

THE FRIENDS OF THE HOBOKEN LIBRARY
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: PAUL SAMPERI

INTERVIEWER: PAT SAMPERI

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TAPE 1, SIDE 1

A: Hello. This is Paul Samperi. I was
born June 20, 1926, in Hoboken, New Jersey.

Q: Where in Hoboken?

A: I was born on First and Hudson Street,
which was next to the Continental Hotel.

Q: What are your earliest memories of
Hoboken?

A: Well, I remember going to the park.

Q: Which park?

A: It was the park opposite St. Peter and Paul Church. I think it was called Hudson Street Park, but I'm not sure. It had a big baseball field where the kids could play baseball. I wasn't that interested in baseball to begin with, but I used to love to walk through the park and enjoy the nice scenery. And, as far as scenery goes, the park was facing the Hudson River, and on the Hudson River, on the Hoboken side, was the Holland-America line, and you could see, every few days, different ships coming in -- the "New Amsterdam," the old "Statendam," the "Rotterdam" -- all beautiful ships to look at -- and wonder what it was like to travel on one of those ships (which, later on, I did experience).

Q: What was the view like, of New York?
The view of New York -- what was it like?

A: Oh, the view of New York was beautiful. It was a clear view. You could see the West Side Highway; you could see many of the high-rises there; you could see the Empire State building; you could see some of the ferry slips. It was really a very pretty view. On a clear day it was really quite nice.

Q: And how many years did you live at this address on -- ?

A: Well, it all started with me being born at 103½ Hudson Street. Then Dad decided to move to 10th and Washington Street, where we lived a few years.

Q: How old were you when you moved?

A: Oh, I must have been maybe one or two. What happened was, the Depression came along and things got quite bad, financially, at the hotel, because when the Depression started the hotel occupancy rate dropped to about half. Dad was strapped for money and he told Mom -- my mother -- "We're going to be moving from 10th and Hudson Street to the hotel. Since the hotel rooms aren't being used, we'll move in and save all that rental that we were paying at the apartment house."

Q: So how old were you when you moved back to the hotel?

A: When I moved back to the hotel I must have been around three or four.

Q: What do you remember of the waterfront? What was it like when you were seven -- noises, and smells and -- ?

A: Well, I remember at night, when we lived at the hotel -- that was on Hudson Street, which was right in back of River Street. And, of course, River Street had all this shipping, and I do remember on foggy nights, the foghorns going almost continuously, as the ferries and some of the ships were pulling into port. It was a nice sound. I didn't mind going to bed listening to that sound.

Q: Now where the Continental Hotel was (which is now the movie theatre) -- it was in a very busy section of town, a very commercial section, with all the ships and the PATH train down there. Was it busy? Do you remember that?

A: Oh, yes. It was a busy area. There were a lot of taverns on that block, and, also, north of First Street. A lot of the people who worked on the ships -- the seamen -- would come to enjoy themselves at some

of the taverns that were on Hudson Street. There were a few restaurants, too, but most of the good restaurants were on Washington Street, and beyond.

Q: Were the sailors well-behaved, or were they noisy, were they drunk, were there fights?

A: No, I don't remember them being drunk. But I do remember, in the summertime, going to sleep -- we were on the third floor of the hotel, and across the street was a tavern, and you could hear everything that was going on in the tavern, because all the windows were open. Once in a while you'd hear somebody screaming or arguing, but that was very seldom. But I do remember, at times, smelling the vapors from the beer, from the tavern --

Q: -- all the way up to your room.

A: -- all the way up to my room, on the third floor.

Q: And did they have music? Did you hear music playing, on a piano or -- ?

A: They did have music. I think it might have been sort of a jukebox. But that didn't bother me. The music, from what I recall, never caused any problems.

Q: You told me you could remember horses being used in Hoboken for transportation.

A: Well, in those days horses were used for picking up garbage; for cleaning the streets; picking up snow during snowstorms. The garbage collection was under the McFeeley name. He owned the sanitation trucks (all horse and wagons) that operated in Hoboken. By the way, McFeeley also was the mayor of Hoboken, so there never were any contracts given out to other garbage people. He more or less had that sewed up.

Q: Was it smelly? Was there horse manure in the streets? Did you have to watch where you walked?

A: There was a lot of horse manure on the streets, but they did have a good cleanup crew. The sanitation department would be following up and sweeping all that up.

Q: When did the horses stop being used in Hoboken?

A: Well, I guess it was toward the end, or the middle, of the '30s, when trucking became more popular. That's about the time the horses started to fade out.

Q: And where were the horses? Where were the stables?

A: They were stabled downtown, and by "downtown" I mean west of the Hudson River. There was one stable that I know of. I think there was another stable in Hoboken, but I don't know what it was.

Q: Do you remember where, on the west side, the one was?

A: It was on First Street, downtown, below Willow Avenue, I guess near Clinton.

Q: Okay. You also told me once that you liked the Columbus park.

A: Yes. I think the Columbus park was a county park, and it had a big pond with goldfish. It had a lot of swings and sandboxes. I used to love the sandboxes -- sitting on there and tossing sand all over the place. That was about ten blocks from where we lived, so we didn't get there that often.

Q: That was a treat to go there.

A: That was really a treat. I think it was more than a full block, the park.

