

DADE 1

Interviewee: Howard Klein; Charles W. "Pete" Chase

Interviewer: Polly Redford

Date: September 27, 1966; September 28, 1966

R: This is Tuesday, the 27th of September, [1966]. I am in the offices of the U.S. Geological Survey talking to Mr. Howard Klein, who has, for many years, been head of the U.S. Geological Survey here in Miami. I am asking him a few questions about Miami Beach.

What is it that you have there?

K: Miss Redford, these are some old maps furnished by a coastal geographic survey that you might be interested in.

R: That was going to be my last question.

K: You see the dates underneath. They were formed in 1935 and supplemented by other surveys in 1936. It gives you a general idea of what the place looked like back in those days.

R: This one already shows a considerable portion of the land dredged in and filled. What I am really interested in, Mr. Klein (I was going to bring this up a little later), is to see if there are any of the original [surveys]. I will probably have to write to Washington for them. What is the date of the first survey of Miami Beach that you know of by this department?

K: Are you speaking of the topographical maps?

R: What is the earliest topographical map that you have?

K: I am not sure, but I think probably 1946 or 1947. I do not think any of them have been mapped down here before that.

R: Oh, really? I wanted one from 1905.

K: Oh, no. You will never get it. I am quite sure of that.

R: What did they do in the early days of the land surveys, for instance, at that point?

K: I do not know what they did then. I know there were some old highway maps made back in the old days. You see, most of the topographical maps that we have now were drawn usually from aerial photos. Aerial photography did not really come into its own until fairly recently. This gives them a good base, from the photos.

R: What was normally done in the very old days to determine ownership of land?

K: Well, I guess this was left to the individual counties. There are some old county [maps]. Let me show you, for example, an old map of Collier County.

R: Fine.

In order, then, to get old maps, what I must do is to go over to the county.

K: Yes. I would think you would want to go to county engineering department. Probably Dade County's offices are] here in the Metro-Justice Building.

R: How about maps of the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey? Would they have made maps of that area at that time?

K: This is one of the first ones that we had. This is what we call "t-sheets." These were done from photos, I guess. Yes. It says "from aerial photos." But as far as we know, these are the first ones of the Coast and Geodetic Survey that were prepared.

R: What is the date on that?

K: 1935 and 1936.

R: The reference station was _____ 1934. That, to me, is very interesting. I did not know that. That is your base point. All right. Well, so much then, for the maps. I guess it was pretty much uncharted territory until the Depression.

K: Yes. I presume that the county has older maps than these.

R: You probably know **Irwin Partigle** over in the county office. He has done maps for the county. He is very talented. [He is a] hunchback fellow.

K: Yes.

R: He has some old maps. He loves maps. He collects them. But I thought perhaps you might have them.

Let us go back. I had a few questions [to ask]. Just enlarge on them as you see fit.

I have been told by architects that under the sand of Miami Beach lies a ridge of some kind of a limestone rock. Can you identify that for me and tell me what it is and how old it is and if it is the same oolite that we have under the city itself?

K: Unfortunately, we have never drilled test holes on Miami Beach because there is no fresh water there. All of our drilling is restricted to the mainland. Of course, under the mainland, in most of Dade County, the immediate rock that you hit is

the oolite. In the northern part of Dade County you drill through a thin sand blanket which is **pamlico** sand, [dating from the] Pleistocene. And maybe beneath this is the oolite.

So what we have on Miami Beach is a difficult question. Probably the drillers know better than we do. The drillers drill wells over there for air conditioning purposes. This is the main reason. They call us up a lot of times for information on rock, but we just do not have much information. The rock, I presume, is Pleistocene. It would have to be Pleistocene. The depth of the top of the rock is hard to [judge] because it is not uniform.

R: When you say it is Pleistocene, am I right in saying it is limestone?

K: Limestone, yes. But there is a sand on top of it, of course.

R: Yes. We are going to come to the sand in a minute. That is a whole separate [topic]. It is limestone from the Pleistocene [era]. I will look it up. I know that is the age.

K: The Ice Age.

R: The reason I ask this question is because I saw somewhere in a book on southeastern Florida a description--I can show it better to you on a map--that speaks of the true [nature of the geological foundation of south Florida and Miami Beach]. This rock starting here is different from the one there, see?

K: Yes.

R: That is what I really wanted to establish. Some people refer to Miami Beach as one of the [Florida] Keys. Geologically speaking, it is not.

K: I do not think so. I think the Keys are just those Keys starting probably from Soldier Key.

R: What are they made of that would be different?

K: They are made completely of coral. This is a true coral reef.

R: Are the true Keys what you call a fossilized coral?

K: Yes. Let us say the upper Keys are fossilized coral, Pleistocene in age.

R: So what is the difference?

K: These are dead coral.

