

**Charles Watts**  
**Former Castle Hills Resident**  
**Route 9 Oral History Project**

Interviewed by: Michael Emmons, Center for Historic Architecture and Design, University of Delaware

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**Abstract**

Charles Watts lived in Castle Hills from 1958 until 1970 or 1971, when he left to join the Air Force. His parents purchased a new home in the development and moved their family of nine there from Southbridge when he was four years old. Watts has lived along the Route 9/New Castle Avenue corridor for most of his life. In addition to Castle Hills and Southbridge, he has lived in Collins Park and Mobile Home Village. He is a current resident of Swanwyck Estates.

In this interview, Charles Watts recalls growing up in Castle Hills, characterizing the subdivision as a big step up in house and yard, neighborhood, and education from their small Southbridge rowhouse with its tiny back yard. During his childhood years, Watts remembers Castle Hills having a “Leave It to Beaver” feeling. He describes the sense of community he felt there, how people took care of their property, how kids played outside, and how people watched over each other’s kids. The physical and social focal points of the community were Castle Hills Elementary School and the baseball field at James Rogers Park, with a playground and regular dances held at the former and neighborhood events as well as Little League and Babe Ruth baseball games held at the latter. Neighborhood kids would also congregate to play in Rogers Woods, where, among other activities, they would pay Mrs. Rogers 10 cents to ice skate in the pond behind her home, Boothhurst Mansion. Watts and other neighborhood children would also ride their bikes along the railroad tracks, sometimes venturing to Battery Park in Old New Castle, where they would eat a picnic lunch. As Watts grew into his teenage years, he recalls the formation of gangs in many of the neighborhoods that would often fight with each other. Watts was a member of Castle Hills’ gang, Roxeter, which had a junior counterpart, Little Roxeter. He describes some racial unrest in the later 1960s.

Watts describes Castle Hills as an almost entirely white neighborhood and included several families of Polish or Italian heritage. Many residents had moved to Castle Hills from Wilmington as well as Maryland—especially the Elkton area—and West Virginia. Watts recalls that many of those from West Virginia lived in the northwest section of the neighborhood (encircled by Midfield Road), which had a more country feel to it. Other residents referred to the residents of that section of the neighborhood as “Castle Hillbillies.” He remembers that many of Castle Hills’ residents held jobs at General Motors, Chrysler, and DuPont, or in the construction of the Delaware Memorial Bridge. The homes, which he describes as “starter homes,” attracted many younger families. The schools in the area were fed by predominantly white neighborhoods and a few very small Black neighborhoods. He recalls that the neighborhood remained white while he lived there and for quite a while after he left. Referring to the Route 9 neighborhoods, he characterizes as white “anything south of the overpass,” with the exception of the Buttonwood neighborhood. Now,

he says, all the area neighborhoods are integrated. There was some distinction in the makeup of the Route 9 neighborhoods: Swanwyck, Watts says, was the more “elite neighborhood” when he was growing up, while Collins Park was “redneck-ish.”

Architecturally, Watts recalls that the houses were fairly uniform throughout the entire development, with no major variations in the size or design of the houses. Almost all were built on concrete slab foundations, though a small section of the neighborhood—on Roxeter Road and Chelwynne Road—had full basements. The houses had sizeable attics that most people utilized for storage. Watts’ father built a large kitchen addition on their house, which helped accommodate their large family, and Watts remembers that many other families seemed to build kitchen additions shortly afterwards. The neighborhood mostly had carports, with few people building garages, though his father extended the driveway further into the backyard to make more space. Watts remembers playing basketball there with his brother. His father also built a large patio with a big, green awning, and he remembers his mother gathering there with neighborhood women in the evenings.

Towards the end of the interview, Watts describes his residency in Mobile Home Village in the mid 1980s, calling it “a rough stay there.” He also briefly recalls the Baldton neighborhood (within the corporate limits of New Castle) south of Castle Hills.