

**Oral History Interview**  
**Sam Dupree**  
**WH048**

(written transcript and digital audio)

On June 20, 2009, Sam DuPree was interviewed at the Independent Club of Colonia by Brenda Velasco at 11:15 A.M. In the room, Viola DuPree also was present.

*Brenda Velasco:* I have the good fortune of interviewing Sam DuPree, member of the Colonia community. For a number of years he was also the former Woodbridge Housing Authority Commissioner and just resigned (1997-2009). He's a member of the International Longshoreman Association; he had several titles. He's also part of the Atlantic Post District of the AFL/CIO but we'll go into all his titles later. I'm now going to turn it over to Sam to introduce him.

**1. Identify individual-name, section, date of birth.**

*Sam DuPree:* My name is Sam DuPree. My birth date is February 22, 1935.

**2. How long have you lived in the Colonia section of Woodbridge?**

I have lived in Colonia for forty-two years.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, because you moved here, Viola said, you moved here in 1966 so it's about forty-three years you've lived in Colonia.

*Sam DuPree:* Right.

**3. Why did you or your family originally move to the Colonia?**

Well, the environment that I lived in in Elizabeth wasn't conducive to the way I wanted my family and my children to be raised; mainly the school system. I was looking for somewhere for a better life at that time.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you were married at that time?

*Sam DuPree:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* But originally you grew up in Georgia, didn't you?

*Sam DuPree:* No, I grew up in Elizabeth. I left Georgia when I was nine years old and I came to Elizabeth, New Jersey.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so you had grown up in Elizabeth. What area did you live in Elizabeth?

*Sam DuPree:* I lived off Fifth and Broadway. I was in John Marshall School #20 of Elizabeth elementary school.

*Brenda Velasco:* So by the time you moved here you were married to Viola.

*Sam DuPree:* I was.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, and how many children did you have at that time?

*Sam DuPree:* When we moved here we had three children, and that's all: three children.

*Brenda Velasco:* So your family was formed by the time you moved here.

*Sam DuPree:* Yes, right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you came because you liked the school system and a better life.

*Sam DuPree:* Better life for my family. When we moved here my son used to get great marks in the school system because he would tell the teacher she got a nice dress on and she looked good and she's this and that and she gave him good marks. But he wasn't ready so I knew he needed a good structured school system. So I checked and found out that this was a good area in the schools. That's why I purchased a home.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and what street do you live on?

*Sam DuPree:* Cedar.

*Brenda Velasco:* Cedar, okay, alright. That also goes into Question #4.

#### **4. What did you like about living in the Colonia section of Woodbridge?**

*Brenda Velasco:* What did you like about living in Colonia-because of the school system and the area?

*Sam DuPree:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you had a one family house. Did you also have a one family house in Elizabeth?

*Sam DuPree:* I had a two family house in Elizabeth which I still do.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and then we go to the important part of this interview, that this is the Independent Club of Colonia.

#### **5. Independent Club of Colonia**

##### **a. How did you first learn of this Club?**

##### **b. Why did you become a member?**

*Sam DuPree:* When I first moved here some of my neighbors advised me to "don't bother with it", "they're a bunch of nosy this and that". And then some of them said, that the only way to help the neighborhood, to protect it, is to have organizations within the neighborhood that want good government and a good place for the children to grow up. So I got involved in it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well we're glad you did.

*Sam DuPree:* I'm glad too.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it's only two blocks away from your house, very convenient.

##### **c. How long were you a member? What years?**

*Brenda Velasco:* What year did you become a member because you moved here in 1996.

*Sam DuPree:* Well that the year I became a member.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, right away?

*Sam DuPree:* Right away.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and how long were you a member, forever?

*Sam DuPree:* From 1966 until now.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, forty-three years.

*Sam DuPree:* I'm staying.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright and how much was the dues?

*Sam DuPree:* I tell you the truth, I don't recall. I know it was about forty-five or fifty dollars a year or something like that.

**d. Did you hold any offices?**

*Sam DuPree:* I was president for a couple of years.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you recall the years?