- R: Yes, because you can cut in there and see the brain corals; you see all the formations.
- K: The living corals are similar to this.
- R: Yes. Then what is it that underlies Miami Beach that is different from what you have down in the two upper Keys?
- K: I do not think you meet the coral--although you might--under Miami Beach. I think the limestone beneath Miami Beach is the same limestone that you run into at depth below the Miami oolite.
- R: It is the same that underlies the mainland below the oolite. I do not have any confidence in these things [tape recorders], so I am making a few notes.
[Laughter.]
- K: That is the best way. Let me continue. As you go further down into the Keys, the lower Keys, the surface material is made up of oolite.
- R: You mean down on Big Pine [Key] and . . . ?
- K: That is right. Key West and so forth. And this is just an extension of the Miami oolite southward. But underneath the Miami oolite in the lower Keys, you run into coral again.
- R: That is why you have been very active in trying to get this national monument. People are always saying, "What is the geologic significance?" and I never knew it. So it is the fact that it is a fossil coral as opposed to being oolite. Now, as you say, the rock underlying Miami Beach is a Pleistocene limestone, which means it is an extension of the mainland lime. Is there a name for that lime?
- K: Yes. I think we gave it the name of Anastasia Formation.
- R: Why?
- K: Because this is a marine Pleistocene limestone deposit. Presumably this limestone comes and goes along the east coast of Florida.
- R: Is it a sedimentary limestone?
- K: Oh, yes.
- R: So, in other words, the true Keys, at least the northern part of them, is this fossilized coral reef.
- K: Right.

- R: Then what is underneath the Miami oolite that would represent the dead bodies of all these marine organisms and shells cemented together? Well, now, wait a minute. It would not have been formed in the Ice Age because the reef was formed before the Ice Age.
- K: Some of it was formed in the Ice Age.
- R: Then the oolite was deposited on top of it?
- K: I do not believe there is any oolite on Miami Beach.
- R: Yes, but presumably this must have risen and fell. The oolite on the Miami side was overlaid on top of this other stuff.
- K: Yes, but the oolitic material occurs only on the mainland. It does not occur on Miami Beach--I do not think.
- R: What does that indicate to you? The fact that this simply rose and fell a number of times?
- K: Unless it was removed. There might have been some there originally, but it was removed subsequently.
- R: By wave action or something?
- K: Yes.
- R: So it is a bit of a mystery.
- K: Yes. The oolite might be a near-shore or offshore deposit of oolitic limestone that was altered by wind action to build it up [and] give it a little elevation.
- R: Now, oolite is the stuff that looks like a sponge but [is] made out of . . .
- K: Little swirls of calcium carbonate. Very, very small, white spheres. *Oolos* in Greek is "fish egg." [The smooth, round grains of oolite resembles fish roe. Ed.] So it is millions of these little grains put together and cemented in calcium carbonate.
- R: We live in one of these old-type Miami houses that has these coral rock pillars. It is full of holes. Is that oolite?
- K: No.
- R: What is that, then?

- K: Coral rock, which comes from the Keys.
- R: So that would have been quarried in the Keys?
- K: Key Largo limestone, yes. If you could see the coral structure, this is Key Largo limestone.
- R: We have a combination of it. Sometimes you can see little coral stuff in it. Mostly, it is all just shot full of holes. It looks like a sponge.
- K: Most of it is.
- R: So that is Key Largo limestone, which is still part of the dead reef that we were talking about before.
- K: [It is] coral reef [that was] probably quarried from **Moolie** Key.
- R: Really? Is that where most of that old stuff came from?
- K: If you go within the interior part of the Key, you will see some of the old quarries. [The coral was] cut right [out, in] blocks.
- R: That was just the way they did it. It was soft.
- K: Then they would saw them right down into slabs.
- R: I had assumed that some of these quarries I saw west of Miami were started then.
- K: Not in Key Largo.
- R: I know, for instance, we did get a really long _____ on the ridge in Coconut Grove. When we dug some holes to plant some trees in, we chopped it out, and the rock looked like a sponge there.
- K: That was oolite. I will show you some. That is coral, and this is your oolite. And this is oolite. You can see the little white spheres.
- R: Now, that is what I am familiar with. Is that oolite?
- K: This is the lower part of the Miami oolite. These are what we call Bryozoa. They are little marine animals that lived near beach areas.
- R: That is what we dig up, and that is what our walls are made of down in Coconut Grove. But sometimes you will find little animals in there.

