FINAL COPY OF TAPED INTERVIEW WITH HENRY FORSTER
INTERVIEW OF HENRY F. FORSTER
by
William Gordon
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Mr. Forster is one of the longest residents of Westfield. He was
born in 1892.

Q: Mr. Forster, tell us about how you came to live in Westfield.

A: My Dad had relatives who lived in Westfield and we had been dissatisfied
with the way things were in Maplewood so Dad had Charles Crickenberger
build him a house on Academy Place which is now Temple Place in Westfield
and then there were two other houses built shortly after -- Mr. Collins
owned one on the corner and on the other side of our house was a house
owned by the Coles. They were all built about the same time and I
attended the Westfield schools and...

Q: Mr. Forster, you mentioned a picture in Cappie Smith's Real Estate
Window that listed all the older residents of Westfield. Tell us about
that.

A: All I remember about the picture in his window was that I noticed that
he said that one of the oldest residents in Westfield was the Forster
family and there were four generations of Henry Forster's family living
in Westfield at the present time. And that was so. There were four
generations of us at that time when I saw the article in the window.

Q: The house on Academy Place or Temple Place you moved into in 1895,
I think you told me, and lived there for most of the time that I was a
boy around there. Lincoln School was right across the way from that.
Originally there was a school there before Lincoln School?

A: I don't recall another one before Lincoln School. When we came there,
the Lincoln School was supposed to be the academy or high school. But
my brother went to school there in the primary grades and I never went
there myself but went a few years later to the Prospect Street School.

Q: That's the old Prospect Street School? What grades did you go to in
that school?

A: Very young grades, very young, like kindergarten or first or second
grade. And then we moved over shortly after to the new Washington
School which was built over where--Orchard Street?

Q: There on, yeah, Orchard and Walnut.

A: Walnut Street, yeah.

Q: You mentioned you had a photograph of the Washington Street School and
then were showing me how the primary or the junior grades were on the
first floor. Tell us more about that.
Well, the junior grades were all on the first floor. The eighth grade was towards Walnut Street and then upstairs was the high school, four different grades of high school and the lavatory on the second floor.

Who was the principal then?

J.J. Savitz.

In your album, Mr. Forster, you had an old post card that showed Mindowaskin Pond. It wasn't called that then. What was it called?

Well, the post card that I showed you called it Traynor's Pond and that evidently was because Patrick Traynor who had the feed store down on Elm Street had bought the house on the hill where the town library and police headquarters now stand. But the house, really, the pond really belonged to Clarks originally and Addison H. Clark's family was known to be the owners of that section for a long time. It was Clark's Pond always when I was a little fellow.

Could you swim there?

Oh, yes. They used to swim there and they used to skate there every year and it had a very nice, clean bank situation where you could go and sit down and have your lunch. It was very attractive. A lot of people used to spend time there eating lunch and skating and swimming and whatever it might be that came into their minds. They did quite a bit of fishing.

Do you recall if they had some movies with Mary Pickford in them that were presumed to have been taken there? Do you recall that?

Well, I don't recall the pictures of Mary Pickford being taken at the pond but I do remember being on Spring Street one day and Mary Pickford came into a little old house with a fence around it and terrible old, dilapidated-looking home and she went into that as a little old, little, poor little girl to visit her old grandmother. Now, what the picture was all about I don't recall now, but it was one of these poor little girls going into this little old house and that's all I know about. That must have had a name, of course.

When you were a boy, in addition to skating and swimming, did you get caught up in the bicycle craze?

Oh, yes. We all, everybody rode bicycles at that time just like they have a craze for bicycles now.

What was your bike like?

Mine was a Cleveland, called a Cleveland.

Did it have the high wheel in the front?

No, my Dad had one of the high-wheeled bicycles but I never learned to even ride it. Westfield was just crazy about bicycles in those days. We used to have bicycle races along Broad Street and we had very fine bicycle riders that used to race in Westfield. One was Dave Curtis who was very well-known all over the East.
Q: You showed me a post card of the Westfield Club. Would you like to talk about that and tell us where it was?

A: Well, the Westfield Social Club stood about where the First Federal Savings and Loan Association have their building at the present time. It burned down in later years but in the early years of my life in Westfield it was a very active club and most all the people that could afford to belong to it belonged to that club. They had very fine affairs there and we used to go down to it and they had masquerades and fancy dress dances. It was quite a popular place.

