MAX KOHNOP
Interviewed by
Susan Bennet
on
March 6, 1967
SB Oh, we should be recording now. Today is March the what? Sixth? Seventh?
MK Sixth.
SB March the sixth.
(break in tape)
SB 1967 and I'm talking with Mr. Max...
MK Kohnop.
SB Kohnop.
MK Kohnop.
SB Let me from the, let me spell that correctly.
SB K, K-o-h-n-o-p. Mr. Kohnop is now retired; he was with the Dayton Daily News.
MK I was Sunday editor for about, Sunday editor for twenty-five years, I was with the News for forty-two years total.
SB That's something.
MK A long time. And...
SB Let me check now that I am recording, I don't trust...
(break in tape)
SB Okay, we're recording now. Could you tell me about your association with Mr. Wright, what you remember about him.
MK Well, my association with Mr. Wright was two-fold. First, I first met him in the early days of aviation, let's say back around 1923–24 the time of the, when the international air races were being held here. And later, of course, he became a member of the Oakwood Library Board of which I am president, was president at that time. And let's, if I may, let's go back to the days of aviation. There are a few things that come to mind that might be of interest. Number one: I don't think anybody can truthfully
say that they knew Orville Wright personally because Orville Wright was a very, very shy man. And yet he loved company. He loved people but he was very, very fearful of publicity, which I imagine dates back to the time when he and his brother had their experiments with the first airplane. And the newspapers weren't too friendly to them at that time, and didn't do them justice in his estimation. And he was very, very backward and fearful of saying anything that might be used for publication. He also didn't like to appear in public or make public speeches. But, going back to the old days, if you recall or people who hear this recall, that the old McCook Field which was then the experimental section of the Air Force, experiments were constantly going on, the development of flight equipment, flight planes, and motors. And in those days, they had a very free and easy group of pilots, some of whom are today the generals and commanders of the Air Force. And in each and every experiment that was being made, they would always invite Orville Wright to be there. And even in those days, knowing that these fellows were a reckless crew and yet they were a safe-minded crew developing things for safety in the air, there was a little awe whenever Orville Wright would come around. In the days for instance, when McCurdy and Kelly were making their altitude tests, and their long distance flights, he was always there at every one of the experiments. I recall one particular instance showing the respect, and he was entitled to it, there's no question of that. The respect these men had for Orville Wright; in other words, you mention Orville Wright, there was a certain awe and quiet in the room. And they had, these fellows at McCook Field, had a routine, If anybody made an error in flying, they had various assorted prizes you might say they'd give them as for instance, a line of dirty wash, or something of that kind. But somebody got up an
idea one time among them, there were so many newspapermen that came in and wanted to watch these experiments, that they decided maybe these fellows were too much of a nuisance and somebody developed what they called a lung tester. Now the lung tester was a very simple gadget that you were suppose to blow into a certain tube and the register would show what capacity your lungs had—how much air you could exhale or inhale and blow up. But what they didn't know was that at the bottom of this particular device, was a little box of lamp black. Now when you blew a certain amount of strength in it, why you blew real hard and they said, now blow harder and blow harder and here were all these fellows. And quite a few of top ranking officers of the Air Force were at these events, and they all got to know it. Because quite a few of them were caught in it. And when you blew real hard, somebody accidently touched the button and there this lamp black would come and cover your whole face and your front of the suit and everything. Well, quite a few of the newspapermen at those sessions got caught by that. One man particularly with a beautiful white suit he had on he was just covered from head to foot with lamp black. Well, he couldn't say anything, because they all stood there and laughed at him. Well, at one of these sessions, somebody suggested that Orville Wright was going to come there, and they were just about, somebody said we ought and try to see if he won't go for this. And they were just about ready to do it, when somebody came in and said don't you dare do that. And they all laughed about it. And Orville Wright at the time, laughed when he heard about it. In other words he liked companionship, but there was that awe about him. Further, I recall showing about his reticence in the appearing in the public and making a speech. I think it was probably was at the thirtieth anniversary of flight. There was a big dinner given. And all
of Dayton, the Chamber of Commerce was there and all these people were there. They must have had four or five hundred people gathered, there were quite a few dignitaries from other countries who were there, and they were going to honor Orville on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary. Charles Kettering was the toastmaster. And he made a long speech bestowing all the virtues of the Wright Brothers, what they had done and everything, and he must have spoken for about twenty minutes. There were other speakers. And then he got up and he says, now, he says, "We will hear from our guest of honor, Mr. Orville Wright." So everyone stood up and applauded and terrific. And Orville got up and smiled and turned around to everybody, and says, "Thank-you" and sat down.

SB chuckles

MK Which was the shortest speech, I guess, on record. But he did like people. In fact in his home up in Oakwood, he lived alone, of course, with his housekeeper there. And there were many nights he would leave his house. And he would go up to the homes of neighbors at nine, ten o'clock at night and knock on the door if he saw a light. And particularly the late Howard Smith with whom, he was associated in quite a few not ventures, but they were very friendly. And he came there one night to Howard Smith's home, not one night, but he did quite often. At nine or ten o'clock at night, he'd see a light in the room and knock and he'd say, "Howard Smith, come to the door." And he say, "Well, it's just Orville." He says, "I just wondered if you cared for company." And they'd sit there and talk for hours, about different things, Halloween particularly. The kids used to, in the neighborhood, used to come around for goodies, and they wouldn't care too much about going over to the Wright's because they thought, oh, he's, you might say he's saintly, you mustn't go there. But they finally
broke down the barrier and each Halloween the kids in the neighborhood would go over and mess, and he wouldn't give each one a piece of candy or a cookie, what may be. But he prepared a large bowl which he set on the table in the living room and when they came knocking on the door, he'd say come on in and help yourself, and they'd go to the bowl and help themselves. Well one night he was, a large group came in there and he said, "Now, I'll be back in just a minute." Well, just as soon as he left, as long as he was there, they would take one or two pieces. He left the room and there must have been about ten or twelve youngsters there. And they took everything in the bowl and out they went, and when he came back in the room the place was empty. But he did enjoy that. He loved...