- K: This is the lower part of the Miami oolite. You might see some oolites on there. But these things here are Bryozoan. See the white?
- R: I see it. We have a lot of these. Occasionally you will find little pieces of [something] almost like coral in it.
- K: It is possible to have some coral material in it.
- R: Sometimes you get a mixture. That is it, all right. It is so soft when you cut it and hard when you get it. You have never made any test wells, so you do not know how deep that would be.
- K: We never cut into it, unfortunately.
- R: How strange. In the old days when they had the plantations there that was high land. There was a ridge of pine and palmetto, which means there should have been . . .
- K: Oh, there would be, naturally. It would be natural to have some fresh water there. On an island of that type during rainy season you would build up a lens of fresh water. Then, as the dry season came on, this lens would decrease in size. They might have pumped some fresh water out of there. The water was a very shallow depth, [and it could be pumped] just like skimming the shallow water out.
- R: You can do that, I know, on sand ____; I am familiar with that.
- K: Sure.
- R: Generally speaking, how deep is the sand? Do you have any idea?
- K: Let us start at Key Biscayne, for example. On Key Biscayne you go through thirty-five or forty feet of the sandy material before you run into the rock. As I remember, there was a drainage well over there for the City of Miami, or for Dade County. They pushed their casing down to about thirty-five feet, I think, before they ran into the limestone rock.
- R: That is in [Key] Biscayne. But you are not sure what it would be over at . . .
- K: As you go north, though, I think that rock gets deeper. There is a thicker section of sand.
- R: I can talk to construction people. I know that all of the [builders of] skyscrapers and highrises dig down and put their foundations onto the rock. So someone who builds out there would know.

Where does the sand come from? Does the sand have a name? Is it a special kind of sand?

K: No, [there is] no name to it. It is just a Pleistocene or recent sand. The lower section would be Pleistocene overlaid by recent sand. I imagine Miami Beach is an offshore bar.

R: That was another of my questions. I want to know what is the scientific name for this type of barrier island. You find them all the way up and down the coast.

K: It is a barrier island or offshore bar. Biscayne Bay is a lagoon _____.

R: You find them often in estuaries. I am quite familiar with a sand island up in Massachusetts where the Merrimac River comes down. There is a big sort of estuary or lagoon with brackish water and oyster beds and that kind of thing. There would be oysters if it were not . . . There are clams up there. Then there is a big sand island where my father-in-law lives. That is how I know about the fresh water line. But that is just pure sand. Here, you have to go awfully far down before you come to any rock. That is just a sandbar; it is nothing but a sandbar. Do you think here that the underlying limestone acted as kind of a collector that caught the sand on its way down?

K: I would say [that] I do not even know what the composition of the sand is on the beach. Some of that is calcium carbonate. Most of it on the beach is calcium carbonate. I have been told that some of the beach sand looks like stuff that has moved from the north. Now, I do not know.

R: Of course, they may have imported it. They did a lot of hanky-panky there. The thing about the sand brings me to this miserable problem. I do not know if it is part of your bailiwick or not. From what I read in the newspapers and other places, I understand that there is a constant southward movement of sand all along the Atlantic Coast.

K: Oceanography tells us that.

R: And that wherever people have made jetties, such as the one at Government Cut, it creates an imbalance. They are having the same trouble up in Jupiter and in Palm Beach and all along the whole [east coast of Florida]. Is this an oceanographic problem rather than a geologic [problem]?

K: The Marineland people could tell you better than we could. They deal with these trends. They study these trends, and they know _____ offshore.

R: This is actually the movement of the sand along the thing. They have proposed the sand elevators and all of that.

- K: The people who study it say this is one of the worst problems in Florida.
- R: I know it is. Unfortunately, it is not your baby. [laughter] Now, offshore of Miami Beach there are a number of things that they call the reefs where people go fishing. Are those true reefs, or are they simply coral accretions on top of limestone?
- K: Eastward from Miami Beach?
- R: Yes.
- K: Do they come to the water surface?
- R: I am asking you.
- K: I do not know. I know there are offshore reefs along the Keys. Those are true coral reefs.
- R: Yes, like ____ and places like that. [I am asking about] what they referred to as the reefs, where you go fishing out there. You can catch big fish.
- K: They are true reefs. I do not know the name of them. There are just shallows out there. Maybe [they are] accumulations of sand. Whether there are growing reefs, I do not know. Once again, you should get with Marineland on this, because they study it.
- R: I suppose I would ask the city engineer. At one time there was a tremendous mangrove forest there. During the early days of dredge and fill in the 1920s . . .
- K: This still shows on the maps--mangroves at the beach.
- R: Yes. What is that now? The golf course?
- K: Let me see. This is 125th Street. This is Broad Causeway out here.
- R: This was done before the island had burned.
- K: This is Normandy Isle maybe?
- R: Gosh, I can never remember the names up there, to tell you the truth. I am quite ignorant of them.
- K: No, here is Normandy Isle. [There are] mangroves along in here.
- R: Anyway, at one time it was all mangrove. Then the early people who filled would cut down the mangrove forest, put out a bulkhead line, but they would leave the

mangrove stumps with their branching [growth]. Then they would suck sand up from the bay, which they pumped in. This has apparently created some extraordinary fill problems, because those mangrove stumps have been there now a little over fifty years, and they are beginning to rot out and settle out. So you get strange things happening to some of this old fill of the land. Is that part of your bailiwick?

K: No. I suppose that is what happens. There is no reason why it should not. Dead roots start rotting away and things start to settle. It is natural. That is why _____, and I get to build on _____ back there, except a normal-sized home. Anything that has any kind of height will go on top. They just cannot take the chance.

