wallace. They were going to take up passengers and they'd fly around and find them a field, usually had a barn on it and they'd just land and set up and start taking passengers. That's all, just...because the barn was there. And a lot of them would sleep in the barn.

INTERVIEWER: Was stunt flying part of something like that or not?

MR. PENNINGTON: A little bit, they didn't have the airplanes that would stand stunt flying as we know it today. They do loops and maybe a roll or something like that, but nothing, just enough to excite the people.

INTERVIEWER: Just to make them want to go up and pay the fee.

MR. PENNINGTON: The fee was the main thing.

INTERVIEWER: Where did aviation go from those days of the 30s, I know the war must have had a lot of influence on it, a certain type of aircraft.

MR. PENNINGTON: The original was just a two wing airplane with an engine and that's it. Two, normally three places, carry two passengers and a pilot.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Open cockpit.

MR. PENNINGTON: Open cockpit and in about the 30s, they started building larger tri-motors and other things and it slowly went up from there until ...most all of the airplanes were built just from scratch from day to day. No one knew really how to do it. They just did it.

INTERVIEWER: Did Henry Ford...

MR. PENNINGTON: No, Henry Ford hired a man that was an engineer, supposedly an aeronautical engineer and he built an airplane. Henry Ford bought him out. They got together and built Ford tri-motors and that's one of the first larger airplanes that we've ever had.

INTERVIEWER: What were they intended to be for?

MR. PENNINGTON: Transport. Several of the airlines have them. When they first started out, they'd fly during the day and stop at night and get on a train and go to the next town going all night and then they'd catch another plane and go that day. It was a long time before they ever started flying at night.

INTERVIEWER: Now let's get to you, Anna, tell me this, what kind of aircraft did you learn to fly on and tell us about your first solo.

MRS. PENNINGTON: I learned to fly on the old famous Piper Cub. Everybody thinks that a little airplane is a Piper Cub because they were so popular back then. That's what I learned to fly on. That's what I soloed in. Soloing is quite an experience especially in a Cub because your instructor sits in the front and all of a sudden you're taking off and the front is empty. You see this vast open space.

INTERVIEWER: It feels lonesome?

MRS. PENNINGTON: It feels lonesome, but it felt good (laughter) to think that you could accomplish that.

INTERVIEWER: How long did you keep up with flying?

MRS. PENNINGTON: I kept up until the war started and then some after the war.

INTERVIEWER: Have you two kept an ownership of a plane?

MRS. PENNINGTON: After we sold the business, kept one for a short time, but didn't use it that much so...

INTERVIEWER: Tell me, what was the extent of your business and what was the nature of your business in flying.

MR. PENNINGTON: In later years when it really was a business, we had everything at the airport, the gas, the oil. We did all of Piedmont's maintenance, service work. We repaired all of the local aircraft and some of out-of-towners, taught people to fly, did charter work which was about all there was for a number of years.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Now before the war though, remember the Camp Davis anti-aircraft training.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about that. I didn't realize that you were involved in that.

MRS. PENNINGTON: He would fly in the daytime as a living target for the gunners to practice aiming the guns at.

INTERVIEWER: I hope you got combat pay for that (laughter).

MR. PENNINGTON: We got combat pay.

MRS. PENNINGTON: And then at night, they'd fly so the searchlight crews could practice on him.

MR. PENNINGTON: Some nights we'd have to turn the lights on so they could find us and turn the light on us (laughter).

MRS. PENNINGTON: And they photographed Camp Davis practically from the time they started construction...

MR. PENNINGTON: I took pictures of just the swamp that was there. There was nothing and then every two weeks we had to go back and take another picture.

INTERVIEWER: Were these overlapping aerial photographs?

MR. PENNINGTON: I made one of these overhead things and had to get out and sit on the struts to hold the camera down straight. I got a check from the government and I took it down to the bank and the man like fainted. It said \$2 million, \$2,000,052.00. Of course, somebody had left the "2" in the check machine and there were some zeroes and then my \$52 (laughter).

INTERVIEWER: That's like the man that took the check and deposited it for \$93,000.

MR. PENNINGTON: Well I put mine in, but all I got was \$52.

INTERVIEWER: (Laughter) Okay, that's a good one, that's a good one. Tell me what interesting experiences developed out of your work at airports, either with contacts with people and instances that happened, whatever fashion, whether it was significant or whether it was serious. At an airport, you can have all sorts of things as you know. Celebrities coming in sometimes, whatever.

MR. PENNINGTON: We did. Corrigan came in. He's one I can remember. We had a lot of the famous pilots of that time.

INTERVIEWER: Is that "Wrong Way Corrigan"?