Q: And you mentioned they had bowling alleys in it.

A: I believe, yes. I remember, yes, they had bowling alleys there and they were good bowling alleys and my Dad was on the bowling team in Westfield and had his own team here that he formed and was captain of for several years.

Q: Do you remember who else was on the team?

A: Yes, a fellow named Fred Hegerman was one. George Ortlieb or Charlie Ortlieb, I'm not sure which or maybe both and I can't remember some of the others but some of them were very fine bowlers.

Q: Across the street from that club you said there was another club.

A: That was the old Gales Clubhouse with slate alleys and it was also used for our first pictures -- they weren't motion pictures, they were stills but that was the only kind of picture entertainment that we had at the time. That was the beginning of it and later on Flagg opened a moving picture house across the street where we had real moving pictures. It used to cost ten cents to go in and see them. In World War I it became eleven cents with the penny "war tax."

Q: Didn't Flagg also open a place later on at the ground level? He had one place up on the second floor there, as I remember. And then he opened another place across the street on the ground level on Elm Street.

A: That's the one I'm talking about.

Q: Oh.

A: Yeah, that's the one I'm talking about, the one on the ground level. And then later on I guess you got the Rialto.

Q: Yes, Mr. Forster, somebody told me once there had been a recreation field at the corner of Summit Avenue and Park Street enclosed by a board fence. You remember that?

A: No, I don't recall that. If it was ever there, it must have been before 1892 or '95 because the only baseball field I remember in those days is down where the school is on Westfield Avenue (Lincoln School, south of the building). It was boarded up, same way and all and the pitcher's box was out where it faced Westfield Avenue. And they would
pitch from the interior towards Westfield Avenue at the catcher's box, that's where the catcher's box was and we had one of the finest baseball teams in those days and we had Christy Mathewson pitching for the Westfield team and we had some of the finest baseball players from the different teams that would come there on Sunday to pitch for Westfield.

Q: Mr. Forster, what was it like living in Westfield before the automobile?
A: Of course, before the automobile came to Westfield everybody got around on foot or bicycles and if they were wealthy enough they might have a horse and carriage. But the town being so small at that time, only about 2,000 people all told, made it very easy to get around because the stores were all located on Broad Street and Elm Street and Prospect Street.

Q: The north side of town extended where?
A: That was it. The north side of town went as far out as Dudley Avenue and they had-- the main avenues running up were, of course, Elm Street and Prospect Street and Clark Street.

Q: And on the south side...
A: And Mountain Avenue. On the south side we had Summit Avenue and the Boulevard and Westfield Avenue. They were the main streets. Also Rahway Avenue.

Q: Was Grove Street about the dimensions...
A: Grove Street was about, that was the... Park Street in the early days was the end of town and then later on, of course, it developed quite quickly out to Grove Street.

Q: What did you do about shopping, getting food?
A: Well, they delivered a lot of the things that you had to buy. They had delivery service.

Q: This would be Hutchinson's and Windfeldt's?
A: All of them. They delivered and then we had people that came around with fresh vegetables in great big wagons and they'd stop at the house regularly and we'd go out and go right out to the wagon and pick out whatever you wanted to have and it was fresh right from the market. That was the big thing we had in those days.

Q: What did you do for social life in those days, parties and getting around?
A: Well, mostly, as I say, most of the parties were at the Club and we didn't know what it was to have any real entertainment outside of the movies when they came and we used to walk over to Springfield from Westfield, the boys did, and we'd stop over one of the taverns over there and we'd spend a little time and walk back again and that was about the Saturday night trip. 1500 minutes
Q: What about vacations in the summertime or winter?
A: We used to go down to Asbury Park and Ocean Grove and places like that. They were always available.
Q: Well, how would you get there? By...
A: Train.
Q: Train.
A: In the early days, of course, the trains weren't so good. They had little pot stoves in the end of the car, originally, to heat them.
Q: You started working in New York at a pretty early stage or am I mistaken on that?
A: Yeah, I started about 1913, I guess. Anyway, I was about 17 years old when I went to New York.
Q: And you commuted on the Jersey Central?
A: Yes, for years I commuted on the Jersey Central.
Q: Any difference then than now?
A: Oh, tremendous change. The cars were much better and the heating was better and they were kept cleaner.
Q: You had the ferry boat, of course.
A: We had the ferry boats that went across regularly.
Q: Do you remember the Carberry sisters, one of them used to commute everyday
A: Oh, I knew Miss Carberry very well, yes. She worked, I think, in the Guaranty Trust or one of those big banks.
Q: What about the Fairbairns and the race track?
A: Well, Robert Fairbairn had Fair Acres Race Track over there and he had some very fine horses and they had regular race meets there. Very, very fine. Very fine races. He had some beautiful horses himself.
Q: We've had a lot of snow this winter and that reminded me of Willoughby used to come around behind his mule with that little wooden snowplow and plow off the sidewalks.
A: Yes, that's right.
Q: I never knew how far that was, was that just on our street or did that get down to...
A: Well, he came... you know, Willoughby was all around here. All around these main streets. Willoughby, you know, lived right over here on Rahway Avenue.
Q: Yeah, he had his barn and his house.

