

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

THE MAXWELL HOUSE PLANT OPENED IN 1939 AND CLOSED APRIL
1992.

INTERVIEWEE: DICK ENGLAND

INTERVIEWER: JOHN GILBERT

DATE: AUGUST 11, 2001

SIDE ONE

Q: This is John Gilbert of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library. As part of the Hoboken Oral History Project, I am delighted to bring Dick England to you, formerly of Maxwell House. It's Saturday, August 11, 2001 and we're here at Hoboken uptown Starbucks, one of two here in town. We're literally next door to the plant that used to make Maxwell House Coffee. Dick, what do you think this says about Hoboken and the changes we've seen in town during the past 25 years?

A: Well, I think for the majority part, I think they're great. I think 75% is magnificent. The town has come back from the

ashes, so to speak. Beautification, young people -- the values have gone up. Everybody seems to be doing very well. However, you have to

remember, there's still a portion of Hoboken that's still ultra-blue collar -- that's left over residual if you will, from the industrial town.

I feel bad for them because they're sort of being shoved back and away from the outgrowth of Hoboken. I wish there was something we could do for them. I don't have the power or the insight to figure it out, but that's what I feel sorry about. Other than that, it is still my great town.

Q: We're now standing outside of Starbucks at the corner of 12th and Hudson, here in Hoboken. Dick, can you tell us what we're looking at here?

A: You're looking at the northern end of the property. It's American Can, the old American Can building directly on Hudson Street. And if you look back to the left, you'll see the shipping area where the docks are -- where we were shipping finished goods out of and bringing in raw materials to use. And beyond that, obviously, is the waterfront -- with our long pier -- and I'm sure we'll go out and see the long pier.

Okay, we're standing at the main gate or what was the main gate, prior to the renovation of Building 8. Through this gate every employee came -- through the security -- all trucks inbound, outbound. We used this predominantly, because at the time, we still had rail lines. And through the -- what is now the main gate, there was a rail spur that would bring flat cars into the bays that you are looking at directly. This is where it all happened.

Q: Can you tell us about some of the buildings we're looking at here?

A: Okay, on the right-hand side, is what we called Building 6. It housed Accounting, it housed Division Research. It was predominantly administration. On the left-hand side, beyond American Can, you start getting into the shipping area on the first floor. And above that, Quality Control and the back end of our production lines -- our can production lines, swinging around to the right-hand side. And then above that are the Executive Offices, fourth floor, where we used to have the plant manager. He would be in the right corner where he could overlook everything. Then in the right-hand side across the bridge, would be our Building 7. That is predominantly where we do some packing and some roasting and some grinding -- processing basically. Beyond the main building, our Building 1, is where we used to do our

roasting, our grinding -- preparing all the coffee. And then beyond that obviously, is the river, and where we would receive the green coffee.

Q: We've now walked south to the corner of 11th & Hudson. We're looking at a big ivy covered building here on the corner, where Sinatra Drive empties out into the Hudson.

A: This location was where we used to pack the frozen coffees, the frozen soluble coffees. We called it our Building 8. It was built in 1961. I got here in '59, so it was the employees' parking lot at that time. Two years later, they built this building and started making frozen coffee. The reason that we parked here, was because at that time we used rail lines. We had Hoboken Shore Railroad and most of our product -- a vast majority of our product -- traveled by rail. And they would wrap up around Hudson Street, go down Sinatra Drive -- what used to be River Road then. And they would cue boxcars where the existing parking lot is now. There was a barge-head out on the river and we would take them over land or on the barge -- the finished product out. There had to be people who remembered that. There had to be forty or fifty boxcars sitting on sidings, just waiting to go out with coffee.

Right now we're just inside what is now the main gate -- used to be the rail siding. And we're looking towards the river, and directly to the river's

edge, you'll see a structure that was built very late on -- probably late 80's early 90's. It was a research center. They were working on some special project, on developing an enhanced type coffee. It never really got off the ground, but that was built specifically for that project.

And if you bear to the left, you see our own internal generator obviously, and then you go into the Green Coffee Receiving Area. One thing I'd like to say is, if you notice the high stack -- there were two of those. We lost one in an explosion back in -- again the time runs together -- I'm going to say the mid 70's, and we had to take it down. It popped out. It was a beautiful thing. I mean it wasn't -- no one got hurt. It was not an endangerment to the people but it weakened the structure, so we had to take it down. It was some project. It was a 100-step foot stack.