MR. PENNINGTON: Yes, Wrong Way Corrigan, he came in. That was before the war.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Roscoe Turner came in after the war.

MR. PENNINGTON: There were a lot of the well-known pilots at that time and there wasn't enough of them. I didn't get my commercial license until 1936 and my number was only 36720, so you can see how few pilots there was before that time. So it wasn't too hard for a person to come through and you know him. And there was not a lot of traffic in those days either.

INTERVIEWER: Who were some of the names of that day in aviation, not just here in Wilmington, but nationally? Of course, you had some Frenchmen in there too.

MR. PENNINGTON: Frank Hawks, these were all racing pilots, broke records going from New York to Miami and things of that nature.

INTERVIEWER: Was Floyd Denny one of them?

MR. PENNINGTON: No, I never did know him.

INTERVIEWER: The airport itself after '60, you say you sold out in '66, what did you do after that? Did you retire as such?

MR. PENNINGTON: Oh no, I had retired from aviation, but I had a sporting goods store that I had had for well since '52.

INTERVIEWER: Was that the one at Third and Market?

MR. PENNINGTON: No, I was between First and Second and Tenth and Market.

INTERVIEWER: Tenth and Market instead of Third and Market, I got the numbers mixed up.

MR. PENNINGTON: After that, of course, we sold out about eight years ago and since then, it's "honey-do" (laughter).

INTERVIEWER: Well you're fortunate, you're fortunate to be able to have somebody telling you "honey-do". Some men don't have that opportunity (laughter). Anna, what have you done, while all this was going on besides raise Alan?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well I was Secretary and Treasurer, Carolina Aeroglobe which was a statewide organization. I served at that. I've written a newspaper column on aviation for the newspaper.

INTERVIEWER: I want to congratulate you on your piece in Sunday's paper. That was very nice, certainly was.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Oh thank you, it was trimmed down so there wasn't much left of it. It was a bigger celebration than it read.

INTERVIEWER: But it was nicely written.

MRS. PENNINGTON: And I kept interested in flying.

INTERVIEWER: I understand you are interested now in something the Cape Fear Museum is involved in. Could you tell us about that?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Right, they're planning an exhibit on the history of aviation in southeastern North Carolina. It's to open in November of '96 and we've been working with them for a year or more, picking up artifacts and we've done an interview like this and helping them, you know, anything we can do. It's been a lot of fun really, real interesting. Of course, it's not

anywhere near being finished yet, our work. Looking forward to doing more with them because it's fun to dig in the old things that you have collected and now they're important.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, a couple of people told me you were working on that one, Frasier Perry and another was Beverly Tetterton.

MRS. PENNINGTON: And it's fascinating.

INTERVIEWER: Well I would imagine so. Is this involving getting together the old photographs and all the old artifacts and things of that sort? Are you going to be able to get Skinny's painting off the wall?

MRS. PENNINGTON: No, it's long gone. When they tore it down, it went (laughter).

MR. PENNINGTON: We've got a few things that we're going to let them have, but they're getting things from other people, like uniforms from the airlines. They want more information on the airlines and just about everything that came along.

MRS. PENNINGTON: And when he said airlines, you've got to remember Piedmont Airlines started from Wilmington, the first flight went out of Wilmington in 1948 and grew from there.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, we've had some of those veterans retire around here for a while of the Piedmont senior captains, Roy Malott and a number more. What have been some of the significant events that you have witnessed as to what is now the New Hanover County International Airport? Is that the right name? I have to be sure to get the "international" in there.

MR. PENNINGTON: That's the name they've got on the signs.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, what significant events do you happen to have there that you've seen?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well you know, aviation today doesn't do like it used to be when the barnstormers and what-not came along and everybody rushed out just to look at it. Today it's just there just like a garage or anything else that's been there for a while that people get used to. You don't see much going on. Once in a while, every 3-4 years, we'll have an air show and that's about it.

INTERVIEWER: We've got one of the military flying units to come through.

MR. PENNINGTON: Well they have an airstrip, part of one out there.

INTERVIEWER: That's true. Have we had any disaster events happen out there that you can recall in the past that you were witness to?

MR. PENNINGTON: The only one that I saw was when C.D. Martin and the boys in that airplane that cracked up, Jimmy Craig. In fact, I happened to be on top of the hangar. Of course, we operated the airport and I was on top of the hanger watching it as it crashed. We saw the whole thing from the very beginning to the end. We've had so few things like that. We had one before the war, Dr. Something – Goldsboro, and we had an air race on Aviation Day and two of them ran together and it killed one of them. Can you remember anybody else?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Just minor accidents.