A: And the rest of the fellows lived next to him and they had their chickens and barns there too. And then the Talcott Farm was the great big area which is now all developed, as you know.

Q: Yeah, right.

A: The Fresh Air Camp was at the end of Summit Avenue. It was on the southwest side of Summit Avenue, corner of Summit Avenue and Grove Street and it was way out in the wilderness. We didn't have any houses or anything in between Park Street and Grove Street then and they had the great big Fresh Air Camp for children to come out, poor people from New York, and spend a couple of weeks at a time at the Fresh Air Camp.

Q: This would have been about what years would you...

A: Let's see, I was born in '92. That'd be 102, I suppose around 1902-1905, along in there. I don't know how many years it was open. I guess it was open just a little while and it was quite a camp.

Q: Preparing for this interview I was reminded of the column of anthracite coal that used to stand in front of Irving's Coal Yard. Do you remember that?

A: Oh, yes. I remember it very well.

Q: Schaefer's Clothing Store was there on Elm Street.

A: Yes, Schaefer had a very fine clothing store there. We did a lot of shopping there and that was a very fine store. Everything, Schaefer had in that store.

Q: Well, I remember it primarily because of those wires that used to send the baskets scooting up to the balcony there and with the little metal containers that had your bill and brought your change back.

A: Yeah, that was right.

Q: You mentioned some of the shops and businesses on the lower end of Elm Street. Please speak about that, Mr. Forster.

A: Well, right next to where the bank (Peoples) now stands was Barton's Stable and that was a fine livery stable and you could hire horses there and go for a drive anytime you wanted to and it was a very popular place. Many people rented space for their horses in his stable.

Q: Was this on the same side as the firehouse?

A: Right next to the bank on Elm Street.

Q: Next to the bank.

A: Next to the bank on Elm Street. Going up, you know, going towards Broad.
Q: What was on that bank corner?

A: The bank corner was Charles Fergus' Saloon. That stood right where the bank is now. That's where the saloon was.

Q: Well, then that later became John Frank's fathers...

A: He had a little shop...

Q: ...Shoeshine shop.

A: ...yes, part of it, a small portion of it became that. It was a big place.

Q: Was it a good saloon?

A: I don't know. I wasn't looking.

Q: Well, you were telling me as a kid you used to peer underneath the swinging doors.

A: Oh, yes, we did that. But one of our interesting things as little fellows, of course, was to see them light the lights at night. The gas lights, you know. The town was lit by gas lights and we enjoyed that. I can see them now, lighting those lights.

Q: There was mention of an ice cream wagon that used to come around in the summertime.

A: Oh, yes.

Q: Do you recall that?

A: Yes, I remember that. They come around now, don't they?

Q: The Good Humor wagons, Carousel.

Excuse me, but we're on about the shops and businesses on lower Elm St.

A: There was a blacksmith shop that we were most interested in as youngsters. It was at the end of North Avenue just as you turn to go under the Plaza, what is now the Plaza. That was a big blacksmith shop.

(*The blacksmith shop was owned by Clarence B. Smith, Sr., the father of the late C.B. Smith, Jr. - Realtor, who died in 1978. He told me about the shop. I had C.B., Jr. taped during the Bicentennial when I worked with Betty Pate. The shop was exactly on the site of the new bank near completion now next to the new motel.*)

Q: Was that always an underpass there for that railroad crossing or...