SB Well, what did he leave for the kids, candy?

MK Candy and popcorn and things like that—several things. He was very interesting. To me he was a very interesting man, and he was very meticulous and very exacting. I know, for instance, that for many years, I covered aviation on the Daily News. And as part of that, you had to keep in touch with Orville Wright, naturally. Because you couldn't tell anything on the development of the plane that was being developed; the first thing you wanted to have was what would Orville Wright think about it? Well, you couldn't get to talk to Orville Wright, because he had a secretary down there that was the best barrier that I ever heard of keeping people away from Orville Wright. So that when you called and you wanted to talk to Orville Wright you got to talk to his secretary. And you had to tell her what you wanted and if she thought enough of it, why she might call Orville Wright and then, again, she might not.

SB Was this a Mrs. Beck?
MK Yes.

SB Was Alice Hall ever his secretary, Miss Alice Hall?

MK Not that I recall. No. I didn't, the one I knew was Mrs. Beck and frankly I never met her. The only way I ever got in contact with her, is just by phone. And the first time I called and she wanted to know what I wanted to talk about. And I told her. And she says, well, I don't know, you can't talk to Mr. Wright, he doesn't care to talk to you. Well, the second time I called, she said the same, what do you want to talk about. I says, look I says, I want to talk to Mr. Wright. What I have to talk to him about doesn't concern you and you couldn't be able to answer. Well, I'm very sorry, she says, but you can't talk to Mr. Wright. So I says Okay. I didn't talk to Mr. Wright. Number one he had an unlisted phone so you couldn't get in, we had the number of course, and it wasn't until he became a member of the Oakwood Library Board in 1937, I think it was something like that. And when I explained it to him, explained the problems that I was having, that I finally got his number, and there was a select few. If you called up and said this is Mister Kohnop talking, or Mr. Smith in the registered list, why you got to talk to Mr. Wright. And I told him.

SB Was that because you were a newspaperman, do you think he just crossed off.

MK Yes, he wouldn't talk to too many people whom he felt a little bit leary of, I could talk about some of them. But he was very careful. But not only that, it wasn't particularly newspapermen, but anyone. He just didn't want to be bothered with a lot of people. And yet, he was sitting in the back room there doing nothing, where he could have talked to people. But he just didn't care for it. He had to be very careful, or he felt he had to be very careful of anything he said. As you recall the
controversy he had with the Smithsonian Institute and how he claimed he
was misquoted and so forth. He was very, very careful. At the time,
incidentally, that he answered the director, I can't think of his name,
of the Smithsonian, when they had the question over who had the original
plane, or the question of whether the plane would be housed in the
Smithsonian or not. Governor Cox, the publisher of the paper at that time,
wanted to get a statement from Orville Wright and the only way it could be
written, was Orville wrote the statement himself or had it dictated. And
the copy as he wrote it, was used in the paper without one change. That's
how exacting he was because he wanted to be very careful what he had to
say was his statement. But oh, there are so many, so many things
that could be said about him. That when he got on the board of the
Oakwood Library for instance, he agreed to serve on one condition. They
finally elected him vice-president, and I was president, which to me was
a peculiar situation because Orville Wright—a real student—was vice-
president and I was president, but he agreed to serve as member of the
board and subsequently as vice-president, which position he held at the
time of his death. On one condition only: that any meeting that we
would call I would preside and he wouldn't have to preside. That he
didn't care about—presiding. And if for any reason I wasn't going to
be there, the meeting had to be called off, because he would not preside.
Well he was, he was directly involved in the planning of the present
Oakwood Library building or the Wright Library building, the grounds on
which, of course, is, I think, everyone knows is purchased by the city of
Oakwood and dedicated in memory of his sister, Katharine Wright. He
served on the board for, well let's see...'37, well he went on about '37,
'38—something like that. The building was open in '39 and until the time
of his death, he served as vice-president. When we had the, when we had
the formal opening of the library which incidentally was twenty-eight
years ago this month in March, when the building was opened, we discussed
naturally, a formal opening and a program and so forth, and we were going
to invite certain other people to come there. Mr. Chait was there I think,
mayor, and no it wasn't Mr. Chait, it was Hamilton and we figured on the
fairly open program, everybody was going to speak and then we were going
to have an open house. And a discussion. Orville Wright says no, you
can't do that. Because that's a waste of time, and it isn't necessary.
We must have a program of that is far more, must be a program itself
must be no longer than twenty minutes. So we figured after all we got time
to do the, the introducing of everyone around there, introduction of
everyone, and get into the actual program twenty minutes would have
passed. But he was very insistent on that it has to be twenty minutes. Well,
it so happened when we opened the building and had the formal opening, we
had about two or three hundred people over there. And we started the
program; everything went on time, and Orville was standing there in the
back with his watch in his hand and was timing it. Well, it was just
coincidental that at the end of twenty minutes, or nineteen minutes, for
some unexplained reason, the lights went out. There wasn't enough power
at that time to handle it, the lights went out, and we got some candles,
and Orville Wright said to me, well, he says, you did a nice job,
everything went along smoothly.