INTERVIEWER: I could not recall anyone at all except the incident that happened where the WECT newspeople...

MR. PENNINGTON: Well that's the one I'm talking about.

MRS. PENNINGTON: The Air Patrol Friendship Day, I believe. Now of course, during the war, they lost many military airplanes in this area. In the '47 training they had here, they lost any number of those. I was reading some old clippings the other day, two ran together over Brunswick County I think it was, killed both pilots. They had an A-20 which is a twin engine light bomber trying to land on the little Carolina Beach airstrip with engine trouble. It crashed in early '45 and killed...

INTERVIEWER: Well now let's get to the history of commercial aviation as it affected New Hanover County. Who was the first one flying commercially out of here, that is a scheduled airline?

MR. PENNINGTON: Southeast.

MRS. PENNINGTON: He was still in China when they started. They started off at a little Carolina Beach airstrip. We were operating down there.

MR. PENNINGTON: You could only fly from here to Charlotte, to Asheville.

INTERVIEWER: Well when did National come on the scene?

MRS. PENNINGTON: December of '44. No, December '45. It started here in December of '45. They had applied before the war for a route through here and of course, the war just knocked everything out, but December '45 was their inaugural flight through here.

INTERVIEWER: Well our airline here really has been Tom Davis and Piedmont, that has been our airline. In that inaugural flight, where did it go to, it went from Wilmington to...

MR. PENNINGTON: Cincinnati.

INTERVIEWER: Cincinnati that day. I'd seen a picture that was taken with the flight crew that day when they left. Piedmont was thought to be a little small country type airplane.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Puddle jumper.

INTERVIEWER: Puddle jumper and it had a lot of jokes about Piedmont as it came along, but Piedmont did well. Its stock did well and it moved right on along until its final consummation of emerging into US Air. What do remember about some of the Piedmont operations, anything there of significance?

MR. PENNINGTON: We had a contract with Piedmont. We did all of their refueling, night maintenance, everything for them, which included cleaning the airplanes, working on the engines, everything, for the first couple of years that they operated. We knew, but it was just an everyday thing to us. We didn't pay attention to it, anything we should remember so we could talk on this.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, was that done, where was the maintenance done? What hangar was used?

MR. PENNINGTON: The big hangar at the north end of the field.

INTERVIEWER: Is that the large open hangar you could see from the old terminal building?

MR. PENNINGTON: Yes, we could taxi in one end and out the other end. Of course, it's closed off now.

INTERVIEWER: Do we have any, this is just based on current information, the international name of the airport. How did that happen to come to be?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well they wanted to start getting airplanes from the Bahamas, everywhere to fly direct to Wilmington to clear customs and so that made it international, foreign. Today they're still doing that. We're getting quite a few airplanes.

INTERVIEWER: Oh they are?

MR. PENNINGTON: They've got their own building and everything out there.

MRS. PENNINGTON: No scheduled flying.

INTERVIEWER: What is the story about the naming of the airport Bluethenthal?

MR. PENNINGTON: Well you know, people got to have it when something happens. Somebody gets their name in the paper, we'll name something for them. Well we had an airport and we had to give it a name and somebody comes up with that name. Everything goes along after naming it after someone. Just like when Kennedy was killed, they wanted to change the name and make the bridge the Kennedy Bridge and some of us in some of the clubs kind of fussed about it, so they finally decided to call it Cape Fear.

MRS. PENNINGTON: But Arthur Bluethenthal was the first aviator killed in World War I. He was not flying for the United States. He joined the Lafayette Escadrille, the Americans that flew for France before America got in the war and...

INTERVIEWER: That's what I was getting to, was who was he?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Right, and about the day he was transferred to the American Flying Corps, they called it then, his last mission, he was shot down and killed so they named the airport in his memory.

INTERVIEWER: Do you know the connection between Herbert Bluethenthal and Janet Bluethenthal?

MR. PENNINGTON: Oh yes, that's the same family. I think Herbert may have been his brother.

INTERVIEWER: The time difference would indicate probably that fact, that that might be true. Well, now tell me this, let's get away from aviation just a minute. Anna, what have been your interests in life in Wilmington forgetting aviation? What else are you interested in?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Church work.

INTERVIEWER: What church do you belong to?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Pearsall Memorial Presbyterian Church.

INTERVIEWER: We could talk a lot about B. Frank Hall if you wanted to, couldn't we?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Oh we could talk for hours and hours, but I was there before he was. Everybody thought if you went to Pearsall, you were there because of B. Frank Hall.

INTERVIEWER: No, but he really made a name for Pearsall Church, it's a very fine name.