*Jessie Plant Brown, April 1979*
Oh, no. No. Westfield had the, the tracks were elevated later on. See, we had a grade crossing at Central Avenue and then there was another grade crossing where the Plaza is and then when the railroad was approved, they started way below Cranford towards New York and raised the elevation of the tracks so that they could avoid the Graceland Hill. Beyond Westfield it was quite steep; it was hard for the freight trains to make the Graceland Hill. They elevated the tracks all along and that, of course, made these viaducts, you call them? Trestles? That made one at Central Avenue and made another one at the Plaza.

But the bridge up at where Tuttle Parkway comes in there, that's been there a long time.

Yeah, I think that's where they met that level there. You can see how the road goes now. It does it, you know to a certain extent. So what they wanted to do is start at Cranford which gave them a level with Graceland Hill and they could just raise it up from there and go right straight through and save all that climbing, you see. Oh, the freight trains used to just struggle, you know.

Excuse me, Mr. Forster, you mentioned a train wreck in Westfield. What was that all about?

Well, there was trains coming home, commuter trains at night, used to come into Westfield about half-past six, probably left New York at 5:30. It was a 5:30 Plainfield express and a 5:30 Westfield train that followed it. That's incorrect. Forget that.

The Westfield train came into the station in Westfield and the Plainfield express was supposed to pass our commuter train at about the same time. What happened was that our Westfield train left the station and started towards Plainfield and the Plainfield express, which comes through without stopping at Westfield, struck the train at what we call Graceland section which is where the little bridge goes over just beyond the old Tuttle Lumber Yard.

And it telescoped two or three of the cars and oh, there was many people killed. The whole of Plainfield was in mourning. Had it happened a few minutes before, before our train got into Westfield, of course Westfield would have had the accident.

Your Uncle George, you say, was a trained nurse?

Yes, and he went with Brown, the undertaker, and they (the injured and dead) were in such bad shape they couldn't put them together. And he went there and put some of the, you know, pieces together and got them together so they looked like something. He was very expert at that kind of stuff.

We've been talking about living before the automobile. Do you remember when you got your first automobile and tell us something about that.
A: Well, we got our first automobile about 1913.

Q: What kind did you get?

A: It was called a Corrigea. It was made by a Spaniard and the car that we had was originally made for Miss Clark whose father was the spool cotton Clark man. O.N.T. Clark man and she didn't like it...

Q: Was this one of the Westfield Clarks? It wasn't, was it?

A: No. O.N.T., the spool cotton man. And she didn't like the car so we had a chance to pick it up and that was our first car and we had it for quite awhile.

Q: What did an automobile cost in those days?

A: I think about $1800 we paid, second-hand, of course, then.

Q: Can you describe it?

A: I can show you a picture of it.

Q: I think we need a description.

A: Well, I can't describe it very well excepting it was a...

Q: Did it have an engine in the back?

A: No, it was a four-passenger car. It had a Wisconsin engine, the same engine that the Stutz car used, and it had a Cooper transmission which was supposed to be very good in those days. It was an assembled car.

Q: Did it have a regular steering wheel?

A: It had a regular steering wheel. It was a very powerful four-cylinder engine and could climb any of the hills around here. The Pot Luck Hill was nothing for it to climb, it had no trouble at all. Most cars couldn't make it at all.

Q: Pot Luck Hill, that's up where you showed me that photograph of Pearsall's Castle? Well, this photograph you're showing me is of the Corrigea. It's a touring car with a fabric top...

A: It had a silk top.

Q: And there are your parents all dressed up in long dusters just like early movies. Did you ever hear of an Elmore?

A: Oh, yes, I've heard of that, Elmore. Yes. I don't know anything about it but I've heard about it.

Q: Shirley Wright was saying the Elmore was her family's first automobile. You mentioned there was a farm where the recreation field is today?

A: That's right.
Q: What was it you used to go over there to get?

A: Oh, we used to get ripe turnips in the fall of the year when the frost got on the ground. He had lots of turnips and we'd go there and dig those turnips and eat them. We used to enjoy doing that. That was Pierson's woods, you know. That was a big woods. We used to go in there chestnutting and hunting around through the woods and it was really a recreation area for kids, you know, to go down there.

Q: Was this a continuation of Talcott's Woods on Rahway Avenue? I guess it was, wasn't it?

