Abstract: This collection consists of digital audio interviews with twelve former employees of the Chrysler Assembly Plant in Newark, Delaware. These interviews were conducted by University of Delaware students in HIST 667: Oral History, taught by Professor Roger Horowitz, in the Spring semester of 2011.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 643
Title: Chrysler Corporation Newark Assembly Plant oral history collection
Inclusive Dates: 2011
Extent: 11 interviews in mp4 format (1.29 GB)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 643, Chrysler Corporation, Newark Assembly Plant oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.
Location: Special Collections Department, University of Delaware Library Newark, Delaware 19717-5267 Phone: 302-831-2229 Fax: 302-831-6003 URL: http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/
Source: Gift of project participants, 2011.
Processing: Processed and encoded by Evan Echols, September 2011. Interview summaries provided by Kyle Herring, July 2011.
Materials Available in Alternative Format: Access to streaming mp4 files of the oral histories is available by following the links in the finding aid below. These digitized files are housed in the University of Delaware Institutional Repository.
Access Restrictions: The collection is open for research.
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Historical Note

For more than a half century, the Newark Chrysler Assembly Plant provided employment for generations of local residents and was an important economic asset and social presence in the city of Newark, Delaware. After the plant closed in late 2008, the 272-acre property was purchased by the University of Delaware with plans to use the site for future campus expansion.

Chrysler’s 3.4 million square foot plant in Newark, Delaware, was built in 1951 to produce tanks for the U.S. Army. The plant was converted to Plymouth and Dodge production in April 1957, starting a run of nearly 7 million cars, including the LH series (Intrepid and Concorde), the AA bodies (EEKs) (Acclaim, Spirit, LeBaron), and the legendary A-body Valiant and Dart before starting Dodge Durango production. In 1969 alone, the Newark plant produced 186,177 Plymouth Furys, Dodge Polara, and C-body Chryslers.

In 1997, Chrysler put $623 million into the Newark plant to ready it for production of the Dodge Durango. The plant was closed in December 2008 due to falling sales of the Durango / Aspen. It had just started producing hybrid-electric versions of both vehicles, and had 1,100 employees, down from 2,115 in 2005.

Sources:

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of digital audio interviews with twelve former employees of the Chrysler Assembly Plant in Newark, Delaware. These interviews were conducted by University of Delaware students in HIST 667: Oral History, taught by Professor Roger Horowitz, in the Spring semester of 2011.

The interviews document the experiences of former employees of the Chrysler Plant serving in a variety of roles within the organization. The interviews discuss working conditions and events at the plant from the 1950s until its closure in 2008. Topics discussed include job duties, union activities, changing race and gender relations, plant culture, family life, and the introduction of new technology. Brief summaries of each interview are provided in the contents list along with the names of the interviewers.
Selected Search Terms

Corporate Names

Chrysler Corporation. Newark Assembly Plant.

Topical Terms

Automobile industry and trade--Newark (Del.)--History--20th century.
Labor unions--Newark (Del.)--History--20th century.
Plant shutdowns--Newark (Del.)--History--20th century.
Industrial productivity--United States--History--20th century.
Oral History--Newark (Del.)--History--20th century.

Geographic Names

Newark (Del.)--History--20th century.

Form/Genre Terms

Oral histories (document genres)
Interviews.
Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically, by interviewee.
Bates, Lee W. , 2011 May 13

Interviewed by Angela Lano. Bates discusses his intermittent employment at the Chrysler plant over a number of years between 1980 and the closing of the plant on December 31, 2008. Describes routine work days and working conditions, plant life (informal market, meals, cooking, use of alcohol), and worker relationships with management. Discusses joining the union, structure of the union, and various positions held (trustee, shop steward, committeeman alternate). Also discusses specific events such as the introduction of new technology at the plant, worker strikes, and the last day at the plant on December 19, 2008.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from September 3, 1980, until December 31, 2008, in the paint room, body shop, metal shop, chassis shop, and as a quality man. Also served as a union trustee, shop steward, and committeeman alternate.

Digital audio file 1

Listen

Galyen, Art, and James Galyen , 2011 May 14

Interviewed by Ryan Davis. James Galyen discusses his employment at the Chrysler plant starting in the 1950s. He describes his job as an electrician, including his job duties as well as training, during the plants early years making tanks, and how he was then re-hired in 1957 when the plant began producing automobiles. He details his involvement in the workers union, relations with his fellow co-workers, and worker management relations. He also addresses diversity through-out the plant in these early years. Art Galyen discusses his experiences at the plant beginning with his employment in 1971 through 2001. He explains joining the union and the various union activities he participated in such as walk-outs and strikes. He details the specific jobs he held at the plant including work in the paint shop and as a team coordinator. Also addresses working conditions at the plant over the years and plant atmosphere and life (race relations, diversity, informal markets, cooking, use of alcohol and drugs, and theft). Discusses the bonds he made and the Chrysler community now that the plant has closed.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from 1971 until 2001 as an MOA Coordinator and line worker (paint).