Okay, we're on the fifth floor at the back end of our M.R.G Building, commonly referred to as Build 7. We're facing Manhattan and I think we're here, because directly above us are the stanchions that used to hold the Maxwell House Coffee Cup and Sign. I remember seeing it all through my career, even as a child. My family originally came from Staten Island. We would take the Staten Island Ferry and when we got close to South Ferry, you could see the Maxwell House sign at night -- it reminded you of almost home. And conversely, I had family up in Dyckman area, up in Manhattan -- and when I come down the Westside

Highway, I could always pick it up and knew I was getting close to home. It was a beacon of light. When it closed, we thought it would be a historical landmark. But to be brutally frank, I think they came in one night and took it down without anybody knowing about it. I was a little distraught when the sign came down. You know, it was part of my life, part of the history of Hoboken. I mean they kept the Colgate Sign -- the Colgate Clock. I didn't see any reason why they couldn't keep the Maxwell Cup and Sign on the river.

Q: So looking at the plant today, are you surprised to see how it looks now?

A: Well, I think it looks pretty good considering it's been unused for nine years. It's sad to see the empty spaces where millions of dollars of equipment and many, many of my good friends spent most of their waking hours. I'm disappointed to see it gone, but at the same token, I'm happy to see that it's still standing.

Q: Well, it looks very dark and deserted here now, but this plant had a very vibrant past. Can you tell us a little about what was made here?

A: When I first came to work for Maxwell House in '59, everything that the Maxwell House Coffee Company sold could be produced here, and in most cases was produced here. If they introduced a new product, it was introduced through this plant. We made cans of coffee, both caffeinated and decaffeinated. We made instant coffee, both caffeinated and decaffeinated. We made freeze dried caffeinated and decaffeinated. The other sister plants -- with the exception of Houston later on -- could only do one or the other. Our California plant only makes cans. Our Florida plant only makes caffeinated products. They don't make any decaffeinated products.

So there were limitations to the other plants. We were the main player. And when we were producing -- back in the heyday -- we had to make 60% of all coffee sold in the United States out of this plant. Right at the end, even at the end -- the day before they shut us down -- we supplied -- 60% of Maxwell House Coffee's marketplace was within 800 miles of this plant.

Q: We're still standing under the sign, here on top of Building 7. We're looking out on Building 9, which is a very interesting building. It's a tall concrete structure, maybe five or six stories or higher, perhaps. It has a lot of piping and equipment attached to the

sidewalls and a commanding view of the Hudson River. In fact, it's right on the west shore of the Hudson. What was this building for?

A: That was a Green Coffee Storage Area. We brought green coffee from numerous countries and sorted them by type. And then, depending on the type of coffee that was being made at that particular time, we would formulate different coffee types by percentage, to give it the flavor that was required. Coffees came from -- our predominant coffee was from Africa. But we brought coffee up from Central America, South America -- everybody heard about Colombian of course. We even brought some Indonesian coffee in -- not much here. We did predominantly African, Central American and South American.

Green coffee -- that's an interesting history. When I first came to work here, before the dinosaurs walked the earth, we used to bring coffee in by bags. 125 bags would be brought up from wherever their destination came from. They would unload them right here on this dock, down below -- this building was not here. They would put it down on the dock. Men would pick up those bags and dump them manually. All day long they would dump the coffee bags into these grates and they would be sent upstairs. It was only later on -- when we lost the ability to bring coffee in off the water -- that we built this building -- because our beans were then coming in either by rail or by truck. And we had to put them

someplace in a bulk mold. So we created a system -- which is still existing downstairs -- where they'd come in and they'd dump cargo -- not bags -- bulk cargo -- into these grates by type and they would be put into silos. The silos themselves could handle up to -- I don't know -- I'm going to say five million pounds of a type of coffee bean -- which would relate to, like five days worth of operation, for our operation.

When that building was built, the sophistication that came with it was immense. I mean back in the old days, it would take maybe fifty guys to move coffee around. When they built that building, we wound up with -- like four people, a shift supervisor and three silo operators per eight-hour shift. The complexity of all of it was handled automatically. They had these computer systems -- if that's what they were -- or electrical systems that would move coffee through the system unbelievably easy. I wish we could see it. It was a beautiful thing to see.