(laughter)

MK Oh, he had, we thought it was very funny of course, we got one of his
best friends, Mr. Weinheimer, from the Dayton Power and Light was there
at the time. It was very embarrassing for him...
that the lights went out at the time, and he was the one that hustled out to get some candles, but Mr. Wright was very satisfied with the arrangement of that, because it tied in exactly with what he wanted.

(laughter)

MK On the board, another stipulation that he made to us was that as long as he was a member of the board, nothing that he ever said, in board meeting, must be used in, or published in papers, you see. And for a period, for a long period when he was a member of the board, we used to have a hundred percent attendance for board members. For one reason, we'd get in there and the meeting would last maybe three quarters of an hour, maybe an hour, and as soon as we adjourned the meeting, Orville Wright would sit down, and start talking, telling stories. And he would tell stories of some of his experiences, that were very, very interesting, of his experiences in his camp up in the Canadian woods, and of his dealings with various peoples. And how he entertained some of the outstanding people in aviation from all parts of the world at his home. And he did have a sense of humor. His, he had a lot of, a lot of humorous things he could talk about. He had a very dry sense of humor. But he was interesting. You could sit there and talk to him for hours. And he never repeated himself. But he always made a rule, that was peculiar, knowing that I was with the Daily News at the time, that as soon as the meeting started and he'd start telling somebody something, somebody that really had a meeting question concerning so about so and so and so, and then he'd start off. Nobody had to interrupt him, because he'd keep on talking. What I'm saying, he just loved company. But before he'd start talking on any subject, he always looked over at me, and he'd shake his head. In other words, saying now remember nothing of this is to be published. And there
was, the only thing I did at the time, I made mental notes and I made
written notes, of him. And after his passing, the Daily News was doing
exactly what you're doing here. And they were getting from all that knew
him, little bits of information about him. And I think at the time, I
wrote either two or three columns of anecdotes of my experiences with
him, living. And that was the stipulation. He was very, he was very
mechanical. He got, I think, probably purchased one of the, I believe,
one of the first electric typewriters that ever came out. And took it into
his shop on Broadway in his little laboratory. And took it all apart and
I don't think he ever got to use it after that. But, and the same thing,
he was very insistent at the time that we were buying new equipment for
the library as for instance a power mower for the cutting of the grass out
there. And he was insistent that we buy a certain mower because, by his
own experience, this was the best mower of all. And the man that was
doing the mowing for us at the time, also did the mowing of the lawn at
the Wright home. And one day, at the Wright home, on that hill there was
quite a few rocks under his way and using Mr. Wright's mower he, this
mower, hit a couple of rocks and broke something, there and this fellow
was mechanically inclined, and so he takes the mower apart up in the
stable, lodge, or whatever you want to call it. And while he was
working on it, Orville Wright come along, and saw what he was doing in there.
And he was incensed to think that somebody would take his equipment and
take it apart, because nobody knew what that mower, how it was stuck
together and he couldn't understand how this fellow could do it. And
this fellow was a little hot tempered too and between the two of them,
why I think they came to some words, but in the end, he realized that this
man knew what he was doing, and let him go ahead and finish the repair of
the mower. But the same thing is true in the, in the building and the planning of the Wright Library. There are quite a few features of the building now, as it stands today, that were put into the planning of the building of the structure at the suggestion and recommendation of Orville Wright. Because he was, as I said, mechanically minded. And he knew certain things, perhaps through experiences. There's so much that could be said of him. But I think I most probably would say, a lot of other things about him. But maybe I haven't touched them. And I wanted to touch particularly on his connection with the library.

SB Do you think he was particularly interested in the library because it was for his sister?

MK No, not particularly; as I say, the ground where the library now stands was purchased by the city of Oakwood, and because he was a resident of Oakwood, the city decided it would be a good idea to name that as Katharine Wright Park, knowing that she was interested in that type of landscaping and things of that kind. And he was, he was named a member of the board, not particularly because of his sister, but because the board felt that he could, he liked to read, and had a pretty good collection of books, that he would be a definite asset to the board, and he was. He was very interested in everything that was done.

SB Was he interested mainly in the humanities, books about the humanities, or was it mainly I think the scientific nature.

MK Mainly scientific. He gave to the library and his collection that he left, the library collection that he left, some of which was given to the, I forget which university, Oberlin. Oberlin and Western, one of the two in Ohio. But he gave almost...

SB Oberlin and Berea.
Berea and Oberlin. And he gave most of his collection too. He did leave some of his first editions that he had, he left to the Oakwood Library; they're there now. And...

First editions of what?

Well, there was, I can't recall, I know Samuel Pepys, we have one of the first editions of that. Now how many people have ever read it I don't know. I doubt seriously whether the collection was very much, used very much, because if you look at it today, it looks as if it hasn't been touched. Now whether it was just a collector's item with him, or whether they, I venture to say he did read it, but most of his material that he had in books were of scientific nature. They tell an unusual story about him, at the time in later years after a lot of his experimental work had more or less died down, and didn't transcribe to the Wright Field. He was back in his laboratory and he was working on a little mechanical toy, that if you pressed a certain button it would jump, it would make it go through some gyrations. And there were a lot of comment about it, it got nationwide publicity that here's the inventor of the airplane playing around with toys, but it wasn't, it wasn't that particular thing, he was interested in the mechanics, the thing made his plane what. I don't know whether he ever sold it or not, or whether it was just something to pass the time. On account of his injury, that he suffered in the early flights, for which, in which Prof. Langley was killed or one of the other flight...