R: How about [Biscayne] Bay? Do you do any water studies or rock studies with relation to what goes on?

K: No. The only studies related to the bay are [focused on questions like] what kind of _____ is the fresh water entering the bay from the mainland? We do this by measuring flow in these canals.

R: How long has that been going on?

K: This has been going on on a continuous basis. We have had gauges in all these canals since about 1956. A little longer than ten years.

R: Not much newer than some _____.

K: Of course, everything does not discharge through the canal. You get some groundwater moving _____.

R: I am trying to reconstruct a picture of what the physical and geographical conditions of the thing must have been, say, in 1910. That is mainly why I am [here].

K: The water levels on the land surface on the mainland side are much higher, so probably Biscayne Bay in those days was considerably fresher than it is now.

R: I read all the descriptions describing the north bay as very, very shallow and extremely clear. [It was] full of grass things.

K: Untouched by human hands.

R: Many of the accounts say that it was when people started putting sewage into the bay that it turned cloudy. But all over the Miami River there is dynamite.

- K: It just had to do with it, too.
- R: Do you think it was the sewage or the Everglades water?
- K: It was probably a combination, because as soon as you extend these canals into the Everglades you are going to move that mucky, brown water into the bay. You will have to. So there was a combination of both. I think there might be an account of some of this in a big, thick publication they have--in 1939 in Water Resources.
- R: How about topographical maps and descriptions?
- K: Topol mapping I do not know. There are other geologic descriptions. I will take one out.
- R: There are some old geologic descriptions. I know because I have seen it in the Florida collection at the **Richter** Library.
- K: Early conditions. He has a bibliography in here, too.
- R: Maybe I will take a glance at that. Let me see if I have run through my questions here.
- K: It has Coconut Grove and the Miami River. You look through your questions, and I will get this little publication.
- R: What is the situation with septic tanks in a place like Miami Beach? There is no problem with a polluted water supply because the water supply comes from the well.
- K: I think it is all sewerred over there now, is it not?
- R: I do not know.
- K: Is not all of Miami sewerred?
- R: I know that there is a very famous fishing hole off of Miami Beach which is referred to because of its awful smell as the "Rose Bowl." It is not too terribly far. If you are up at the Fontainebleau and the Eden Roc [hotels] you can see a cluster of fishing boats clustered around a place in the reef.
- K: It is some kind of outfall.
- R: It is; it is sewage outfall. Some of it must go down to Virginia Key. But the Rose Bowl is a famous fishing spot.

- K: There must be another outfall on the north end. There is some kind of plant--whether it is a water pumping station or sewage [I do not know]--up there on Miami Beach.
- R: I can find out from the city engineer.
- K: [It is] about 60th Street.
- R: I cannot remember. I just know about the Rose Bowl. You can see it.
- K: I have never heard of the Rose Bowl. [Laughter.]
- R: About the Anastasia Formation, who was Anastasia, and why is it called Anastasia Island?
- K: Anastasia is an island up near St. Augustine.
- R: So it merely indicates that it is similar.
- K: That is what we call the type section for the Anastasia Formation. It is a mass of cemented shells.
- R: Let us go back in the geologic history of this area. This has always been a warm sea, one way or the other. Sometimes the rock comes up as sediments from what they call the drift of the . . .
- K: Something moving southward. Some moving from the land.
- R: Yes, but I mean the constant rainfall of these marine organisms creates a sedimentary limestone rock. So it has always been . . . Even the Ice Ages. Was it glaciated down there?
- K: No. It was warm, shallow seas, but the seas were fluctuating because of the ice accumulating and melting.
- R: Yes, I know. Partly the seas fell when . . .
- K: It was always either semi-tropical or temperate down here.
- R: As far back as there have been any geologic recorders, the climate has always been pretty much what it is now?
- K: Since the Pleistocene.
- R: What was it before the Pleistocene?

- K: A lot of it was completely covered by sea.
- R: And prior to that?
- K: It has been covered by seas for a very, very long period, because all of our rocks are sedimentary.
- R: But some of those can be rather shallow seas.
- K: OH, yes. Mostly shallow seas.
- R: If you are lying on Miami Beach and looking up at the **blue** and you are thinking about geology (which you probably would not be), would you think back that as far as science knows it has always been either a warm, shallow sea or a little land surrounded by warm, shallow seas?
- K: I think it has always been covered by shallow seas.
- R: Since the planet cooled it has always been that.
- K: Let me get another book. Have you seen *Reefs*?
- R: I have not seen anything. I am coming to you [for information]. U.S. Geological Water Supply Paper 319, "Geology and Groundwaters of Florida," by Samuel **Sanford** and George C. **Mentz** in 1913. Do you think there are only two copies in Florida? One here and one in the University?
- K: [There is] probably one in Tallahassee also.
- R: Do you have any objections to publishing any of the things that you have said during this interview?
- K: [I have] no objections at all.
- R: OK. Thank you very much.