Okay, now we've just come down the stairs off the roof on to level five of the building. This was the Roasting Area. As I had said to you earlier John, the flow of product came from Green Coffee. It was pumped all the way up to the top and then started its flow down, to ultimately get to street level as a finished good. This was the first step. We roasted the green coffee in this area and again, I don't know how many roasters there

were -- six, seven, fourteen -- I have no idea. But there was a lot of them and it was hot up here.

Q: Roasting must have been a hot and difficult department to work in. I was curious if people bid different jobs within the plant or moved around. Perhaps you could talk about that a little?

A: Bidding jobs was part of life. I mean, everybody worked for money. Nobody really worked here just because we loved to come and get sweaty. But predominantly -- it's in my opinion -- that once people got on a job, they were really happy. There was really no problems. The vast majority never moved. You would move for one or two reasons: A) a better opportunity opened somewhere, you had the seniority and you made a move or B) maybe you had a personality conflict with a fellow employee or a shift supervisor and you wanted to transfer out. But other than that, people I met in the early 60's, early 70's -- when we closed the shop -- they were still doing the same work. They were making good money. We all made good money. Maxwell's was great. I don't think people moved that much.

Okay, we've left the roasting area. We're now standing in what was the B.A.R. Control Room. B.A.R. meaning Browning After Roasting. At this point, they took the roasted coffee in the combined form and browned it

to a color to meet the specifications of the product. Once that was finished, then they sent it to grinding for the next step -- but a lot of things happened here. I was not that involved in it much, but I know it happened.

Q: Standing outside the B.A.R. Room, we see men's and women's restrooms. Could you talk about the mix of the workforce here at the plant?

A: Sure, I guess it was like any other facility in the country. I mean predominantly men, but we had a good share of women and most of them were longtime employees. They had their children, came back and worked. I knew an awful lot of women that retired and with 25 and 30 years. They stayed with us and they got along well. Some of the women rose to managerial positions. Winslow was a good friend of mine. She was a manager in Quality Control. I think there were two accounting supervisors when I passed through. They didn't get as many as they liked I guess, but they had a fair share.

Okay, we're down one more floor now and we're still on the eastside of the building. And this would be where the grinding took place after the roasting and the browning. You come down here and mix it up and put it into the grinders and grind them to the specific texture that was

required for the type of product that was going to come out -- whether it was a drip-pot product or a percolator-pot product. But it was all done here and then from here it would be shipped down one more floor to the packing lines, ready to go.

Q: You were telling me that you had some special memories of this space itself?

A: Oh yeah -- well don't ever tell my boss -- but when I got bored in my office across the hall, I would sneak back here and stand in this particular corner and look out at the view of the river. I loved the naval ships and when they come up the harbor -- even the cruise ships -- I'd stand here and watch them for fifteen to twenty minutes and take my break.

Q: We've walked over to the other side of the fourth floor and we're in the old plant manager's office. Do you remember some of the plant managers here Dick?

A: Oh yes, very well. When I came to work his name was George Burgess. He was stalwart. He was a really strong man -- got along with everyone. Nobody pulled anything on him. He was a tough guy. And then through time -- Burt Crawford, Russ Cox, Frank Meegan.

All kids that I remembered growing up with became plant managers. It was good times, good times.

Q: Dick, do you remember any stories about the plant managers -- maybe some special initiatives they might have tried to come up with or other things like that?

A: Well, every one of them had their own agenda. They were all trying to do something creative for their own benefit. There was one story -- I'm not going to name the plant manager who came in and said, "Okay, my objective is going to get the Receiving and Shipping department to work more efficiently. We're going to make sure they're on the job more often and they work full days. I don't want anybody punching out early or going home when they're finished doing their load." I guess there was a point in time where there was a working deal with management, saying the normal workload was you did eight trucks of coffee a day. You unloaded it or you loaded eight trucks out and that was the typical average. Well, the guys downstairs were shrewd enough to say, "Okay, well if we really break our chops, we'll get eight trucks out in six hours and we'll take two hours and go home." Well, he said, "No, you're going to stay on the clock and maybe we'll get nine trucks." Well, when the Union heard about it, Union said, "Okay, you want to play that way." They started driving their forklifts according to the rules of the

Union contract. We got four trucks a day for about six months. The plant manager got called upstairs into headquarters. They cancelled that try and we went back to the eight trucks.

Q: We're now walking across the empty floor of the old offices. We're going to go visit Dick's old office. Well, here we are in Dick's old office looking out the window to the west. I bet you have a lot of memories about this place.