Lieutenant Selfridge?

Selfridge, I'm sorry, yes. He never flew, he only took one very, very short flight as I recall, and that was in the old Barley bomber, which was the forerunner of the massive air planes we have today. Let's see, the tri-
plane- I don't know if you've ever seen it or not...

SB Yes, I know, It was here for that 1924 air race.

MK Yes.

SB His brother, of course, manufactured toys.

MK Yes.

SB Lorin did. I wonder if that...

MK Well, that may be true. He may have given it to Lorin to produce and distribute. Now I don't know if they, the only thing as far as the story that we had at the time was concerned, that he was playing around with this in his laboratory, and you see, the misconception a lot of people had. A lot of people had the idea that he developed the airplane and did this mechanically and so forth, but he would continue with his experiments which he didn't do. But what people don't know, that is didn't know then, or didn't realize, that there was very, very little of the experimental work that was going on at McCook Field or subsequently at the Wright Field, that he didn't know about and didn't act as consultant. Because they did respect his judgement in many things. And while he wasn't actively interested in this, he still was used as consultant, and he did very well.

SB That's interesting. Did he ever discuss politics?

MK No.

SB He was not particularly interested...

MK No.

SB ...in affairs of the day.

MK No, and still he was, he was very, very friendly with all your presidents, because, naturally, he did visit them. He was invited as guest on many occasions. But he never, he never as far as I'm concerned, as far as I know, we never got into any political discussions.
SB Did he ever get into any ethical or moral discussions about the uses of the plane?

MK Well, naturally he had the, he was very much worried and concerned as others have been on the uses that have been put to the airplane—in war and things of that kind. Because I doubt seriously and I think there have been some public statements that are issued on that, which he regretted the development of the plane to the point that they were used for war and for non-peaceful uses. But his, his primary reason was for, that it was something that would be advantageous for peace pursuing efforts. That he didn't, he didn't care very much for the war angle, of course there was nothing he could do about it. Because it was a natural development, and out of, naturally, out of the development of war planes, the coming of peace, peace equipment, the equipment that is used for peaceful pursuit for peaceful pursuits.

SB War always seemed to stimulate the ideas...

MK Yes, it does, because in something, it is something that is done in a hurry and has to be done in a hurry and there's some quick thinking of minds and then, after the war, the war agency approved of a change of peaceful channels and it's very useful. Your big carrier planes today, are all the result of, the passenger planes are all a result of the war. War agency.

SB The B-17 is a very...

MK Yes.

SB Were there any women on the library board?

MK Yes, we had two, three now.

SB At this time, when Mr. Wright was on the board?

MK Yes, Catherine Hader was the, a member of the board.
SB Yes, I'm going to talk with her, next evening.

MK She lived, she lived within two squares of him. In fact, I think, she would be able to give you quite a bit more personal anecdotes which maybe I couldn't, because she probably knew him more, better than I did. Because of living closer to him, and I think he knew her mother very well.

SB They had a personal tragedy in the family. I talked with her yesterday. And she said that she would call within the week, probably, and that we could get together but that she had been very busy. I just wondered, here was this prosperous bachelor, how he ever escaped getting married.

MK Well, that I don't know. Of course, there was a story at the time, many years ago. That oh, you see it didn't affect Lorin because Lorin wasn't actively interested in aviation, as such. But Wilbur and Orville and Kathy. Katharine helped a good deal in inspiration for running in the background, and the two brothers. And there's a story issued which as far as I knew, I don't think he ever agreed to. But it was never formally denied as far as I knew. The three of them made a pact never to get married. And they would always stick together. Now when Katharine Wright did get married, to this man in Kansas City, which was some publisher, there was a story also that a little estrangement between the two. And there was also a story which of course I don't whether its true or not, just in reports, maybe I shouldn't even mention, there was one rumor that he wasn't even going to attend her funeral when she passed away. But that wasn't true because he did attend her funeral.

SB Oh, he did.

MK Oh, yes. He was there. But now whether that's true or not, its just a report. Maybe as I say, maybe it shouldn't be mentioned. But...
SB Well, it has, I mean it had, it has been mentioned before. But he, was there was he ever linked with.......

(break in tape)

(end of side one)

(start of side two)

MK No, not that I know.

SB He just didn't. It seems like he lead a rather lonely life.

MK He did, he did—very lonely life. And if you ever go through his, if you've ever gone through his big house, what you call it Wright Hill, in Oakwood, you wondered why a man would need a big roomy house like that. A roomy house that it was, for just himself and his housekeeper. Of course, there are quite a few friends that came there and visited him. Lindbergh stayed there when he came after flight to Paris. He spent a couple of days with him. But, he did have quite a few distinguished visitors from all over the world that came there. And he'd put them up. But...

SB When he talked of them, did he seem to be impressed with them? Because they were just.....what, what did he admire in another man? Or another woman?

MK Well, if you could speak on Orville Wright's level, scientifically or if there was something that interested him, he would speak for hours with the person. Now, I never will forget one night after a board meeting, and I really got to know Orville Wright more in that one session than I had for, when I had in all my other connections even in the board meeting. Well, we had a little discussion at one board meeting, and it was a cold wintery night. It must have been about ten below zero, and there was snow on the ground. We had a session in the library and there was a disagreement, passed this procedure in the planning of the present building, and after
the meeting was over, I left in a hurry, and he thought maybe I had felt badly about something that had been said, and he hurried out after me. And we stood in it every time I think about it, I wonder why we ever did that. But we stood in front of the building, which was the library which was then out at Forty Five Park Avenue, which is now the federal building. And we stood there for at least an hour and a half, in the deep snow, and cold as the devil and we talked about various things, particularly aviation. And he spoke freely, very freely. Anyway I got to the point that I forgot the cold, was so interested in what he had to say about aviation and some of the things that I wanted to know about. But there again, he says, not for publication. So there again there was a lot of things, he stood there for an hour and a half I couldn't make any notes, everything had to go up in here. And...