*Sam DuPree:* What year was I president, Viola.

*Viola DuPree:* Oh, I'm sorry I don't remember.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, we can look that up.

*Sam DuPree:* I'll get that.

*Brenda Velasco:* We'll get that later because I know you wife always has everything on hand.

*Sam DuPree:* Yes.

**e. What services did the Independent Club of Colonia provide for you and your family?**

*Sam DuPree:* Well we were instrumental in doing that area when I first came to that. Some families had a problem of existing and we normally helped those families and some of the larger families had a problem just existing. Without any fanfare or anything like that we, as a community, used to get together and help.

*Brenda Velasco:* When you say you helped them, did you give them money?

*Sam DuPree:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Money and food?

*Sam DuPree:* Money and food.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because this was in the '60s and early '70s then.

*Sam DuPree:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And times weren't always that good especially if you had a large family of fourteen kids or eight kids; times were tough.

*Sam DuPree:* Nobody was really flourishing then some needed to help out and we did that.

*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, so this was a great social network.

*Sam DuPree:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* Social organization of fraternal organization.

**f. What were some memorable events or activities that you recall?**

*Sam DuPree:* Well, voter registration was one of the main things that we used to, you know, try to get people involved and whenever there was a crisis they tried to, what was they trying to do, they wanted to build a liquor store. Excuse me, they wanted to build not a liquor store but a tavern over across the bridge and I remember Mrs. the big house on the corner, what was her name, Mrs. Jones. Mrs. Jones had that big brick house over there and they wanted to put a liquor store, a tavern, up there on Inman Avenue.

*Brenda Velasco:* Which would be a bar servicing alcohol and everything.

*Sam DuPree:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Sam DuPree:* And Mrs. Jones raised cane and she advised everybody. We stopped that tavern from being up there because I remember the words she said, "in all of our homes here we got a tavern and we don't need a public tavern up there on that street and they knocked it out".

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so organizations did count then?

*Sam DuPree:* We knocked that tavern out there and they wanted to put it on Inman Avenue up there, now it's Ace Hardware in that area.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Sam DuPree:* We knocked that out.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.

*Sam DuPree:* Mrs. Jones said: "I've liked next door, upstairs and downstairs from taverns in Newark all my life and we don't want one out here; we don't need one". And that's how we knocked it out.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were very successful though.

*Sam DuPree:* Yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And if it hadn't been for this organization you wouldn't have coalesced into a force.

*Sam DuPree:* That's right.

*Brenda Velasco:* Were there any other activities, parties that you recall?

*Sam DuPree:* We used to have, at the firehouse, our annual get together for the neighborhoods introducing the new people that come in. We did more than then we do now. Everybody is going to be snobbier now. They don't want to get involved now. They've left Newark and Elizabeth and now they've got it made so they don't want to get involved today. That's what is happening now with this organization. We had it packed in here because everybody had issues. But now everybody left Elizabeth and left Potter's Crossing and came here; now they got it made. No you don't have it made but, it's still, like I shudder sometimes when I see this place here. If it wasn't for this place we would have half the houses here. They would have put everything here but we fought it. We wanted to keep it as a community. But now everybody's come out of Newark or Jersey City and now they got it made. They've got a house and they don't want to be involved with the clubhouse. They don't want to be involved with it.

*Brenda Velasco:* What we're seeing now is that the younger generation.....

*Sam DuPree:* That's the only reason that I continue to be here because I see them getting new blood and people are civic minded. They're coming in now and that's the only reason that I came back because I was discouraged with it because, you know, everybody got it made now. They've left Elizabeth and Jersey City and Newark and they got another piece of the world now and nothing else matters.

*Brenda Velasco:* Well, it's a nice one family area and several streets here and it's a very quiet neighborhood.

*Sam DuPree:* Oh, yes.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you've got the Colonia Middle School right across the street from here. And you explained why membership declined. People didn't feel they had issues.....

*Sam DuPree:* No, they got it made now. Elizabeth or Jersey City, wherever they come from now they got there one little place out there and they got it now, here you don't.

