

City of Alexandria  
Office of Historic Alexandria  
*Alexandria Legacies*  
**Oral History Program**



**Project Name:** *Alexandria Legacies- Del Ray/Potomac Centennial*

**Title:** *Interview with Norman Hatch*

**Date of Interview:** *March 20, 2008*

**Location of Interview:** *Mr. Hatch's Home on Mount Ida Avenue in Alexandria, Virginia*

**Interviewer:** *Dave Mills*

**Transcriber:** *Dave Mills*

**Abstract:** *Norman (Norm) Hatch was born in Boston, Massachusetts, on March 2, 1921. He came to Alexandria in 1943, settling in Presidential Gardens. After World War II he and his wife Lois moved to Old Town upon purchasing a 1797 house on St. Asaph Street. Five years later they moved to Aldie, Virginia, for a brief period of time before moving to the Mount Ida/Del Ray section of Alexandria in 1951. Norm was a cinematographer and a federal administrator in photography for the Marine Corps and the Department of Defense. He was President of Photo Press International, Ltd., in Alexandria for more than twenty years, producing editorial/commercial photography for foreign publishers.*

**This transcript has been edited by the interviewee and may not reflect the audio-recording exactly.**

**Table of Contents/Index**

**Tape: *Tape 1***

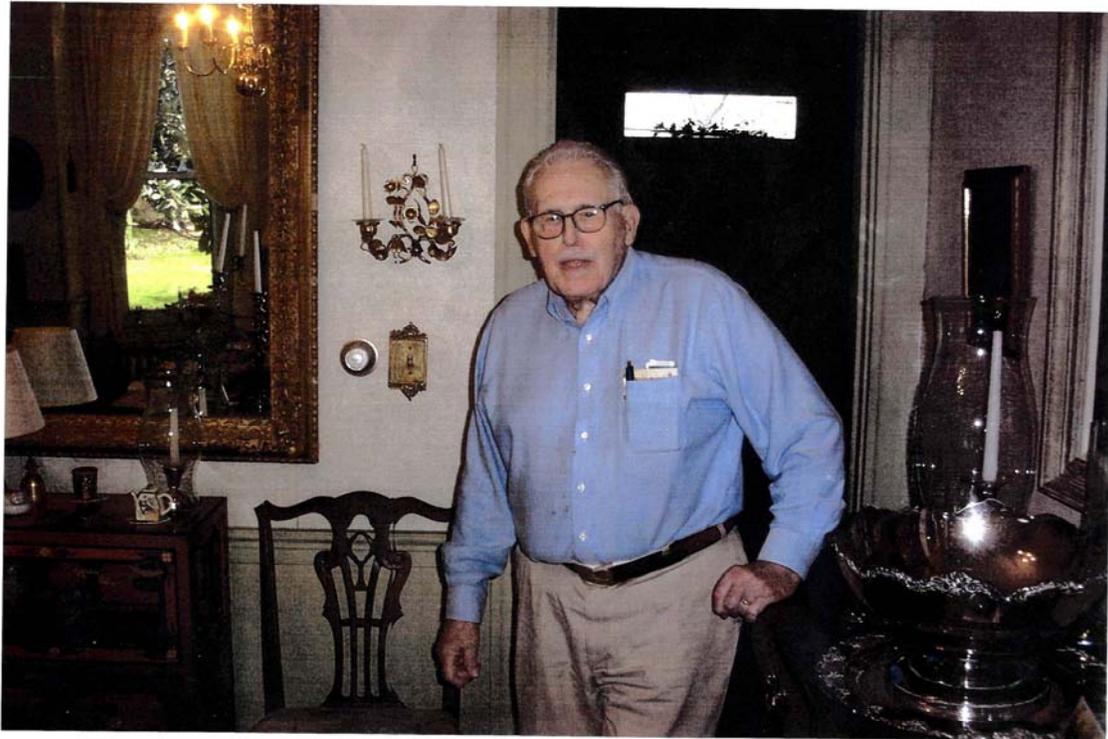
**Side: *Side 1***

<b>Minute</b>	<b>Counter</b>	<b>Page</b>	<b>Topic</b>
10:35		3	Interviewer's Introduction
10:37	104	4	Household and Neighborhood
11:07		5	Del Ray Businesses
11:23	329	7	[End of Side 1]

**Tape: *Tape 2***

**Side: *Side 1***

<b>Minute</b>	<b>Counter</b>	<b>Page</b>	<b>Topic</b>
11:30		7	The Del Ray Community