SB What did he say?

MK Well, we, I can't recall just what I think it was on some of the developments, the developmental stages of aviation. Some of the things that would come about. And he was very, very well-versed in all these things, naturally, But he just spoke and spoke and I wasn't going to stop him. But the way the meeting was arranged, we could have stepped back into the library where it was warm, but no we had to stay out there in the cold and snow. But we had, I was glad I had the opportunity to meet with him. And to be associated with him.

SB So many of the books, it seems like, or not that there have been very many books. That in the later years of his life, he was always looking backwards to those golden years where they developed the plane. Now, in speaking with you this doesn't seem to be true.
MK No, his knowledge of course, was strictly basic as far as aerodynamics are concerned. And he applied his basic knowledge on and as far as that goes, your basics that you had in aerodynamics are true today as they were then. But the developments with them, I think came a little too fast for him.

SB He didn't keep up with them?

MK No, because...

SB Why...?

MK ...he wasn't, he wasn't that active in the field where they were used. See what I mean?

SB Yes, I just wondered, now Henry Ford took the idea of the plane and developed the company and kept right with it. Now Orville fell out, why?

MK Well, I don't know. Frankly you see, Orville at the time, when he had his patents on the plane, he sold his patents, which automatically took him out of the business. He sold his basic patents. He could have gone back into the field, but you see there's two things that I understand, now whether this again is true I don't know. But the rumors at the time were the general opinion was, that the mechanical genius of the two, Wilbur Wright, passed on. Now Orville was the inventive man more or less and Wilbur was the mechanical man. If Wilbur would have lived, I venture to say they might have gone through the business. Into the (unintelligible)

SB Well, Wilbur seemed to have made, just although I can't say this definitely but he seemed to have made the original financial arrangements, and that he was, and they had a good share of the stock, and he was a part of the executive board, and Orville was not.

MK I don't think so either. Of course, I, I, I can't say this to that because that's a little bit before my time. The only thing I can say
that is when Wilbur was, see I didn't come to Dayton until '22, or Wilbur
died in 1911, I think it was. But those are the things you heard constantly,
in discussions of the two brothers. Now whether if Wilbur had lived
longer I venture to say that there would have been a much different
combination of the two brothers. I don't think they'd stop the proceedings.
After he developed the plane as they did, and after Wilbur's passing, it's
possible also, that the reason, one of the reasons was the injury that he
suffered, on his plane flight which more or less got him a little bit out
of the active end of it. Of course you never, he never stopped being
interested in the development from the scientific standpoint. Or the end
of, practical end of these developments. His theories...

SB The business end, the business end.

MK He didn't.

SB Oh, is that so.

MK He, by standards, by today's standards, I don't think he got what he
really should have gotten out of the original patents considering what
the, what the industry has developed into today. Now of course in those
days, the money that the two of them got was pretty good, a lot of money
in those days. By today's standards it would be a mere pittance, so to
speak. Of course, I don't think he ever wanted for anything, I think he
lived a comfortable life as far as he was concerned. But the injury, that
injury did a lot to him, and he couldn't ride in an airplane and could
only, whether this is true or not, he, he had that old Franklin automobile
that had to be, he drove a Franklin, now whether he got anything later I
don't know when Franklin got out of business, but he drove a Franklin,
and the Franklin was equipped with special springs to take care of
jarring, he couldn't stand any jarring because of this injury and...
Did he walk with a limp?

Slight, very slight.

Very slight limp.

But he's, well I have frankly I doubt seriously whether every...anyone can really tell the whole story about Orville Wright, in other words his story. It would be like, I think it's something to do a fascinating story if anybody could. Fred Kelly in Xenia, as you know, wrote the book about him.

Yes.

And Orville Wright sat down with me, and everytime I think of him, I'm reminded of the Manchester book and Kennedy, because Orville Wright told him everything he wanted to know. And Fred Kelly was a business sort of man, and he sat down and he wrote everything that Orville told him. And then there was some provision there that before the book would be published, Orville Wright had to see the copy, and after he saw the copy, he just wrote red pencil all the way through it. Passages that he didn't want to even mention because this is of no interest to the general public, and it would be material such as your taking now, the sidelights which would make the interesting story, but he wouldn't stand for it. So the book actually if you have read the book, the book deals primarily with the scientific end of the development of the airplane, and strictly that. He also stopped if there was any chance of Fred Kelly had of turning the material over to the movies for the making of a movie of Orville Wright, and Wilbur Wright for the same reason. That he didn't want the publicity and he stopped that. Which out of it all, I doubt seriously whether Fred Kelly ever made enough money out of it, to justify the amount of work he put into it, because his idea was to make a movie which would
make a lot of money out of it.

SB  Oh, is that so?

MK  But, naturally he couldn't do that.

SB  Well, it of course now, maybe, there'd be a difference in time, but, a modern person reading that book, is very skeptical. When I read it, it's so biased that it, it, I couldn't read it as history at all. I mean he, Orville, defeated his purpose, because you simply can't believe.

MK  Well, you see, see the reason, for this reason, was that Orville as I say, detested publicity. You recall...

SB  Why, did he, why did he hate publicity that much?