A: Probably was, part of it, because, you see, it was all woods, you take beyond Grove Street, as I told you. It was all woods. And you can go our Central Avenue now just beyond Clifton and go in a block or so where they're developing still and you'll find nothing but woods there. It was a tremendous woods, this place here, tremendous wood area. We used to hunt all through here, all through this area here. This house was the first house built in this particular section around here.

Q: You're talking now about the house we're in on the Boulevard here?

A: Right now, yes. This was built as sort of a show house and he lived in it himself, the man that developed this property.

Q: Who was he?

A: Well, he was a fellow named Goodman. Joe Gallagher, who was vice-president of the old People's Bank, was one of the developers with him. A fellow named Moon who had a florist shop of some kind on Central Avenue was the other partner. The three men built this whole section up here.

Q: Good heavens, the Moons have had this property for all that length of time.

A: This was the first house they put up. Of course, he lived in it himself and all these other houses were built around.

Q: Do you recall the spring on the playground of the Elm Street Washington School?

A: Yes, it fed into a brook at Orchard Street and Elm Street. It went underneath Elm Street and ran along back of the stores on Elm Street and houses and in the form of a brook and that brook continued on and went under the Barton Livery Stable and back of the stores on the west side of Elm Street at that point and then...

Q: This is down by the foot of Elm Street now, is that right?

A: Yeah, at the foot of Elm Street and underneath what is now the National State Bank and across under the firehouse and came out underneath the railroad tracks at a point close to Westfield Avenue and South Avenue.
Q: You mentioned that as kids you...

A: When we were children, we could walk under Barton’s Livery Stable which was next to the corner where the bank is and walk underneath there all the way across under the firehouse and come out under the railroad tracks and end up at Westfield Avenue and South Avenue. And that was quite a stunt. We could always go through there in the dark and see the light ahead of us and we knew that sooner or later we’d be to the end of the route. Evidently that became a brook that finally ended up near the Shackamaxon Golf Course.

Q: You mentioned a bullfrog pond on Westfield Avenue somewhere between Park Street and Washington Street.

A: That was located not quite in the center of Washington Street and Boulevard and Westfield Avenue. The pond was a fairly good sized pond and we called it Round Pond. Later on houses were built there. I don’t know whatever happened to the pond.

Q: Well, you also referred to the Drake Estate which was on Westfield Avenue and Park Street. A big, old mansard house there?

A: It was set right in the middle of the estate and the estate was bounded by Westfield Avenue, Park Street, Rahway Avenue and Shackamaxon Drive. And the house was a large mansion and set right in the very middle of the property and there was a large apple orchard that ran along Park Street and Westfield Avenue to about where Shackamaxon Drive is.

Q: That that's the property which was later subdivided and became Stoneleigh Park, is that it?

A: Yes, the property was later sold off and subdivided and became Stoneleigh Park and that covers the entire property of the Drake Estate and the gatehouse at the entrance to the park which was the same roadway entrance from Park Street as it is today. That house was cut in half for some reason or other and one-half of it moved over to North Avenue right where, by Hahne’s parking lot and the understanding was that when the elderly person that was there, a blind person, passed away, they would tear the house down and turn it over to Hahne’s for their Parking lot.

Q: On Westfield Avenue and on Park Street there are some brick columns which used to have chains between them and that type of thing, I think. And then, of course at the entrance to Stoneleigh Park itself which also had brick columns, were those part of the original Drake Estate, do you think?

A: I’m not sure but it was in the same location. Same entrance way as it was in the old Drake Estate.

Q: While we're on the subject of then and now, you mentioned that the original railroad station was later moved down and then became Jarvis’s and the Westfield Leader building. Can you give me a little idea what kind of a station that was. Was it a two-story station?
It was wooden. It was a semi two-story. It had an attic affair attached to it. It was a long, narrow station and the platform ran all around the station and it consisted of narrow boards that were quite thick and there was quite a space, maybe half an inch, between them, each board. There was a long flight of stairs that went up to the station because naturally it had been raised up way above South Avenue by that time and people used to lose their money through the boards when they were buying papers and that money would go down underneath and there was a big wooden siding facing the station, it faced towards South Avenue and it wasn't pretty to look at but it was all solid wood with little doors in different parts of it where they could store tools and things if they wanted to and we could creep in there and look for the money that dropped through the boards up above because it was quite a distance from the South Avenue level to where the station was. Later on they brought a lot of dirt and made a ramp from South Avenue up to where the station was and that's the way it stays as the present time. And then they put a new station up, a stone station which is there today.