**Norm Hatch at Home 2008**

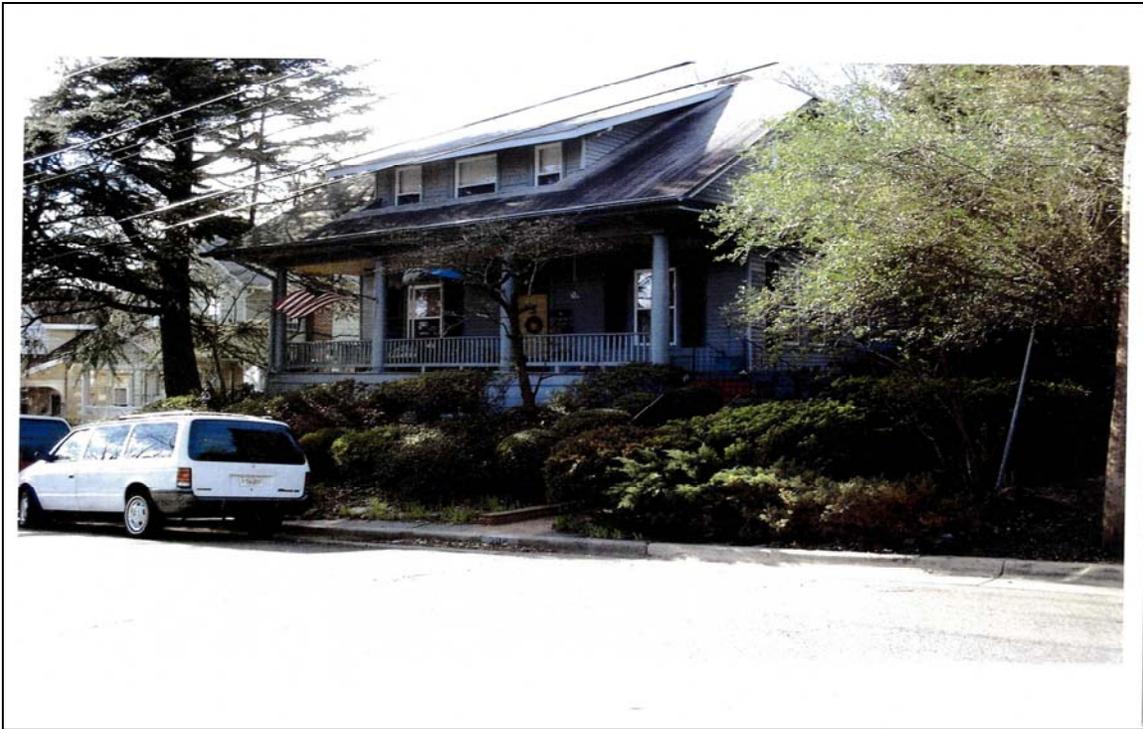
*(Credit: Dave Mills for Alexandria Archaeology)*

### **Interviewer's Introduction**

Dave Mills:

Upon arriving at the Hatch residence, Norm kindly welcomed me inside, where I was instantly treated as a guest. Norm's house was originally built in 1902 for the Supervisor of Potomac Yards. It is one of the very first homes built in Del Ray. Portions of the home's inner structure consist of railroad lumber from Potomac Yards. According to a neighbor, the house still had a well and a cistern (which Norm was able to locate) back in 1935. The house is immaculate both inside and out. A garden of large boxwoods, which were planted as seedlings by the Hatches when they moved in, now dominates the backyard. Finally, we went down to Norm's office in the basement, where the interview was conducted. He had an incredibly sophisticated set-up with a computer and many well-organized file cabinets overflowing into another large room beneath the front porch. When we took a break to change the recorder tapes, Norm checked his e-mail; he had 38 messages!! Since Norm didn't arrive in Mount Ida/Del Ray until 1951, the interview touched briefly on the topic of household, focusing mainly on the topics

of neighborhood, Del Ray businesses, and the Del Ray community. Whenever I would mention “Del Ray” during the interview, Norm would laugh and correct me by saying “Mount Ida.”



**Mr. Hatch's Home on Mount Ida Avenue, 2008**  
*(Credit Dave Mills for Alexandria Archaeology)*

**Household and Neighborhood**

D.M.:	When did you arrive in Del Ray?
Norm Hatch:	I arrived in Mount Ida. It wasn't Del Ray in 1951.
D.M.:	What brought you into the neighborhood, originally?
Norm Hatch:	After living in Aldie, Virginia, for a short period of time we wanted to move back in close to the City. I was working in the Navy Annex and then later at the Pentagon for 23 years.
D.M.:	Did people have gardens?
Norm Hatch:	When we moved in, being in a neighborhood of single-family houses, just about everybody had a garden of some sort. I raised tomatoes, cucumbers, and my wife grew a variety of flowers. Most of the property was quite old. My house was built in 1902, and the house across the street in 1921. That was a common age range across the area.
D.M.:	Did people around the neighborhood have pets or animals?
Norm Hatch:	There were lots of pets around, especially dogs. We had two dogs at one time and eventually down to one. This was a family neighborhood. You