MK  Well, it goes back to the day and if you look in the, the library would have a copy of it I know. But if you go back to the day when, Orville and Wilbur made their first flight...

SB  Yes.

MK  Someone there, down there, I don't think Orville or Wilbur had anything to do with it. But someone there sent a story to the Dayton papers, Orville and Wilbur Wright, Dayton natives, made the first successful flight, three minutes or whatever it was. Well, it so happened that it came on a day when it came just late at night, and the Daily News ignored the thing entirely. The Journal had just one little strip. The only paper that had, and they used it about days old. But I think New York Times was the only one that wrote any kind of story at all, some history is made today, when two Dayton boys, two bicycle makers flew the first, made the first successful flight. And for a long time whatever they said and did, everybody discredited them, because nobody was thinking, quite frankly. They called them the two crazy Wright Brothers at the time.

SB  I know. Well, why did he carry that grudge all his life?
I don't know.

I mean there was, they only, that was typical of the times. Science had proved that nobody ever would be able to fly, and it seems strange that he all of the after, usually, you see the normal reaction would be that after he showed them that he would no longer carry such a deep resentment. But he seems to have, and I was wondering why he continued to carry this deep resentment.

Well, I don't know. It may be.

Did he ever express any?

No, not that I know of. But he just had that fear of publicity. Fear for one I don't think he feared the publicity as such, he didn't care for it. Let's put it that way. But he was very fearful of that whatever he said, he would be misquoted. Now on that basis, he figured rather than be quoted and be quoted incorrectly, it would be best to say nothing. And if you got into private conversation with him, as I say, get into a private conversation, he would talk and he would talk, and be very interesting. And knowledgable. But when he found out that you were going to publish that or voice for a publication, he'd shut up like a clam. Or else if he knew the party he would tell them to leave, this was not for publication. It's peculiar. I think, possibly, I don't know whether it would be any difference, or whether their history would have changed in any way, or whether he might have become more active and done other things, I don't know. But I think it stems originally of more or less of a repression. Of the two, and they never got over it. It's one of the few things. But...

Did he ever speak of his brother? Talk about Wilbur?

Very seldom. Of course as I say, when I got to know him real well, it was quite a few years after his brother passed on. He didn't talk too much about
him. Of course in those days if he, what Wilbur and Orville did at the
time, that was, initially that was history. And what developed later,
they didn't have anything to do with the development, except from the
consulting standpoint, that is, after he got rid of the patent rights.

SB What would upset him in the, on the library board? What would he, what
were his particular prejudices, let's say, everybody had....

MK Well, there weren't any as such, you see, if we had a very strict
relations with him, and very straight thinking of what he wanted to
get done. And I think this is one, that's it. If anybody changed it,
you had to have a pretty good reason for doing so.

SB Now, was this in the building of the building, or...?

MK During the building or anything like that.

SB Did he wish to censor any particular books?

MK (unintelligible during SB)

MK No, he never went in for that.

SB Not even the purchase of books?

MK He was just a, let's put it as far as his membership on the library
board, he was a good member, he was a dutiful member, attended all the
meetings. Very seldom did he miss. But he never, he never got into any
difficulties, the only, remember one thing I mentioned, when there was
a difference of opinion, we had the one time about something, how to be
done about the site, which was incidental to the community. But still
he had his views now. When the question one as I said, when the time
came when we wanted to buy some power equipment to maintain the lawn
there, he made the recommendation, and the board went along with his
thinking, only because he had the knowledge and experience, because he
had one like it. But, no, I don't think there was any, he never caused any trouble. The fact of the matter is, when you say this, and all the years, I've been on the library board, which dates back to 1933, the board as a whole had very, very few disagreements. In other words, the board was clear thinking and reached certain decisions and that's it. We haven't had any wild arguments, so to speak. We didn't have them then, and we haven't got them today.

SB That's good. Who decides which books will you buy?

MK (unintelligible) Book Committee. Mainly the librarian makes the selection. She's a registered qualified librarian.

SB I see, now Miss Had was the librarian.

MK Yes, Miss Had was, Miss Had was the first, but not the first librarian, she came on I forget when we were still on Park Avenue. She was a member of the board at the time when I got on the board. And she also served as a member of the board, and also as part-time librarian. She was helping then. When we got into the new building, or even before, we got it, she was named librarian full-time.

SB Yes, did he help financially with the loan?

MK No.

SB Did he help financially with anything do you know?

MK That I don't know. I couldn't answer that. His private affairs I wouldn't, you mean as far as the library is concerned?

SB Well, I thought just any.....

MK Or generally.

SB .....just any needy person if, often men in his position, quietly help families within the city.
MK I couldn't answer that. I don't suppose anybody really can answer that...

SB I just wondered if he had.

MK .....because he was very in his ways, closed mouthed about that, and I don't think anybody ever questioned him about those matters. Especially if it's not a business matter. Now whether he did nor not, I don't know. The only, the only time anything like that ever came to the floor, was the time that he disagreed with the way the money was being spent by the Red Cross. And he couldn't change the thinking on that because he had the idea that there was too much money being spent on administration. And so for years, he would never contribute anything to the Red Cross here; he would send his contributions directly to Washington. Now whether that had any effect or not, because the money had to come back to Dayton anyway. But he would never contribute here because he figured there was too much administrative cost and he wanted his money to go where it would do the most good. So he'd send it to Washington. Now, that is, so he told me and what he told the board, I don't know. But whether he gained anything or not for that I don't know, because everybody knows, that when his money goes to national, unless you make a certain stipulation on how it's to be used, a portion of that money is supposed to come back to the original area where it was contributed. Well, that's part of their scheme. Unless he made his, a specific recommendation how the money was to be used, I don't know. That's something you don't know. That's the only thing I ever knew about that particular thing. Now whether he helped anybody or not I don't know. I don't think anybody would know.