A: Oh yeah, this is -- you could have a lot of fun in here. We got a lot of work done. That sounds trivial but yeah, we did get a lot of work done. We had a lot of fun. We had a good atmosphere around us. Our job was to get coffee out the door -- coffee in, coffee out. That was all we needed to do. If we had fun doing it, fine. If we didn't have fun, move on. But we had fun.

Q: Could you tell me about what your responsibilities were? What was your title or your progression of titles here and how did you wind up? What was your last job here at the facility?

A: Well, I started in '59 in the mailroom. And then after school and the army, I wound up in Scheduling -- first in Soluble, then over here in Scheduling Distribution -- scheduling raw materials in,

packing materials finished out -- things along that line. From here, I went up to headquarters in White Plains doing the same things on a national level. And then took a transfer back here as the manager of the same operation but at plant level -- because up at headquarters, Phillip Morris had bought us out. Careers were being shortchanged and slowed down and I didn't want the 31 mile commute anymore. I was old enough then. I figured I'd retire out of here. That's what I did. I wound up being Manufacturing Services Manager at this plant when it closed.

Q: What was a typical day like for you here?

A: A typical day -- you walk in -- you make sure everything is going for the day. You'd be thinking about what's needed for tomorrow, and what's needed for two weeks from now, and you would start laying out plans as things changed. You may have an emergency. You have to make a certain kind of coffee for a certain customer in Pittsburgh and you would have to bring everybody together and say "Okay, we have to make a midstream shift. Eight o'clock tonight, we're converting from a decaffeinated coffee. We're going to a dark roast and we're going to make 4500 cases of this two pound can." And we would get everybody together. Everyone would tell us what they needed and we would get it done. But that's what was good about the Hoboken plant. The Hoboken plant could change on a dime. We were the ones that

could provide anything within a reasonable amount of time. The other plants couldn't.

Q: Flexibility is the key.

A: Absolutely, absolutely -- we were the most flexible plant in the parenthood.

Q: So did you work long hours? What time would you come in? How long was lunch? When did you leave?

A: I truly don't know. I'd come in when I'd come in and I'd go home, when I'd go home. It wasn't then like it is now. Today kids work twelve, fourteen hours a day. We didn't do that. If we came in at 8:30, we went home maybe 4:30 -- you know, a typical day. Sometimes you came in earlier, sometimes you'd stayed later. Sometimes you came in later, sometimes you went home earlier -- but that was typical.

Q: The plant ran 24 hours, 7 days a week?

A: When I first came up through 1970, the hardest part of being a manager in the Hoboken plant, was how to convince the

labor force to work Sunday too. We were working -- our process went seven days a week. The packing at its heyday was averaging six and a half days a week. It was after the frost in the 70's that people stopped buying coffee, and through no fault of any of the plants, our requirements dropped. At the end, after the frost and the demand for coffee fell off in the United States, we started to curtail. We ended running five days a week, sometimes a sixth day to catch up on productivity -- but we didn't run every line, every day. Back in the 60's/70's, we ran every line, every day around the clock, six and a half days.

Q: You mentioned the frost. Was there some sort of fundamental shift in the coffee market that effected this place?

A: Oh absolutely -- I'm sure it effected every coffee company in the United States. I'm saying approximately 1975 -- there was a major frost in South America. Coffee became unavailable. Coffee prices went through the roof. At one point during the mid 70s, a can of coffee cost you \$5.00. Well that stayed for like a year, maybe a year and a half. When the prices finally settled back down, people had left the coffee market, and coupled that with the fact that today's generation doesn't drink coffee. We're losing those senior citizens who drink 16

cups a day. You know they don't now exist anymore. You're down to an occasional Starbucks in the morning. So you don't have the need for 47 million pounds a day.

Q: We just walked through a door that Dick has never been through before. We're standing in a large clerestoried room -- well lit, big open manufacturing floor. What was this space Dick?

A: It's affiliated with American Can. It's their top floor. I've never been here so I don't know what they did. It had to be some kind of processing area for the cans. Although, it couldn't have been very loud, because with us sitting behind them, I never heard any banging or machine parts going. So I really have no idea what they did up here. You'd have to have to get someone from American Can or -- so I don't know.

Q: What was the relationship between the two companies?

A: The relationship as I know it, was purely automated. American Can supplied us with cans -- we received them. Everything I ever saw was automation. I never saw a human being from

American Can. I don't know how many people worked here. I don't know who they were.