As I was packing this up, Mr. Klein said that there was nothing much known about Miami Beach because the U.S. Geological Survey does not do drilling of wells there. Therefore, geologically speaking, not much is known about the Beach. That is the end of this interview, which is the first in a series. I will number it Number One.

[End of side A1]

- R: Today is September 28 [1966]. I am on my way to interview C. W. Chase, one of the old timers of Miami Beach. I am finding myself with a little extra time. I have

explored the neighborhood. Mr. Chase lives at 1900 Meridian Boulevard in an old-style house. He seems to be one of the last few holdouts in an area that has changed very rapidly. Meridian Avenue at 19th Street is only three very short blocks from the Lincoln Road Mall. [I can see] Washington Federal Savings [and] Burdines.

Somebody just saw this tape recorder and asked me if I was on [the staff of] Candid Camera. Obviously, they think only a professional person would be doing such a thing.

Mr. Chase's house is surrounded by new, rather schlocky apartment houses. The Montclair Apartments, for instance, [is] advertising deluxe efficiencies, recommended and approved. Here, another old-time house, a couple blocks away, has been taken over by a couple of dentists. There is a vacancy also at the Bermuda Apartments, a steel-and-glass set of apartments here on Meridian Avenue, right next to the Washington Federal Savings. Generally speaking, it is one of these old neighborhoods being rebuilt. [There are] a few boomtown houses with red tile roofs, the remains of landscaped palm trees, and the old homes turned into apartment houses. Elsewhere, you can see where the old ones have been torn down, and very obviously new steel-and-glass [and] concrete boxes [have] been put up.

There is a cheap and rather dreadful place in light yellow and dark green concrete with awning windows that advertises itself as a pioneer house. There is a vacancy: hotel rooms, efficiencies, one-bedroom, two baths, furnished apartments.

Next door to it is an old-time, Spanish-style house. Its lawn is much overgrown. [There are] two large automobiles parked in the front. It looks as if it is still lived in, perhaps as a boarding house. Next door there is a cheap apartment house [and] the remains of what must have been yesterday's landscaping. [There are] two very high royal palms that must have been there for a number of years. Across the street, also, [is] an empty, overgrown lot [with] large palm trees that must represent a big landscaping investment by someone way back in the 1920s.

Mr. Chase seems to be a holdout against progress. His house has that closed, shuttered look that houses do as if they are empty or that old mansions do when they are surrounded by rooming houses. The grounds are beautifully and neatly kept up, but the shutters and doors are closed. There is none of that "open effect" that you get in usual Florida houses. I am wondering if this external impression will be borne out by what he actually says.

Let me start off by saying that I am here in the living room of Mr. C. W. Chase.

What do the initials stand for, Mr. Chase?

C: Charles **Warthan**, but nearly everybody calls me Pete.

R: How did you get the name Pete?

C: My father was Charles W. Chase, and everybody called him Charlie. When I was born, I was Charles W. Chase, Jr., but they did not want two Charlies, so they called me by my middle name, which was **Warthan**. When I went to military prep school as a boy of fourteen or fifteen years old, the first day I was there I bumped into an upperclassman. He stopped me in the hall and said, "Hey, kid!" I said, "Yeah?" He said: "No. You do not mean `yeah'; you mean yes, sir." I said, "Oh. Yes, sir." He said, "What is your name, kid?" I said, "Warthan." He said, "What!?" I said, "My name is Warthan." He said, "You mean `Warthan, sir.'" I said, "Yes, Warthan, sir." So he said: "Warthan. We do not want any Warthans around here in this school. From now on your name is Pete." That has been my nickname ever since. It stuck to me through all the years.

R: Incidentally, where do you come from originally, Mr. Chase?

C: That is a peculiar question. My parents were theatrical people. They were playing in Kansas City at the time I was born. Three months afterwards, my mother rejoined the show on the road, and I just stayed along with it until I was thirteen years of age.

R: You grew up on the run?

C: Yes. So I came from everywhere.

R: What did your parents do in the theater?

C: My mother was an actress; she was fairly well known back in her day. My father was a playwright and wrote a number of plays and dramatized a number of plays and produced a number of plays. Some of them [were] New York productions.

R: So it was legitimate theater, then.

C: Oh, yes. [It was] legitimate theater. Like all theatrical people, you have great ups and you have tremendous downs. After about the third down, my father decided he was through with theatrical business.

R: So he settled somewhere then?

C: He settled down here on Sugarloaf Key.

R: Really? What year was that?

C: 1910.

R: So you really are in [Florida] from the beginning. I did not know you were such a Floridian.

C: Yes. He settled down there in the sponge business before there was any railroad or any road. They were about twenty miles from Key West, and [we] had to get all our supplies with our own boat.

R: Was this when you went to military school?

C: No. I had already been to military school and had gotten out by that time. My father quit the show business entirely in about 1906. Then he came down here in 1910. He lived off his royalties from his plays until they stopped being produced. Then he got into something else, which was the sponge business.

