

Title Page & Abstract

An Interview with Donald Taft

Part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library
Community Stories – Rochester Oral History project

Interview # CR-A-L-2019-100

Donald G. Taft, a descendant of the historic Taft family who were early Rochester settlers, was interviewed on the date listed below as part of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library's *Community Stories-Rochester* Oral History project.

Interview dates & location:

Dates: Nov 7 & 14, 2019 Location: Le Peep Restaurant, Springfield, Illinois

Interview Format: Digital audio

Interviewer: Carole Strick, ALPL volunteer

Transcription by: _____

Edited by: _____

Transcript
being processed

Total Pages: _____ Total Time: 0:49 + 0:38 / 0.81 + 0.63 = 1.44 hrs.

Session 1: Early life through his experiences at the Heritage House in the 1980s

Session 2: Life and career as a restrainer after the 1980s, and Le Peep Restaurant

Accessioned into the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Archives on May 12, 2021.

The interviews are archived at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library in Springfield, Illinois.

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Abstract

Donald Taft, *Community Stories-Rochester*, CR-A-L-2019-100

Biographical Information/Overview of Interview: Donald G. Taft was born on January 2, 1933 in Springfield, Illinois. He was one of four sons born to Delbert G and Virginia Taft who lived in Rochester, Illinois. Don's great-grandfather, William Woods Taft, (b. 1802) was one of the original settlers of Rochester, coming to the area from Vermont in about 1840. Grandfather Henry built the family home, Maplehurst, in about 1902, which was modeled after Southern homes and included large pillars that were very expensive. The house is a landmark in the Rochester community today and remains in the family. Donald's father operated the Taft Dairy in the old WCTU building in Rochester. and his mother worked in the dairy as well, selling the dairy products and other food items. Donald's parents lived in the family homestead on Rochester Road before moving to an apartment in the WCTU building and finally to a home on Mill Street where they lived until the 1980s. Don graduated from Rochester High School in 1951. He attended Bradley University from 1951 until 1955, graduating with a business degree. While there, he was in the Air Force ROTC program. Upon graduation he was commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and was expecting to enter active duty but did not due to the end of the Korean War. He still received extensive pilot training which led to a profound interest in flying. During his lifetime, Taft owned many planes, including a T-33 jet, a helicopter, and several passenger planes. He never returned to Rochester to live, instead settling in Springfield.

Don has been as an entrepreneur in several venues, from the family farm to drive-through dairy stores to restaurants. One of the popular restaurants in Springfield was the Taft dairy/restaurant on Cook Street across from the post office. Don owned many restaurants in his career, including a well-known eatery, the Heritage House, which was a large smorgasbord facility that finally closed in 2004. He currently owns and operates the Le Peep restaurant in Springfield. Though not a career, Don continued to fly until a few years ago after suffering a TIA (transient ischemic attack). Before that, however, he flew many humanitarian trips helping patients travel. He played an active role in a group called Life-Line Flights.

Don has been blessed with two marriages. He was married to his first wife Rita for fifty-two years. They had three children, Jo Ellen, Donald Jnr and Jeffrey. After her death in 2010, Don reconnected with a childhood sweetheart, Nancy, whom he married in 2013. After six years of marriage Don claims to still be on his honeymoon. He has a strong Christian (Methodist) faith.

Subject Headings/Key Words: Heritage House; Rochester, Illinois; Springfield, Illinois; Bradley University; Air Force ROTC; Cessna T-33; Cessna L-39; Le Peep Restaurant; Life-Line Flights

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