Q: But as Materials Manager, did you ever have to give forecasts for American Can? Did you share information back and forth. How did they know what to make?

A: We put our can orders in with American Can but not through this plant -- through like a facility in Hillside or something -- their main plant. And they would either ship the plate over here and it would be formed and sent over. I don't know how they did it. But I never had any interaction with the Hoboken facility.

Q: We've just descended the floor on to the third floor now. What happened here Dick?

A: Okay, this -- way back when -- when I first came to work in the late 50's, early 60's, we packed tea and it happened right here -- where we're standing. It didn't last long. It was maybe two years and then I guess there was no call for it -- so we did away with it. The rest of the stuff was storage areas for bins of coffee. You know we would grind it, put them in bins and roll them over to the dump stations. Coming out of the grinding area, they'd bin them up and then roll them

to the appropriate can line. This was a foreman's office behind us. This was a Quality Control sub-station -- basically a working area -- not heavily manned -- a few people.

Q: So you kept work-in-process inventory here for the canning process?

A: That's correct, as we roasted -- we roasted faster than they could pack. So they would roast it up and they'd drop it into these big aluminum rolling carts. They would roll them over those little plates you see in the floor, to the appropriate can line. They would empty it and they would go the hoppers down below. So there was always someone dumping.

Q: Anybody dump anything in the wrong bin?

A: Of course, over the years -- you know that's going to happen eventually. I mean we've had our accidents, but not that many -- typical.

Q: Did they get out the door?

A: We had a couple of incidents. I remember one joke. It was -- we had some -- some customer who found a rodent -- a bit of a rodent tail in a can of coffee, and it took us 16,000 cases of coffee from 8,000 on each side. That's how tight our Quality Control was. We pulled everything back. We dumped it all as rework.

Q: We've just entered the old locker room on the third floor. Dick seems to think there might have been as many as 600 lockers in this space. It's really dark. The room seems to extend forever and there is showers and toilets. It's kind of a scary place. What was this like?

A: This was where everybody in this section of the building would come on-shift/off-shift to change their clothes into their uniforms and guys would take breaks in here. There was always something happening. I was kibbutzing earlier -- it's dark and spooky, but I bet there's still a couple of people sleeping back here from the old days.

Okay, we're back. We've crossed the bridge and now we're over at the Soluble Processing side. This is where they percolated coffee and dried it to a powder form to be packed in glass jars. What we're looking at are holes in the building, obviously. But at one time -- you have to try and

visualize if you will -- a five story, stainless steel coffee pot -- a percolator. And they would fill it up with water and coffee, perk it to a fine coffee flavor and draw off the water and create this powder. It was a great operation. It really was. It wasn't labor intense -- maybe twelve to fourteen guys a shift would do it all -- and it was a lot of coffee, a lot of coffee.

Q: Nobody ever drank this coffee did they?

A: The instant? When it was finished or out of the sludge?

Q: Out of the sludge.

A: No, no we did lose two guys, two guys right there. Lost two guys -- went in the vat. That was during my tenure. They were good kids.

Q: They fell in?

A: Yeah, one guy fell in. The other guy tried to get him. We lost both of them.

Q: Hmm.

A: In the section we're in right now, we stored the soluble coffee, the powder -- in what looked like stainless steel refrigerators. They were big cubes and they held up to 700 pounds of this powder. Each one was labeled with the type, and the weight, the date it was made, the hour it was made -- so it could be tracked for quality purposes. And it was stored here awaiting need at the packing line. Okay, soluble coffee was never the predominant product, but again, when I started it was pretty good. It was about -- I'm going to say 25/30% of our business. Over time it shrunk for whatever reason. But it did shrink to the point where we did away with the operation in Hoboken because of the lack of demand -- probably in late 80's maybe.

Q: Just for everybody, soluble means what?

A: Water solvent coffee. It's a powder form. Add water to it and it becomes a liquid coffee.

Q: Instant coffee?

A: Yes.

Q: We just crossed over to the west side of the third floor now and we're looking at a big space. What was in here?

A: They stored raw materials -- the packing coffees -- the soluble coffees for use later on.

SIDE TWO (Tape One-Side B)

Q: Dick, inventory control must have been difficult here too then?