	generally knew everybody around, which doesn't happen today. We are now one of the oldest not only in the sense of age but time of residence because of so many new people moving in. A lot of these folks have very young children or no children at all, so there isn't a whole lot of interaction.
D.M.:	Did you ever have any extended family in your household such as parents or in-laws in the 1950s?
Norm Hatch:	My mother-in-law lived with us at that particular point in time.
D.M.:	Did you have any favorite neighbors?
Norm Hatch:	They were all equally treated. The people on either side of us and across the street—our relationship was generally pretty good. There were never any street fights or anything of that nature going on. Everybody was busy at work during the day, so people were generally too tired to really do too much. It is still basically that way today. There were more women at home in those days, which was good because there was always someone to keep an eye on the property. Today most people work.
D.M.:	What games did kids play?
Norm Hatch:	I had a basketball hoop up on the garage. Right behind us up on the hill there is a church [on Russell Road] that used to be St. Stephens School. We sent our son over there for intramural sports. When my son was growing up he had three friends; they were all sons of Army colonels on active duty, which gives you a sense of the transience factor in the neighborhood. My son had taken what is known as the Marine Corps "Red Book," which gave basic instructions on how to march, shoot a machine gun, dig fox holes, etc., and he dug fox holes into the hillside up by St. Stephens and asked me to come up to inspect the holes. All three of the Army colonels' sons enlisted in the Marine Corps and went to Vietnam. My son, who had been with me a few times at Camp Lejeune when I was taking photographs, I dressed him up in uniform and told him to salute everything that moves and act like he knew what he was doing. After trudging through all of the mud he decided that wasn't for him so he joined the Air Force.
<b>Del Ray Businesses</b>	
D.M.:	Looking back to 1951, can you describe the major changes such as major landmarks like grocery stores, restaurants, and other businesses? Did you work at or own any businesses in Del Ray?
Norm Hatch:	One of the big changes right here in the residential section is the number of very large additions on homes, along with some tear-downs to make room for "McMansions." The 1920s was when most of the [original] building took place. Some of it was grand and some of it was very basic. There were Sears & Roebuck houses, all for the cost of about \$2,000, although you had to erect them yourself. They were delivered by rail.

The trolley existed on what is now the grass median strip between North and South Commonwealth Avenue. It was built originally for workers to get into Washington, D.C.

The main drag—Mt. Vernon Avenue—was pretty quiet. There wasn't as much commerce as there was in earlier days. Across the street from the post office [1908 Mt. Vernon Avenue] stood Doc Carneal's Drug Store. That was sort of the center point of town because everybody needed drugs.

There was a restaurant called the Blue Fox at the site of the recently closed Los Amigos [1905 Mt. Vernon Avenue]. The Blue Fox, which was around for about 23 years, was owned and operated by Bruce Morris. It was the typical bar and restaurant for the working man. There was a shoe store next to Doc Carneal's which was new. There was a large store selling only women's clothing that occupied almost the entire 2300 block called the Scott Shop. For an area that was considered middle- to low-class, it had very up-scale clothing. People came from Old Town to shop there. It had all of the big name brands. The owners eventually closed up and retired.

The Tommy Papageorge Family, who had a local restaurant history, opened the Snuggery, a very nice family restaurant across from the post office in the old Doc Carneal's Place. Then the Evening Star took over. Next door for a short period of time there was a grocery store run by a Korean gentleman who was shot and killed. That was the only serious encounter of crime. I don't remember anything else like it.

Further down the street, heading North, at 2419 Mt. Vernon Avenue [present location of the Caboose Restaurant] was where I had my first office—I rented the first floor. Prior to my arrival, the City was using it as offices. Prior to World War II there were offices on the second floor, stores on the first floor, and a bowling alley in the basement. When I was there, the upstairs consisted of 30 to 40 efficiency apartments because of World War II. Besides my office there was a venetian blind company. We were the only two inhabitants of the building. The immediate area of Mt. Vernon Avenue became kind of a no-man's-land.

Mac's Place opened up across the street from my office (of 11 years) at 2419 Mt. Vernon. This restaurant served many working-class people such as truckers and laborers. There were some police raids due to episodes such as fights and people not paying their bill.