Q: When was that done?
A: Around 1910.

Mr. Forster proceeded to describe the approach to the station area from the south side.

A great big tree, I don't know whether it was an oak tree or a maple or what it was, but it was a big one. And it set right about where you begin to put your money in for the first place. They come in off South Avenue, you put your money in there. And I had a squirrel, a little red squirrel. I kept him for a long while. I got him as a little baby and he lived in my house and went all over everywhere and was very tame. I'd sometimes take him to school with me in my pocket and then get sent home. I was told that I could no longer keep the squirrel and so my father said well, the only thing to do then is to just let him loose. So I took him down and put him in that big station tree and every day when I'd go to school I could rap on the tree and he'd come down and I'd feed him and he'd go back up again. That's the way it went until one time I didn't see him anymore.

Q: Tell us about World War I and the food shortages.
A: You haven't any idea of the stuff they gave us, just junk, that we didn't want and couldn't use.

Q: This was the World War I shortages?
A: That's the shortage.

Q: In order to get a pound of sugar you had to buy all this junk?
A: Yes, and all to get a little sugar.

The weather was so bad, we had such a terrible 1918 winter that it was below zero for days. The only reason that January is not as bad as this January that we've just passed through is because that weather below zero lasted for about a week and it was all over with and then things became normal again. The only thing, it made it difficult for us in raising little children was we couldn't get coal and my wife used to have to take little Helen down in the baby carriage to the
coal man and get a little coal in the baby carriage when we could and finally the doctor, when Helen came down with pneumonia because we couldn't have any heat for the house and it was terrible below-zero weather, the doctor insisted that they give us coal. And they sent us up about a ton of very large chunks of coal and I had to come home every night and in a burlap bag I broke up the coal to put into the hot-water furnace so that I could just keep it from freezing, the pipes and the hot water and that's the way we lived all that whole 1918 winter. It was a terrible winter.

Q: Well, then that was followed by the flu epidemic, is that when the flu epidemic occurred?

A: Well, of course, Helen had pneumonia, bad case of pneumonia, oh, we had a terrible time. Right over Christmas.

Q: But there was a terrible flu epidemic along about that time, I know, and I used to wear a little bag of camphor around my neck.

A: We all did that, we all had the camphor. That was a terrible winter. Helen, as I say, came down with pneumonia because we couldn't keep her warm.

Q: Were you involved with the Home Reserve or what did they call it?

A: Yeah, I belonged to it in Roselle Park at that time because I was living there for a short time and we had the Home Guard, that's what it was. I belonged to that and being a married man I wasn't drawn out until the very last when they decided to take the young men between 21 and 30 and my name was drawn out just almost before the Armistice came and then, of course, I was never called into service.

Q: You remember the Armistice, were you on Academy Place at the end of the war?

A: No, still was in Roselle Park.

Q: Well, then you probably don't recall that they had a huge sign of the Kaiser, a great big tin sign there right in that little sunken railroad park that we were talking about.

A: Oh, year, I think Dad talked about that.

Q: As kids we all went down ther and threw rocks at it at the end of the war.

A: You see, Dad was here and I was never more than five miles away, you know. I was up here all the time.

Q: Yesterday you gave me a little insight in the story about one of the guys of your time, Jack Darling and the Halloween tragedy that occurred. This was on the corner of Park Street?

A: Park Street, it was on the southwest corner of Park Street on the near side toward Summit Avenue. A lovely home stood there and I believe still stands there.

Q: Oh, that's where Jim Moffit lived.

A: No, catty corner from Moffits. There was a young lady had a Halloween
party this Halloween night and many of the folks around there were
invited but some of the boys that I went around with and my older brother
went around with were not invited so they decided that they would go
and raid the party. So they went and knocked at the back door and
when the maid came to the door they dumped the ice cream into the
kitchen.

Q: Was this ice cream one of those big wooden containers?
A: It was in a large barrel, like, with ice all around it.

Q: And then they have a galvanized tin container that holds the ice
cream itself?
A: That's right. And, of course, that dumped right in and made a mess.
The ice cream was not disturbed, I don't think, but they made a mess
for them and the man that owned the home, the father of the girl, was
very much upset about the way they were annoying the maid and decided...

Q: The name hasn't come back to you yet, has it?
A: No. So he finally had about all he could stand and as Jack Darling
was putting a tick tack button to make a tick tack on the window frame.