SB Is that so? Was Mrs., was it Miss Beck or Mrs. Beck?

MK I think it's Miss Beck.
SB Yes, I wondered if she ever married also?
MK No, I don't know if she's living or not?
SB No, she's passed away.
MK She did, but she was a good secretary.
SB She kept people away from him.
MK You couldn't, you couldn't get into see him, you had to have a certain code. It was after, after he got on the library board, when I told him what I wanted, he well, he says, I'll give your name to Miss Beck...So I used to call, I called and say this is Max Kohnop talking, can I speak to Mr. Wright? Yes, just a minute, and I'd get right in. Now he had(chuckles) an exclusive list like that that she had. Anybody else had trouble getting in.
SB Did he go to church?
MK I don't know. I know very little about his personal life.
SB Of all the people I've talked to, no one knows whether or not he attended church. And here he was the bishop's son. It seems odd that......
MK I couldn't answer that. I don't know, I don't know who would be able to tell you that. You see there's so much of his private life that is unknown.
SB That's what......
MK It probably never will be revealed. Because he was that type, in other words, you, I don't blame him in a way. That's his business and what he does personally is his business, or was his business.
SB Of course, historically, I think it would be interesting to know, well perhaps Mrs. Granolla can tell me what I want, when I talk to her.
MK She may. Now how much, how much association he had with the rest of that family I couldn't say.
SB Yes, who were his first, his close friends?
MK Most of them have passed on I think; Kettering, Howard Smith, the former attorney, Governor Cox, Kettering. Of course quite a few from, from General Motors Corporation with whom he worked. And, gee, I don't know.

SB Who else was on the library board when...

MK There was at that time somehow you got me stumped, now frankly I couldn't tell you. (unintelligible)

SB That seems to be the only thing that I can find that he really was interested in. Was the library and anything that, he carried on quite voluminous correspondence with people. And Mr. Sam Finn, Sam Finn said that he worked on various civic projects.

MK Well, yes. He was, anything that you dared as far as aviation is concerned, in those days, which is true today, regardless of what you did in the civic way, that had anything to do with aviation, you couldn't ignore Orville Wright. He had to be on a committee, whether he was honorary chairman or a member of the committee or what. Kettering was the same thing. You had to have him too.

SB Well, did he really contribute much or just.....

MK I couldn't answer that. I don't know.

SB When you said that they had a certain revere, was it everybody there was a hush, was it because he was a quiet nature?

SB No, he was a great man.

SB He was a great man.

MK You were in the presence of a great man, a genius.

SB Is that so?

MK I, I, I'm serious about that and I think it, I think it was a respect that everybody had for him, and furthermore, as I say, I don't think very many people knew him. Knew him, that now the point that if you get to know a
person real well regardless of what his station in life is, you go to him and say, well how are you John, or Frank or and you might kid with them, but you didn't do it with Orville Wright because in all the time that I was ever associated with him, nobody ever approached Mr. Wright, and called Orville, it was always Mr. Wright. So in other words, there was a certain awe about him, and a respect that you had for the man. Even your youngsters, the youngsters today would think nothing of going up to Mr. Wright and say Orville this and Orville that. But in those days they didn't. It was Mr. Wright and if you got to meet Orville Wright that was, you didn't wash your hands, you know what I mean that facetiously, but it's true. And the youngsters, particularly these kids on Halloween, when he was really let down in those days, they would stay in their room and talked with him he would have enjoyed it, but they were so fearful of it, him. Here you were in Orville Wright's house and you met Orville Wright. To them that was a great moment.

SB Did he, do you think he enjoyed that aura that he had about him, and cultivated it?

MK I don't know. I don't know. I think he was, he was to me anyway, he could always see, very retired sort of a person. And he didn't want that I know. So maybe, maybe he created that situation, I don't know.

SB Of course that was a product of his, his generation.

MK That's true.

SB I know, when I think back when my grandfather was living we called him by his first name. I don't think anyone ever did.

MK You see, now the difference when he was first associated with Charles Kettering. And Mr. Kettering was probably one of the easiest men to approach and talk to that anybody ever knew. Because you could come down
and speak to him, walk up to him and call him Kett and you never called him Mr. Kettering, it was always Kett. Particularly, well, maybe on the floor. Particularly a newspaper man could approach Kettering at any time. Of course, he always expected you to respect his wishes, and if he said this is not for publication you were expected to do it. Well, I remember the time I was several parties with Kettering with some of the General Motors crew, and he sat out on the grass somewhere out in the country, at a party and sit down and we talk about, he'd answered any question you wanted. Now Orville Wright would never do that.

SB Did Orville ever go to parties?

MK Not, that I know of. He may. Obviously he did, but then I don't think they were that type because, he, he couldn't mix very well, he was probably back in the corner with one of his cronies and talk to them and forget everybody else. That's not, that's not disrespect of the man, because I admire him, I think that's in a sense, his attitude on things; that's the way he was brought up; that's the way he is.

SB Why did he blue pencil so much of Kelly's book? He liked Kelly, or at least he seemed to from his letters that he had a respect for him.