R: What brought him to Sugarloaf [Key] of all places?

C: The United States government had made some tests of several years on the feasibility of growing sponges. Instead of having to go out and gather . . .

R: Farming them, in other words.

C: Yes. Raising them and farming them.

R: How did your father get into that? It is unusual.

C: He happened to meet the government official, the head of the Bureau of Fisheries in Washington, DC, who got him interested in that. My father, being a showman and a playwright, was kind of visionary. This thing just kind of appealed to him. He was an Englishman. He went back to England and raised the money to get this thing going. It looked like a very good thing for a while, so he had me come down there to help him. But when the First World War broke out--that was 1914--the money stopped coming from England to keep it going. In the meantime, as the sponges would mature, the sponge thieves would come in there at night, and they would pick up and steal the sponges.

R: Were those the local **conchs**, or were they Cubans?

C: Local conchs--spongers. I decided that I had better get into something else, so I moved into Key West and got the first Chevrolet agency that was ever in Key

West.

R: At that time, had the road been completed? No, there was no road.

C: No, there was no road. There was the railroad, but there was no automobile road.

R: What year was that?

C: That was in 1916, two years after the First World War broke out. In the meantime, I had gone into a cigar-making business. [I was] advertising them and selling them throughout the country by boxes. After about a year of that, I decided I knew nothing about the cigar business and I had better get out of it.

R: How about Chevrolets in Key West when Key West was not connected to any place?

C: They had never seen a Chevrolet in Key West at that time, 1916. An uncle of mine in Chicago had bought one, and he wrote me a letter and said what a wonderful car it was. I wanted to own an automobile. In the meantime, I had married a Key West girl back in 1913. But I wanted to get an automobile; I had that urge. So there were no Chevrolets in Key West, and he [my uncle] had written me what a nice car it was. So, thinking I might be able to get it cheaper, I thought I would write off to see if I could get the agency. So I wrote off, and they sent a man down from the Atlanta headquarters, a cheerful lad who looked me over. He said, "All right, young fellow, you can have the agency, but you have to take three automobiles first thing off the bat. You have to have three, there being none in Key West to show people." There had never been a Chevrolet automobile [in Key West].

R: Were there any other [automobiles]?

C: Yes. There were Buicks and there were Fords. I only had enough money to buy one automobile, but when you are young and silly [you do crazy, impulsive things]. I said: "All right. Send them down, but send me some pictures so I can show people what the car looks like and I can get the other two sold before they get down here." So they sent me the pictures, and I went around. I sold two cars from the pictures. [I] got deposits on them.

I did not know much about business back in those days. When the automobiles arrived in Key West, they arrived with what is called bill of lading attached, which means you have to pay the railroad for the whole three cars before you can get them out of the railroad car. I did not have the money to take out the three cars,

but fortunately the agent of the Florida East Coast Railroad at that time was a pretty good friend of mine, so I said: "Johnny, I have enough money to take out one car. I have the other two sold, but I cannot get the money for them until I get the car out and teach the guy how to drive it." Back in those days nobody knew how to drive. I said: "Let me take out one car. I will get it fixed up, teach the guy, get the money, come back, and then I will give you enough money to take out another." That is the way I got my three cars out. So I did pretty well. I think I sold about seventeen cars in 1916 and part of 1917.

Then I could see that we were going to get in the war. I had been in the New York City naval militia for about three years before I came to Florida. Somebody told me there was an opening in the naval militia down there as an ensign. I had had six years of military school, so they gave me the ensign position.

R: Where did you go to military school?

C: Three years in Nyack, New York, and then three years in New Hampshire, four miles from Dartmouth College.

I was married, as I told you, at the time, and then the war did come on about a month or six weeks after I joined. Then I was off in the war for two years. When I was gone I left the agency with a friend of mine, but he did not do anything to it. When I came back after the war, I no longer had the agency. Somebody else had it. So I had no job. I had a tiny bit of money saved up. I had belonged to the Key West Rotary Club before I went off to the war, when I got into this automobile business. They kept my membership intact until I got back. When I got back, I went to the meetings. The fellow who was the secretary of the Key West Rotary Club at that time was the Southern Bell telephone man. Of course, that outfit promotes their men by going from one city to another. So one day he got his orders to leave Key West and go to Atlanta. Somebody spoke up and said: "Pete Chase does not have a damn thing to do around here, so let us make him secretary." So they made me secretary--without pay, of course.

One day in the Rotary meeting somebody spoke up and said: "If only we could get Carl Fisher to come to Key West." This was back in the latter part of 1920. "There he is, spending all those millions, making Miami Beach." At that time he practically was. It had not gotten a real good start. "He is spending all those millions. If only we could get him to come to Key West and see what Key West is, why, he might start another development here." So, as I say, when you are young you order three automobiles when you do not have the money, and you say something. I get up--I am the secretary of the club--and I said: "I will get him. I will get him to come." So they said: "OK, kid. You are elected." Then I was

real sorry that I had said what I had said.