MR. PENNINGTON: I don't go to church very often and I went one time because Alan was in the service and couldn't go on Mother's Day. So I said, well I'll go and sit on the back seat and get out of there. I hate these little old women talking up and hugging you.

INTERVIEWER: (LAUGHTER) (LAUGHTER).

MR. PENNINGTON: We got out and Frank goes out the door and shakes hands with everybody going by and he shook my hand and said a few words and I got about two more steps and he just stopped, dead still, he says "Skinny, if I had seen you back there, I woulda fallen out of the pulpit." (laughter) I said, "Doc, don't worry, I'm not coming back". So he laughed.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well I went to Pearsall, well my family went to Pearsall, we arrived here in America like I said in '23 and lived in the community.

INTERVIEWER: How did your family happen to come to America?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well Papa came because of health reasons. He had to come to a warm, sunny climate and his brother knew the Tenga family and they contacted the Tenga's here and yes, he'd be glad to have him come work for him so he came to Wilmington on that account. We may have been in Florida or who knows where else, but it just so happened that way.

INTERVIEWER: Have your parents passed on now?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Skinny, is there anything else you want to add to what we've got here that we might think about later that we would have liked to have said? We've just reached about 3-4 minutes before the end of the tape.

MR. PENNINGTON: Anna has more stuff that she can say.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, Anna you go ahead. You've got about 6 minutes.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well you know we kept talking about airports, but there was a lot of flying done in the river too, flying boats in the river. They would come, put on exhibitions.

INTERVIEWER: Pontoon aircraft?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Yes, and they'd take passengers up and one group, a good will tour of Army airplanes, they were called sea planes, toured South America and on the way back, stopped in Wilmington, landing in the river, so the river, at one time, was rather important for flying, but then very rarely do you ever hear of a sea plane on the river anymore.

INTERVIEWER: You don't see them much anymore either that I know of.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well most of them you see today, they're amphibians and they land on an airport, but this type, of course, was strictly landing on the water. Right before World War II, they had a project for black youth to train them and they built a sea plane float and put it in the river down by Greenfield Street, I think it was, Taylor Colquitt, I don't know if you remember that and they let the sea plane float in case there should be some sea plane traffic. And I can remember one sea plane using it.

MR. PENNINGTON: She broke the champagne on it (laughter).

INTERVIEWER: Well good for you. What other things do you have there that you might share with us.

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well give the Chamber of Commerce credit. We didn't mention it when we were talking about the Audubon Airport. The idea came from the Chamber of Commerce. They were pushing the idea of needing an airport here and it was known in the newspaper articles, that it was the Chamber of Commerce Airport. Hugh MacCrae owned the land, but it was called the Chamber of Commerce because it was their idea and their baby which I think they should get credit for. And a fair amount of flying way in the old days was done off Wrightsville Beach off the strand. The strand was wide then. The beach was wide. It was a big deal you know to fly and people would flock on a beach car, the trolley car to the beach and go down and see airplanes fly off the beach and take a ride.

INTERVIEWER: You mean take off of the beach sand?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Oh yes.

INTERVIEWER: After it was parked hard, I guess. I didn't realize that they took off from the beach. That's news to me. I'm learning a lot this afternoon.

MR. PENNINGTON: I can remember it, watching it in the early 20s.

MRS. PENNINGTON: One of the airplanes was built here. Now there seems to be a question of whether it really ever flew or not, was built on Shell Island.

MR. PENNINGTON: Sold a lot of stock.

MRS. PENNINGTON: He was vice president of the Tide Water Power Company and Gubernor was his last name, Chase was affiliated with the chemical company here and they were partners in this airplane. They built sheds on Shell Island and constructed the airplane there supposedly and it supposedly flew off the beach on Shell Island, but I haven't seen this.

INTERVIEWER: How did the stockholders come out?

MR. PENNINGTON: They didn't (laughter).

MRS. PENNINGTON: Well there was another one too that the stockholders were involved with, American Aeroplane Company, they called it.

INTERVIEWER: Skinny, have you ever seen a Ford Tri-motor go into a tailspin?

MR. PENNINGTON: I've never even seen one. We used to have them come in, but they'd just haul plaster, that's all.

INTERVIEWER: I saw it in Rocky Mount, it was unbelievable. So Anna, anything else you want to add?

MRS. PENNINGTON: Gee, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Well both of you have been very helpful. I appreciate the thoughts that you've shared with us and information that you've left on the table. I know this will be of some value to somebody at some time. We have an aviation industry here now and nobody would ever believe the number of aircraft that come in and out of this little town of Wilmington and we have the means of getting anywhere in the world and so we have a gateway now to everything and with that, I think I'll wind up. Thank you both for coming out this afternoon.