A: Oh absolutely -- we had to maintain the proper mix of product and to do that we had to ascertain what we had in stock. We would take an inventory at least once a month of all these -- what I call refrigerator boxes of instant coffee and count each one by product, by weight, by date -- so that we could ascertain that we had everything in hand. It was kind of tough during the warmer months because this is not an air-conditioned building. The soluble coffee would become tacky and like mud, and stick to your clothes and get in your nostrils. It was pretty nasty but it was something that we had to do. Then once a year, when the auditors came in from headquarters -- that's when you had to prove that everything that you said that was happening during the year.

You had to count everything and show them everything and bring them around and that was hard, that was hard.

Q: We're standing here behind a wire cage and we've crossed back over into -- I guess we're in Building 7. What are we looking at?

A: We're looking at the spaces that use to house two of the five soluble packing lines -- the instant coffee lines. On this side of the building, we only packed the smaller sizes -- the two ounce and the four ounce size. They were the small jars that we used for the individual person living alone. That's it.

Q: We're now back on the second floor of Building One and we're looking at what was the old packaging lines. Dick, can you tell us more about the operation in here?

A: Sure, we're facing north on the second floor and from this end, you would begin with the instant coffee lines. Three of our lines for soluble or instant coffee were located here. On these lines, we packed the larger sizes, anywhere from six ounces up to twelve ounces. The predominant jar in the Maxwell House business is a ten ounce coffee jar. We had two lines capable of running ten ounces and another line

that was a six ounce line predominantly. That's basically where all our product came from.

Q: So that's soluble packaging.

A: That's correct, that's correct. Now we're going past soluble packaging. We're going to go into what was can lines, the roasted end. Okay, now we're basically in where the can production took place. Can lines -- we had from the northern end of the building -- we had two, one-pound-can lines, which would do approximately 5-7,000 cases a shift of 24-pack. So they turned out a lot of tonnage. And then we had a two pound line, predominantly two pound cans only. And then we had a three pound line, predominantly three pound cans only. We were the major three pound can production in the United States. We did a significant amount of three pound can production.

Q: Was this a noisy place?

A: Absolutely -- the noise was specifically the rattling of the cans. All the cans came in here. The empty cans came in overhead on conveyor belts and they would -- try to picture -- I don't know -- 60,000 cans an hour crashing through overhead, banging into each other, stop and go and stop and go. But like anything else in life,

you become immune to it. You don't hear it after a while. You don't smell the coffee odor aroma. You don't hear the noise. You just go about your business.

Q: What happened when the canning line went down?

A: Oh that was -- that was important. When that happened, you had maintenance guys on sight. We had -- each department had at least four maintenance guys on sight every shift. So when the line went down, they were on it right away. And if they couldn't fix it, it usually resulted in overtime for the department.

Q: I imagine the coffee would pile up pretty quickly.

A: Yes, if you don't run the can line, the coffee piles up -- but again, we used at the end, what we call J.I.T -- Just In Time Planning and Control. We tried to keep one day's worth of inventory on hand -- whether it's finished goods or raw materials. So if a can line went down for a period of time, we had storage space. We weren't jammed to the gills. If it stayed down for a period, we had problems.

Q: What was it like to work in here?

A: It wasn't bad. Everybody knew everybody.

Everybody knew exactly what they had to get done. The most important thing that everyone had to keep focused on was the can lines had to keep running. The can lines never took a break. The can lines never had a change of shift. Only the people did. People would replace people. The can line would continue to run. The can line would not shut down unless it was a fixed shut down, like they only ran two shifts a day. So at midnight, the can line went to sleep and woke up at 7 or 8 o'clock the next morning and was back in business again. People came and went. The can lines kept working.

Okay, we're back in the front of the second floor -- at the Hudson Street side -- was our Quality Control Group where they did all the testing on all the products that were being made at that particular time. And in between, the section we passed through, was where we packed bags -- where we had a vacuum packed bag line that you see in the store -- now the brick pack. And we also made the small individual bags that you use in your Mr. Coffee Pots. I used to refer to them as Hessian bags because that was the make of the machine we used to make them, the different products.

Q: We're looking at a huge elevator here. I imagine this was part of the receiving and shipping operation?

A: Absolutely, that was a shipping operation. We would send materials down. If we needed to bring things up, we'd bring them up -- sometimes cans. We'd bring palettes of cans up if something went wrong with the conveyor belt, we'd have extra cans to hand feed the line to keep it going.

Q: These are the shipping bays. What went on in this room?