What could I do to get the man to come to Key West? I picked up the *Miami Herald* one day and saw that they were having a regatta here on Miami Beach. Now, Carl Fisher was a tremendous enthusiast for boats and boating. He loved all kinds of boats; he had all kinds of boats. He promoted the regatta here for years and years and years. I said to myself: Maybe I could get that guy to put on a race from Miami Beach to Key West. In doing that, we might get him here. Then we would show him the town. So I wrote him a letter and told him that Key West would love to have a regatta and what a lovely boat ride it would be and everything, and if he could get up a race, why, we would put up a sterling silver cup for the winner and we would have a reception and so forth. A couple of days later he writes me back and says, "Kid, you are on!" Gar Wood and a man named Gordon Hammersley, who was a tremendously wealthy man at the time and quite an enthusiastic boat racer, and Carl Fisher had this race, starting from the foot of Lincoln Road. They went down to Key West. Of course, these were twin-screw express cruisers, not little open boats. [They were] boats about forty or fifty feet long.

In those days, Key West was just a little homey community, and they had a terrific spirit of friendliness to strangers. They did not have many strangers, in fact, because there was no road. There was a railroad, but it came there, and everybody got off the train and got on the boat and went to Cuba. So a stranger was an oddity; he was somebody to be nice to.

Anyway, they entered into this idea of a boat race terrifically. We got the commandant to turn out the navy band, and we had the commandant shoot the big guns when the boats came around the fort there. The merchants closed their stores all that afternoon and put up flags. We had a reception planned at the Athletic Club. While it is true that Prohibition was on at that time, Key West never paid any attention to Prohibition--absolutely none. There were open bars and . . . Well, it was just a little community of itself.

R: [It] sounds like just the kind of thing Fisher would enjoy.

C: Oh, yes. So we had this reception with a lot of nice drinks and everything. Then the plan was to take Carl Fisher out to the end of Key West. Key West is a mile wide and four miles long. The latter three miles going toward Miami were nothing but weeds and shrubbery and stuff like that. There was no growth out there at all. So the idea was to take Carl Fisher out to the end of the island, and they elected me to be the spokesman. I was the guy that got them into this thing, so I had to do the spiel. We got him out there, and it was beautiful. I tell you, the

view there of the water and the adjoining Keys was just enchanting.

R: What month of the year was this?

C: That was in January or February of 1921. So as I said, we got him out there. Then I had to do my spiel, so I said to him, "Mr. Fisher, just look at this beautiful water." And it is beautiful.

R: Oh, it is lovely. We go down and fish there. I like Key West very much.

C: [I told him:] "It is the most beautiful water that you ever saw. Here is a place that has never had a frost. [It has] never known cold weather. All this beautiful land and all that here is undeveloped. It could be a paradise." After I got all through, he said, "What are you doing tonight?" They had decided to stay overnight at the Casa Marina Hotel, which was then (I think) in its first year. It was brand new.

R: Was that the great big one?

C: That is the big one out on the edge of the water. So he said, "What are you doing tonight?" I said, "I do not know." He said, "Come up to the hotel, and I will talk to you." So we took them back to the hotel, and I went back to the gang at the Rotary Club. I said: "Hey, guys, we got this guy! We've got him! He is interested! He asked me to come back and talk to him." So I went home and told my wife. I got back out to the hotel about 7:00 or 7:30. Anyway, I sat there in the lobby. Pretty soon, out he comes from the dining room. I walked up to him and said, "Mr. Fisher?" He looked at me and said, "Yeah?" I said, "You asked me to come and see you." "Oh, yes," he said. "That is right. Come over here. Sit down. I want to talk to you." So we went over and sat down. (I can still go right to that spot.) He says, "What do you do in this town?" At that time I was working for a molasses company. They imported molasses from Cuba by boat. Then we would ship it out of Key West by tank cars on the railroad. I said, "I am connected with the molasses company." He said, "Are you married to your job?" I said, "What do you mean by 'married to my job'?" He said, "I mean, do you have to live with it forever?" I said, "No. Why?" He said, "How would you like to come and work for me?"

R: So you did not have him. He had you, I guess.

C: I was sick.

R: Really?

C: Well, you build yourself up to something [and you end up hearing something you

do not expect]. I did not want to go to work for him. I wanted to get him to Key West. Here was my dream and all this stuff and everything gone. I was sick. So I said: "I do not know if I want to go to work for you or not. What do you want me to do?" He said: "If we are planting grass, you plant the grass. If we are building houses, you build the houses. If we are entertaining visitors, you entertain the visitors. And if the mule dies, damn you, you bury the mule." [laughter] That was Carl Fisher.

R: That is a wonderful story.

C: That was Carl Fisher. So I said to him, "How much would you pay me?" He said, "How much are you making now?" I said to myself, if I tell him how much I am making now, which was \$125 a month, he will think I am no good. So I looked him right square in the eye and told him the only lie I ever told him in my life. I said, "Mr. Fisher, I am making \$300 a month." He did not say a word. He looked at me. Pretty soon he said: "I will tell you what I will do. I will pay you \$300 a month for six months. At the end of that six months, I will either raise you or, damn you, I will fire you." That is how I happened to join Carl Fisher.