Digital audio file 1

Listen

McDonough, Richard , 2011 April 19

Interviewed by Carl Konetski. McDonough discusses his employment at the Chrysler plant beginning on January 8, 1976, through his retirement on October 31, 2007. He explains the various jobs he held throughout the plant and the specifics of those jobs such as workloads and difficulties experienced, as well as safety in the plant. He discusses various relations within the plant including race and gender relations, co-worker relations, and worker and management relations over his years of employment. He explains the MOA (Modern Operating Agreement) and its implementation on the plant. The plant community and daily job is discussed with regards to the sale of food,
alcohol use, and informal markets for other goods within the plant. He details his involvement with the union autoworkers (UAW) and how he became president until March 5, 2008 when the plant closed. He discusses the closing of the plant including his thoughts leading up to and after it was closed.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from January 8, 1976, until October 31, 2007, as a member of the absentee pool, and in the body shop, trim shop, paint shop, repair line, and as an inspector. Also served as the union president until March 5, 2008.

Digital audio file 1

McKay, William A. , 2011 May 11

Interviewed by David Kobrak. McKay details his employment at the Chrysler plant from his hiring in 1967 to his retirement in 2003. He discusses working on the assembly line, then moving to a salaried job in a management position, working in the budget department. Changes in the plant such as the implementation of technology are discussed and their effect on the work force. Various relations within the plant are discussed including race and gender relations, co-worker relations inside and outside of the plant, and worker and management relations. He discusses the union and its role within the plant supporting the workers. The plant community and daily plant life is discussed with regards to gambling, drug and alcohol use, informal markets, various religious and political beliefs among workers, and activities outside of work (golf tournaments and sports leagues).

Worked at the Chrysler plant from 1967 until 2003, doing forecasting, clerical, and line work. Also serves as the treasurer of the Local 1212 retirees chapter.

Digital audio file 1

Mariano, Bill , 2011 May 9

Interviewed by Jennifer Matthews. Mariano discusses how he moved to Newark, Delaware, in July 1969 to find work at the Chrysler plant and how he was hired to the Mopar parts division of the plant in August 1969. He explains his work at both the Mopar plant and the Chrysler assembly line and the differences between the jobs. He also explains his switch to a management position as a foremen and a supervisor in the paint shop and later the body shop. Daily plant life is discussed with regards to the monotony of jobs and the use of drugs and alcohol on the job. Safety issues and accidents in the plant are also detailed as well as his active relationship with co-workers now that the plant is closed. (part 2) Mariano explains the MOA (Modern Operating Agreement) and how it was implemented in the plant. He discusses how working at the plant affected family life and the difficulties of running a family while working at the plant. He discusses his reactions to the plant closing and his feelings about Chrysler now that the plant has closed.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from August 1969 until August 2006, with a gap in employment during his service in Vietnam from 1970-1972, and again during a two year layoff from 1980-1982. While with the Mopar parts division he worked as a pick packer, on the UPS package line, in the exports division, and as a sawyer. After
returning in 1982 he worked in the paint division as a pool person, and was later promoted to a foreman in the paint division and body shop. He held numerous positions within the union, including shop steward, committeeman, and vice president.

Parag, Joe, 2011 April 22

Interviewed by Kemper Elliott. Parag details the various jobs he held and the various duties of these jobs during his employment at the Chrysler plant from his hiring on January 21, 1965, to his end of employment on December 31, 2008. He discusses various aspects of plant relations among workers such as the surge in gender and race relations, politics, religion, and the overall “brotherhood” of the plant employees. Use of alcohol and drugs throughout by workers on the job that he witnessed throughout his employment is discussed as well as other plant activities such as informal food markets and the selling of various goods. He describes the introduction of new machinery and technology in the plant and how this changed work. He discusses the union’s role and relationship with management and their role in the workers contracts. Plant safety and occupational dangers are also discussed. He details his thoughts on the plant closing and the options he was given when it closed. Family life and the difficulties of working at the plant and having a family is also discussed.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from January 21, 1965, until December 31, 2008, and held positions on the assembly line (installing stone shields) and in the chassis pool. He also worked as a scheduler, driver, and heavy repair person.

Peace, Matthew, 2011 May 11

Interviewed by Kimberly Schezes. Peace discusses his intermittent employment at the Chrysler plant beginning 1993 and then continuing in 2001 through 2005. He discusses various aspects of his employment including jobs he performed, schedules and shifts, and the difficulties and details of different jobs he was asked to perform. He explains how working at the plant affected his family life at home. His relationship among his co-workers is discussed (how they got along during work, and what they did after) as well as gender and race relations throughout the plan while he worked at the plant. He addresses the monotony of work on the assembly line and how people tried to pass the time (alcohol and drug use, radios, horseplay, talking). He explains how the plant closing has affected his life and his feelings towards the plant now.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from February 1999 until April 2007.