A: Both -- it was predominantly shipping, but we used some receiving here also. The nine bays we had -- three that were dedicated inbound, six were outbound. Trucks would roll in and out of here one an hour, one every half hour -- over the road, trucks -- local shuttles that would go out to our Clifton warehouse. But they loaded trucks like it was automatic -- throw them palettes right on there. Everything was scheduled. Everything was by the clock. You got here at a certain time -- you got loaded -- you were out of here. There were no cues waiting outside unless a can line broke down. Then you wound up with cues -- trucks waiting out in the street to come in -- but that didn't happen that often.

Q: How many guys worked in the Shipping Department?

A: Shipping and Receiving -- the combination -- they probably had the second largest workforce in the plant -- maybe 150 a shift. They had a lot of guys because Receiving and Shipping also includes green coffee. So you have anything coming in or going out had to do with Receiving and Shipping.

Q: Did they manage the flow of materials through the whole facility then also?

A: On the receiving end and the shipping end only.

Q: So once it was given to a particular production department, that department would take responsibility?

A: Absolutely -- they had the responsibility of doing their step in the process. When they were finished, they turned it over to the next department. Okay, behind the receiving and shipping docks, would be the storage areas where the palettes of finished goods would be stored awaiting their truck, their destination.

Q: How much coffee was in the plant at any given time for outbound shipping?

A: Up to a million pounds.

Q: That's a lot of coffee. We're back here at the current main entrance, looking out towards Sinartra Drive. The other way is back into the center of the plant, and looking at this place, the question that comes to my mind is, why is this closed? We had a facility that was perfectly designed. You could see that the material flowed right through the production process -- from the top to the bottom without interruption. All of the equipment was here -- the skilled labor -- it's close to one of the largest coffee drinking markets in the country. Why is this place closed?

A: Economics, pure and simple. Going back to what I had mentioned earlier -- on the discussion that in the mid 70's -- after that frost in South America, the coffee market just wasn't the same after that. But at that point and as of nine years ago, the Maxwell House Division had four coffee producing and packing plants -- one in California, one in New Jersey, one in Florida and one in Texas. It got to be a point where we had four facilities with all fixed costs, operating at less than 50% capacity. Management decided that they could curtail one

operation without giving away any capacity. They made a decision that it would be an east coast plant. So they had to make a financial decision whether it would be Jacksonville, Florida or Hoboken, New Jersey. The pencil-pushers -- whoever they were -- decided that it was the Hoboken plant that should be shut down for efficiency reasons and economic reasons only. The decision was made probably in late 1989. We were notified that we had about eighteen months. We ran right up through -- we physically closed the gates in June of 1992. I think the last can production was April of 1992.

The people that worked here -- a combination of things happened. They tried to relocate as many as they could. I think at the end, we had maybe five hundred people working. About sixty were relocated to different plants. Several managerial positions went back to headquarters. Many took retirement packages and forty fell into a hole that -- they got hurt. They didn't have the age to retire and didn't have the seniority to gather a pension. So they got hurt. Personally, I had come from headquarters and spent eleven years there, and I didn't want to go back. I didn't want to leave Hoboken. So I took a package. I packaged out and searched and found another job. It took a while, but I found another job and I'm still sending my kids to college.

Q: If the plant reopened tomorrow, would you come back?

A: I'd be the first one on line.

Q: Really?

A: Absolutely.

Q: What about this place should be remembered long after the building is gone, long after the people are gone. What should Hoboken remember about the Maxwell House Plant?

A: The relationship that it had with Hoboken. I can't speak for Lipton Tea or K&E or any of the other major entities that were in Hoboken, but I lived -- I was raised with Maxwell House. I know that they always, always were there for the city. Whatever they needed -- a couple of ambulances for the Volunteer Ambulance Corps -- coffee for whenever the people needed it -- made themselves available to help the city through fiscal and other type of problems -- maintained their own water stuff. There was no maintenance really supplied from the city and they were a major contributor to the Hoboken water costs. Remember, we used more water than the entire city combined in the day. So we gave

a lot back to the city. More importantly, we gave the employees of this plant an opportunity to stay in Hoboken, to buy property and to reside. There are still a lot of people living in Hoboken who can thank Maxwell House.

Q: Well Dick England, thank you very, very much for agreeing to interview today. This is a great contribution to the history of Hoboken and on behalf of the Friends of the Hoboken Public Library and the Hoboken Historical Society, I give you my very warm thank you.

A: Well thank you John. Thank you very much.