There was an interesting cinema on Mt. Vernon Avenue. The Palm Theater did well. On Saturdays it played typical serials. It was owned by an acquaintance of mine who was a film editor over at the Naval Photographic Center. He lived upstairs. His wife was the ticket taker.

During World War II the City actually encouraged people to rent out rooms in their homes because of the high demand for housing. As long

	<p>as you owned the house you were grand-fathered in at the end of the war. The lady across the street, after her husband died, rented out the second and third floors. There was some trouble over there for a period of time. After she sold the house rooms continued to be rented. There was a conflict of interest. The City made the new owners revert the house back to a single family dwelling.</p>
<p><b>The Del Ray Community</b></p>	
<p>D.M.:</p>	<p>Were there different ethnic groups living in Del Ray?</p>
<p>Norm Hatch:</p>	<p>We hadn't even heard the word "ethnic" in a sense, but there were African Americans who resided in the general area. Generally speaking, there was no influx of Asians or Hispanics—that's only been something in recent years. The blacks have pretty much stayed the same, more concentrated over the years.</p>
<p>D.M.:</p>	<p>Was the area always called Del Ray? If not, what other names did it have? Were Potomac or St. Elmo used?</p>
<p>Norm Hatch:</p>	<p>The community was not as big back in 1951 as it is today. The Mount Ida Association eventually died on the vine. With people working it was hard to get the "civic psyche" going. The Town of Potomac was created early on because the people in the general area thought that they weren't being recognized by the City of Alexandria. There was a considerable fight at City Hall as to whether or not to recognize Potomac, which would have its own government. Eventually they did get established, but later on Alexandria annexed it back. Like everything else, the talk of creating and having a town is nice.</p> <p>In the late 1950s, when I began serving the Del Ray Association as a board member, it became more formidable in its operations. There was a younger interest. People with school-aged children started getting involved. The Association would designate a person to watch City Council and another to watch the passing of laws. The only firehouse in Del Ray also had been the City Hall for the Town of Potomac. There were two banks on the street, both of which are still there.</p> <p>When I was on the board we went through several renovation ideas for the Del Ray section, so to speak. One was to refurbish Mt. Vernon Avenue to draw people. There was opposition because of big box stores and shopping centers. Landmark "one-stop-shop" Center created an immediate evacuation of the area. So the need to shop along Mt. Vernon Avenue became negligible—everyone had cars and shopping centers were easier. Consequently, plans were denied at generating a public awareness of the Avenue. Many newcomers had never even been on the Avenue. Shortly thereafter, antique stores and arts and crafts came in. We started activities such as a one-day Oktoberfest [been running at least 10-15 years]. That particular fair is now one of the biggest gatherings in the metropolitan area. Also, started by business organizations that tie in</p>

	with civic associations—the Turkey Trot, which draws up to 5,000 participants.
D.M.:	What are some of your favorite Del Ray memories?
Norm Hatch:	[laughs] I don't live in Del Ray. I live in Mount Ida! I even reminded our Mayor, who lived right behind me, that we live in Mount Ida not Del Ray. It has been a very pleasant area to live in. There has been very little or no crime. Accessibility to everything you want is easy, including the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., and Old Town Alexandria. Like they say in business and real estate, "location location location," and we have got the location.
D.M.:	What do you think of the upcoming centennial celebration for Mount Ida? Will you be participating in events?
Norm Hatch:	It's a great idea if you don't keep beating people over the head with constant story material that they forget about you. Celebrating anniversaries is great. It gives—especially new people—the realization that there used to be a town here, and it attracts other people in. Other communities around the area have followed our line. With all of the improvements, we have had good write-ups in the newspapers. It is touted as one of the best places to go in the metropolitan area. There is a one-night affair each month on the Avenue during the summer where stores stay open later, and they get a good turn-out.
D.M.:	Finally, what do you think of or how do you feel about Del Ray today?
Norm Hatch:	Over the past 57 years—yes, there are struggles—loss of income from housing, etc., but the Civic Association has its representatives attend various public meetings held by the City. We have become a strong influence, and the City pays attention to us versus an individual. With town involvement watching over building rights, you know you have someone who is helping and protecting you. Our City representatives in a sense are lobbyists for Del Ray. Del Ray expanded itself, but it was a case of benign neglect of other areas that had associations that fell apart. At one time they projected themselves up to Russell Road and down to Monroe Avenue. There was even projection over to the rail yard, Potomac Yards. It was built by people who lived in Del Ray. It's been a nice ride in a sense. I try to get long-term residents and newcomers interested in joining the Association. The answer has been somewhat negative. They can't seem to see anything in it. However, the improvements along Mt. Vernon Avenue have caused a great resurgence in local activity.
D.M.:	That concludes our interview. [End]