**6. While you lived in Colonia did you experience any significant happenings- construction, accidents, sports events, riots, discrimination?**

*Brenda Velasco:* Because you moved to Colonia in about 1966. A lot of these houses were built when you moved here?  
*Sam DuPree:* They were beginning to be built.  
*Brenda Velasco:* Okay.  
*Sam DuPree:* They had just framed out my house when I moved here.  
*Brenda Velasco:* And how many houses were on your block when you moved here?  
*Sam DuPree:* When I moved here there were the Jones, the Sadlers; there might have been eleven houses on my block when I moved here.  
*Brenda Velasco:* And how many are there now?  
*Sam DuPree:* About twenty-two.  
*Brenda Velasco:* So it really expanded. Did you have Colonia Middle School?  
*Sam DuPree:* It was there.  
*Brenda Velasco:* It was there, okay. So your children.....  
*Sam DuPree:* Went there.  
*Brenda Velasco:* Right across the street.  
*Sam DuPree:* Right.  
*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, and that was very convenient and the high school is not too far from you either.  
*Sam DuPree:* No, it's right over the Parkway here.  
*Brenda Velasco:* What elementary school did your children attend then?  
*Sam DuPree:* That school there.  
*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, Evergreen.  
*Sam DuPree:* Evergreen.  
*Brenda Velasco:* Evergreen which is now our senior center and eventually a youth center.  
*Sam DuPree:* Right.

**7. What do you like about Colonia today?**

*Brenda Velasco:* Because you haven't moved out.  
*Sam DuPree:* The lifestyle.  
*Brenda Velasco:* What do you mean the lifestyle?  
*Sam DuPree:* It's quiet, convenient and close to Elizabeth, my home.  
*Brenda Velasco:* You can't leave Elizabeth, can you?  
*Sam DuPree:* That's right; I would die. Well I have property in Elizabeth so I have to keep that in shape.  
*Brenda Velasco:* Alright, and you've been involved not only within the Union Organization within the African American Organization because you were also part of a Martin Luther King.....  
*Sam DuPree:* Yes, we organized Martin Luther King's birthday and we were responsible for making it a holiday. I joined in the Martin Luther King's social change in Atlanta and we used to go there every year. We used to participate in everything. I've been in his home, Addy James home. In fact, I've got pictures at home in his basement, Martin Luther King's basement. We took pictures and at his daddy's church at all of that. We used to go there every year.

*Brenda Velasco:* People don't realize that it was a struggle to get recognition for Martin Luther King's birthday as a federal holiday (1986). It didn't come easy. Did you experience any discrimination when you moved to Colonia?

*Sam DuPree:* I don't think I did because where we lived, over here, it was new ground there and there was maybe three white people who lived on that particular street that we had and we didn't have a problem or anything. I've got beautiful neighbors who have been there and never had any problem.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's one of the successes then of Colonia.

*Sam DuPree:* Yes, no problems.

**8. Do you still have any family members living in Colonia today?**

*Samuel DuPree:* Yes, my daughter, my granddaughter and my grandson, when he's home.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and this is your grandson, Rashid (DuPree-Harris), who just became a doctor.

*Sam DuPree:* Yes, he is.

*Brenda Velasco:* And at Vanderbilt University.

*Sam DuPree:* Right.

*Brenda Velasco:* And just recently got married.

*Sam DuPree:* Recently got married.

*Brenda Velasco:* Congratulation to you; that's good news.

**9. Are there any other stories or events that you would like to discuss?**

*Samuel DuPree:* Well it's a good place to live and it's close to my place in Elizabeth, which I spend a lot of time there, but I like it out here. The people are nice. You know you have some grumps but we manage.

*Brenda Velasco:* You've got a lovely house. I've been in your house and your backyard for your grandson's graduation from college. So congratulations to you and thank you for the service to the community through Woodbridge Housing Authority. Both you and I served on the Board as well as just being a resident of Colonia and keeping alive a dream.

*Sam DuPree:* Thank you.

*Brenda Velasco:* Thank you very much.

*Sam DuPree:* Okay dear.