Recker, George, 2011 April 23
Interviewed by Alex Keen. Recker discusses how his employment with Chrysler began at the California plant, but explains how he transferred to the Newark assembly plant and began working on October 9, 1971, and was an active employee until June 2007. He describes the jobs he held within the plant (lineworker, reliefman, repairman, and janitor) and the work entailed, as well as how job switching worked and what jobs were ideal. He explains the structure of the management and supervision in the plant and his relationship with them. Plant safety and working conditions are also discussed. Recker discusses his involvement with the union (strikes, walk-outs, and walking the picket line) and the union structure. Race and gender relations are discussed as well as relations between co-workers and what they did on the job such as talk and listen to music. Daily plant life is discussed, specifically the internal markets in the plant that sold food, alcohol, drugs, and various other goods. Alcohol use in the plant is also addressed. Work during the holidays and worker activities outside the plant are also discussed. (part 2) Recker explains the details of his job as a janitor in the paint shop and the work involved. He addresses daily in the plant including informal employee businesses selling food, coffee, and alcohol in the plant. Race and gender relations in the plant are discussed as well as how working at the plant affected family life outside of it. Recker also details the final days leading up to the plant closure. (part 3) Recker explains the skilled trades division of the plant with regards to who preformed these jobs and what they did. The integration of technology, robots, and outsourcing is discussed with attention to how the building process was affected by these elements.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from October 9, 1971, until June 2007, and held jobs as a line worker, reliefman, repairman, and janitor.

Recker, George , 2011 May 17

Interviewed by David Littleton. Recker discusses the workers union and his participation in it (walk-outs, strikes, contracts, complaints). Talks about his experiences in both the California plant and his move to the Newark plant and the differences between the two (working conditions, employee relations, general plant atmosphere). Discusses working in the plant with regards to race relations between managers and workers, gambling, the use of drugs and alcohol, plant safety requirements and dress codes, informal markets that arose for food and goods, and various safety concerns of the day-to-day job (general accidents and injuries). Employee activities outside of the plant (basketball games, softball teams, golf tournaments, bar trips) are discussed. Specifics of his work at the plant are discussed, such as job duties, wages, raises, profit sharing, and other benefits received. He also explains his thoughts and feelings towards the plant's closure.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from October 9, 1971, until June 2007, and held jobs as a line worker, reliefman, repairman, and janitor.
Sickles, Bill, 2011 April 13 and 2011 April 20

Interviewed by Kevin Impellizeri. Sickles discusses his employment at the Chrysler assembly plant from 1966 to 2001 in which he describes details of his first day of work and the various jobs he was asked to perform throughout the plant. Discusses the MOA (Modern Operating Agreement) and the implementation of a team system in which he became a trainer of other employees. He discusses his union work and participation (walk-outs, strikes, walking the picket line, his position on the election committee, and running for trustee). Discusses day-to-day operations in the plant and aspects of plant life, such as race and gender relations, the monotony of plant work, worker and supervisor relations, types of cars made at the plant, and quality control of products. Employee benefits are discussed during employment and after retirement. Working for the plant during the Vietnam War in the 1960s, and during the oil embargo of the 1970s is discussed. (part 2) Sickles discusses changes in the plant over his years of employment with regard to plant community and worker relations, benefits lost and received, the implementation of technology such as robots and computers, and changes in the paint shop and painting system due to the fire in the 1980s. Aspects of work at the plant are discussed such as changing jobs, the monotony of the work and dealing with the repetition, co-worker relations, in plant markets and the sale of food and drink, safety and injuries on the job, and work affect on family life. The union is discussed and the various parties within the union and the election process. The sale of the plant to Daimler is discussed and its affect on the workers and the plant, as well as the plant's relationship with Chrysler headquarters in Detroit. Sickles shares his thoughts on the plant's sale to the University of Delaware and his last visit to the plant before its destruction.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from 1966 until 2001, and held positions as a pool person, line worker, repairman, janitor, torque inspector, MOS instructor, and driver. Also served on the union election committee.

Digital audio file 1
Listen

Digital audio file 2
Listen

Volpe, Al, 2011 April 14

Interviewed by Jeremy Perlini. Volpe discusses his employment at the Chrysler plant beginning June 6, 1966, until 2001. He describes specifics of his employment including his jobs (reliefman, heavy mechanical repairman), shifts he worked, details of his first days at the plant, plant working conditions, and his relationships with his supervisors and co-workers. Daily plant life is discussed such as gender and race relations, use of alcohol and drugs on the job, accidents he witnessed on the job, and the monotony of work at the plant. He discusses the union and his involvement in strikes, walk-outs, and the union’s role in the plant. Retirement and his emotions towards the plant now that it is closed are discussed.

Worked at the Chrysler plant from June 6, 1966, until 2001, as a relief man and heavy mechanical repairman.

Digital audio file 1
Listen