Q: This was out of a spool of thread?
A: Yeah, with a spool of thread and a button or suction thing. And he
came to the window, saw Jack putting the tick tack on and as Jack held
his left arm up to put the tick tack on the window, he shot him right
under the arm. It killed him instantly, he whirled around a bush that
was right there by the window and then dropped dead. And, of course,
there was a terrible amount of excitement in the town. The next day
paperboys from Elizabeth and all over came out with Extras and they ran
all over the town hollering about the terrible murder and so it made
quite a disturbance which the town didn't outlive probably for nearly
ten years because Halloween parties after, Halloween was very mild.
It didn't amount to anything. But before that it had been a big thing
in Westfield, big Halloween parties and disturbances all over town
every Halloween.

- Interlude -

Q: Excuse me, Mr. Forster, you're talking about Rahway Avenue and Park
Street and the woods there. Now, you refer to them as Pierson's Woods.
I hadn't heard that before. As kids we called it Talcott's Woods.
A: Talcott was much further up.
Q: Right, further out towards Rahway.
A: Further up, Rahway Avenue, and you have to pass the Willoughby property
and you have to pass the Westonfelder property and then you come to
Talcott's Woods there and he had a foundation, a wall all around it.
That was his woods there.
Q: But up where the high school is, that's where Pierson's Woods were, is that it?

A: Yeah, oh sure, that's Pierson's Woods, had nothing to do with Talcott. The Talcotts were the big bankers, you know. They used to bank for the dry goods houses and all, you know.

Oh, there's so much, there's been some drastic changes. I was so intrigued going to Central Avenue when I was a little fellow, I was only about six or seven years old. There was no houses around there and I could go right out of my house, down through the field and I was on Central Avenue. There was nothing to stop me, there was no houses around there to bother me and I'd go down and watch the gate man put those gates up. We didn't have many trains coming through, you know, but when they'd come through there was an old gate man there, you know, and I used to watch him.

Q: Mr. Forster, you were mentioning some of the characters around town. I refer to the little fellow with the felt boots and the milk can that used to grease the tracks on the trolley car. What did you say his name was?

A: Henry Chavegini.

Q: What did he do besides that?

A: Oh, he'd go up to the ball park and keep the ball park clean and he would sell chewing gum, tutti fruitti chewing gum and any little thing that he could...pencils, anything he could get to sell. He just tried to do whatever he could to make a living. And we had another character, Bill Perrine and Bill Perrine didn't do much...

Q: How is that spelled, P-e-r-r-i-n-e?

A: Perrine, it was. He never did much of anything around town but he spent most of his time apparently in the liquor store.

Q: He was sort of the town drunk, do you think?

A: He was kind of a, you might call him that, he was that kind of man.

Q: He did his share.

A: He did his share. He had a brother who was quite well off and worked in New York, he came home one night and got off a fast-moving train and rolled a big distance before they got him up but he was all right. He evidently had had a little something to drink and that saved him. We had another town character Oony Franey. I don't know how the name was spelled but we called him Oony Franey and he was more or less like Bill Perrine, he didn't spend much time working and he generally had a few drinks to take care of the day for him.

Q: Do you remember we didn't have an awful lot of blacks in Westfield when I was a youngster but one of the ones I remember was a little, short fellow named Blue Gum Benny down in the fire department. Does that ring a bell with you? He had very prominent gums and large teeth.
and some of them were missing but as kids we were sort of afraid of Blue Gum Benny.

A: I remember the character but I knew very little about him. The only one I knew very well was Gus, used to be the chauffeur for my uncle's car in Westfield and he was a fine man himself and he chauffeured a Buick car that my uncle owned.

Q: What was your uncle's name, was he a Forster, too?

A: No, his name was Nelson B. Arnold. He was the father of Douglas Arnold that lived up on Tremont Avenue, You might have known him.

I'll tell you one family that was very well-thought of, a colored family in town and that was the Rosses. Preston Ross was one of the boys and they were very well thought of, fine family. Some of them I imagine still live in Westfield today.

Q: You mentioned this fellow Jimmy, you can't recall his last name, that he thought so highly of you, you say, but he came to a bad end.

A: That's right, but he was a fine fellow to me, he just was really fine. All the colored families in Westfield that I knew were fine families and many of their descendants are right in town today. 55.00 MINUTES