MK Well, as I say, I think the same thing is true that with Manchester and the Kennedy book. Mrs. Kennedy opened that up because she was friendly with Manchester, and she would give him voice to a lot of thoughts that she personally had about Johnson and about everybody else. And what was being done, is exactly is what you're doing here. Was tape recording. And so when, when it was all over, Manchester took it for granted that what she said was for publication. And he used it. Well when it got... Anything you know anything, I can see him talk to you for hours, and then if I see it in print it, I say, "Oh, you can't use that." That's
that's natural.

SB Yes.

MK Because when once it's in print, it looks entirely different from what you thought you said. And that's the, is the case of Manchester and I think it's the same with Kelly. So when Orville wiped out, out his material in print, and he looked at it and where he looked at it the more he came to the conclusion I guess, that this was hardly stuff and it might be misinterpreted. And naturally he took it out. The result is, I think probably the best things in Kelly's book were deleted, because any book of that nature if you were going to write a story about the life of Orville Wright strictly from a scientific point of view, then we're not paying the full two minutes and the wing collapsed or whatever may have happened, why you got to be straight forward story. But if you get into the little anecdotes that he could recall, and or the little things that he did that had human interest in it, would make a far better reading than all this scientific material, and you can still weave in the scientific material which is what Kelly did, but unfortunately that was out. Now whether Kelly wrote a subsequent book I don't know, after Mr. Wright died or not.

SB No, he took the, the, he took the letters and edited parts of the letters, and he had able to use some personal things.

MK Not very many.

SB No.

MK Not very many, I know.

SB When he went up to the, what did he do up in the North Woods?

MK Oh, he owned a camp up there. In Canada. He owned a camp up there and would spend all summer up there. And he used to take his two grand-nephews
there with him. And they went up there, and he worked like a laborer up there. And there, there is some of the things that nobody has ever known about him, just a side of Orville Wright. Everybody knows Orville Wright and remembers him with a high collar and very finely dressed, and he would get up in the mountains and rough it. And he enjoyed it. He and his two grand-nephews they'd go and he used to tell me several times how they went up there and how they built a cabin and do this and do that, go home or fishing. And for the summer he really loved it. Now what's become of that I think (unintelligible) or whether its been sold I don't know, whether he turned it over to his family. But he had a pretty good area. And that also was what, timber lots in Canada was not too accessible, because he wanted to be alone and...But he used to take these, not only his grand-nephews, I venture to say the rest of his immediate family such as go up there and spend time with him. Did his own cooking and everything. He had, really had a ball.

SB Well, he must have not disliked, he must have not disliked children.

MK No he didn't. I think he liked them, but in his way. Let's put it that way, in his way.

SB They had to be well-disciplined, I imagine.

MK Well, he was a very interesting man. I'm surprised frankly that right after his passing somebody didn't think while fresh in the minds of most people that there were more people that knew him, but of course they related with him, but they didn't sit down and write a, what I would call a side light story on him. Little inside things that nobody know about him. Now as the case, same case as a Dayton woman, Marge MacPherson, wrote a story about Charles Kettering along that line, but she talked to him personally, and she got a lot of material from him. And the book is
very interesting. But someone would have done it with Orville Wright, and he would agreed to it, that even furthermore it's not after he passed away a lot of material could have been gotten because there were an awful lot of people that had close association with him. Harry and Paul Ackerman were very close with him. Paul Ackerman of the Auto club. Was very close to him.

SB Is he still living?

MK Oh, yes. Because Paul Ackerman used to be the official timer on all these tests that they used to have at the field and in that way he got in touch with him. He got in close association with Orville Wright, and the two were very friendly but men like Carl.....

(break in tape)

(end of side two)

(start of side three)

MK That could have given a far better story on the interesting phases of Orville's life, where today, most of those people are passed away.

SB Well, that's one reason we're doing this now. While there still are a few who knew him, especially back in this period. Because there are very few who knew him before he got famous.

MK That's right.

SB That's, that's where we're sorry.

MK Even, even in those days, in the real early days after his triumph in Europe, and when the newspapers, newspaper people got to realize that here was a man, top genius. And a man who had accomplished something and should be recognized as such. When that time come and they started trying to get the material from them, well he shut up and wouldn't say anything. Till he thought there was too much publicity. So there would be very few of them knew anything that went on in those days, in
the early days, let's say after, particularly after Wilbur died.

SB Very fine. Did he ever, did he drive his own car? Or did he have a driver?

MK No, no he drove his own car.

SB He drove his own car.

MK Drove his Franklin.

SB Who else did he have employed in the home. Do you remember besides Carrie, the housekeeper?

MK Carrie, the housekeeper, I don't know if he had a gardener or not. He probably did.

SB Yes, indeed, you had a job with a big house.

MK Yes, that was, that's a big house too.....

SB I've never been in it, but it looks big.

MK Well, the NCR has it now as a guest house, you know.

SB Yes.

MK It's a big house.

SB I think they, they planned that house, of course before Wilbur died. And that's probably why...

MK Three of them was to live in it, see, that's the reason it was so big. But the heating of that, and the upkeep on the house must have been very, very high. Real high ceilings, and the rooms were large, still are. But it's, why I never could figured why he wanted a big home. It's a beautiful place; it sits on a beautiful hill. But it's one of those things; that's Orville Wright.

SB Did he ever go anywhere? Did he ever speak of his travels?

MK No. Very seldom. When he went probably the only place he ever went was to Washington, places like that. On scientific expeditions, so to speak.
They would call him to Washington, quite frequently. And also in later years, he was doing quite a bit of editing of scientific papers on aviation, on aerodynamics.

SB Did he like to write, do you know?

MK I don't know, I don't know whether he did....

(break in tape)

(end of tape)
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