R: That was going to be my first question.

C: There is a sequel. I wrote him a letter the next day and said, "I will be there." I knew my job was running out because they were soon going to stop shipping molasses to Key West. They were going to ship it to Savannah. I came up here about three weeks later. At that time Mr. Fisher had his office building on the northeast corner of Lincoln Road and Washington Avenue, where Cobb's Fruit Store is now. He also had a little streetcar line.

R: Yes. I have seen the pictures of that.

C: They used to call it the **Tunerville** Trolley. He built that so that people would come from Miami to Miami Beach. Back in those days very few people owned automobiles. They moved around by streetcar.

R: Did the tracks go across the county causeway?

C: Yes, and landed at 5th Street. Then it turned south and went down to 1st Street, went over to the ocean, came back to Washington Avenue and went straight up Washington Avenue, which, by the way, was called Miami Avenue at that time. It went over to where the Roney [Plaza Hotel] is, came down Dade Boulevard alongside the canal, and then went back down Alton Road. It made a loop.

R: In other words, it was a tour of the Fisher property.

- C: It was a tour of the Fisher property. That is right.
- R: What was the fare on that, incidentally?
- C: Five cents.
- R: Five cents round trip or one way?
- C: Round trip if you did not get off. If you got off and got back on again, it was another nickel. But you could take the ride all the way around and land back in Miami for a nickel.
- R: You had to pay another nickel if you got off to look.
- C: If you got off to look and got back on [you had to pay another nickel]. So I came over on that streetcar line, got off, and went to Mr. Fisher's office there. He had his office upstairs on the second floor. I went up there. The secretary had a room. I told him, "My name is Chase. I have come to see Mr. Fisher." She said, "Sit down," and I sat down. Mr. Fisher had people coming in and out--people with blueprints and people with papers and everything. But he never came out of that room of his. I waited and waited. Finally, about an hour later, out he comes. I walked up to him and said, "Mr. Fisher?" He looked at me and said, "Yeah?" I said: "My name is Chase. I am the guy from Key West that you wanted [to work for you]." "Oh, yeah." He had forgotten me.
- R: There is some question about his eyesight.
- C: That is it. He could not see out of one eye entirely. The eyes were perfect in the way they would move and look and everything, but he was blind in one eye. So he evidently had looked at me out of [the bad eye]. I said: "You told me to come up here. You wanted me to go to work for you." We stood there and talked for a minute. He said, "Well, I have not got anything for you to do right now," but he said, "You go over to the car barn." Now, the streetcar car barn was where that electric plant is, there on the causeway. You know, where you make the turn.
- R: Yes.
- C: Mr. Fisher put in the electricity for Miami Beach. There was no electricity here until he put it in.
- R: I did not realize that. So the car barn was there, too.
- C: So the car barn was there alongside the electric plant. He said: "You go over to

the car barn. There is a man named Ellis. He is in charge over there. You tell Ellis that I said to put you to work. Six months from now he will send you back here to me." In other words, the season was beginning to get over with, and there was nothing much to do until next fall. So I went over to the car barn and asked for Mr. Ellis. He said, "Yeah?" I said, "Mr. Fisher told me to come over here and you would put me to work." He said, "I do not have a damn thing for you to do." He said: "This is February. The season will soon be over. I am laying off people." I said: "Get him on the phone. You call him and tell him." So he got on the phone and told him. [He got off the phone and said:] "Yes, that is right. I have not got a damn thing for you to do. Wait a minute. I will tell you what. I will make you a spotter on the streetcar.

R: A spotter? What was that?

C: Nearly everybody these days does not know what a spotter [is].

R: I do not know at all.

C: A spotter is the guy that gets on the car and sits in the back seat and watches to see whether the conductor rings up the fares or not. That is a spotter.

R: For \$300 a month, that is what you were doing?

C: That is all the job they had for me. So I rode the streetcars for about a week or ten days, and I went back to Mr. Ellis and said: "Mr. Ellis, those conductors got onto me the second day. They know what I am there for. I am not doing any good. They have me spotted."

Just about that time somebody came in to see Mr. Ellis. They said, "We have had another accident." The streetcars were new, and the people with automobiles just did not know who was to have the right of way. They used to have these accidents. [This person said,] "Well, we have had another accident [involving] one of our cars and an automobile over in Miami." So he went out. I turned to Mr. Ellis and said, "Listen. Do you wait until these people that have had the accidents go to see their lawyer or some shyster lawyer gets ahold of them and then they bring a suit against you, or do you have somebody go to them right away and see if you can make a decent settlement?" He said: "No. We let it go." I said: "Give me the job. I will go as soon as there is an accident and see what ____." So he did.

About three weeks later, one day a man came in and...

[End of the interview.]