Q: What do you remember about cars, when you were a child in Hoboken? Were there parking problems?

A: On Hudson Street there was some sort of a parking problem, because a lot of people would come in from out of town. But behind the Continental Hotel there was a garage. It was the AZ Garage -- that's what it went under -- and A.Z. was Albert Zabowskie. He was the owner. He also had gas pumps outside, and every so

often, when they would fill them with gasoline, you could smell the vapors, from where I was on the third floor. But lots of times people would put their cars in garages. They didn't leave them out that often. So I don't recall any parking problem in Hoboken.

Q: Now tell me about walking down Washington Street. What was that like, with the stores?

A: Oh, that was nice. There were all sorts of stores. There was a paint store, and a hardware store, and then there was a store that sold tobacco. I'm trying to think of the name of that. It's on the tip of my tongue. A few restaurants. There were three five-and-dimes -- a Woolworth's, I forget the second one, and then there was a Grant's, which I always thought was a five-and-dime but it wasn't. It was more of a department store. As you moved further up there were furriers, small grocery stores -- National had a grocery store there, that I remember, and the grocery stores in those days weren't like the supermarkets today. You walked in, and there was a man behind the counter (usually the manager), and whatever you wanted, you told him and he would go and get it.

Q: Oh, it wasn't displayed? He would go in the back and get it?

A: No, most of it was displayed. Some of it was in the back. He had a big barrel of flour, so if you wanted a pound of flour or two pounds he'd scoop it up. Or if you wanted beans, dry beans, he'd scoop them up. And a lot of things were packaged, pre-packaged. He also sold candy -- a lot of the general things. No fresh vegetables, all grocery items.

Q: Where would you go for fresh vegetables?

A: Well, there was a big vegetable store on Washington Street. In fact, there were two that I know of. One was called Singer's. Singer's was run by a family, a wife and a husband, and they had, I think, three children, three boys (they may have had a girl). Later on these three boys formed a big cooperative, and they became part of either Foodtown or -- one of those big grocery stores.

Q: Tell me about the chicken place.

A: Downtown Hoboken, on my way to school, I would pass this chicken place, and they were all live chickens. They were inside cages, and he would roll them out during the day and have them on display. Any woman who wanted a fresh chicken, she would order it from him and he would go in the back, cut its head off or whatever it was -- kill the poor chicken -- and prepare it and take the feathers off of it, so when this woman came back she would have a chicken all ready to go.

Q: What about meat? Where would you get meat?

A: Oh, there were a lot of butcher shops. Schmitt's was one I used to go to, for Mom, and Dad used to buy items from Schmitt, for the hotel. We had a nice butcher shop, and I think that was on "Garden Street."

Schmitt's had a son, and the son cut himself. As a result, it became poisonous -- blood poison -- and the poor fellow died. That was rather sad, a nice young man passing away -- Schmitt's son.

Q: Where did you go to school when you were a child?

A: Well, let's see now. The first school I went to, I think it was #1. That was kindergarten. Miss Mooney was my schoolteacher, a very attractive woman and a very nice woman. After that I think I went to #7, which was also downtown; #5; and then for junior high school, #1 school. That was right off Washington Street -- Garden, is it? The first street after Washington?

Q: Demarest? Or is that different from --

A: Number One. It was one block off Washington Street. I think it was Garden, on Garden Street, a nice school. It's still operating.

Q: Okay. What was your favorite class when you went to school? And what grade did you like best?

A: I don't know. I guess as I got older -- eighth and ninth grade -- I enjoyed the challenge that those grades offered. I also liked wood shop. We'd go to

another school -- I think wood shop was at #2 School,
which at that time was all girls.

Q: No wonder you liked it.

A: Number One School was all boys.

Q: Were all the schools you went to
segregated?

A: No. Just #1 School was the only one
segregated. Number Five, #7 -- they had both boys and
girls.

Q: Did you go in separate entrances?

A: You know, they did have names above
the doors that would say "Girls" and "Boys," but I really
don't remember going into separate entrances.

Q: Then you went to high school at
Demarest.

A: A.J. Demarest High School. That was the only public high school in Hoboken. There was another private school known as Stevens Hoboken Academy. That was connected to the Stevens Institute, and a lot of wealthy people went there. Don "Jentz," my friend, went there, and I think his sister also went there -- a very exclusive school. That was opposite Our Lady of Grace Church.

Q: Oh, where the bank was that they tore down, by the library?

A: Right. They tore down the school, they put up the bank, then I understand they tore the bank down.

Q: Yes. They put up apartments.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, what was Demarest like?

A: Oh, Demarest was quite a school. It was three stories; it had a gymnasium; it had a theatre,

or an auditorium. It could be used for theatrical productions. Arthur E. Stover was the principal, who was a very nice man. He was my mentor, more or less, when I became active in debating; also, my coach. I debated other teams from other schools. Most of the teachers who were there were nice.

Q: Tell about when Frank Sinatra came back.

A: When I was in high school I was active in debating, and lots of times Mr. Stover would call me and say, "Mr. So-and-So, or So-and-So is coming. I'd like you to introduce him to the audience." Every Wednesday we had a get-together. But this particular time, Sinatra -- I forget who called, whether it was his agent -- He came on a Tuesday, it wasn't a Wednesday, so we had to call a special meeting for the auditorium, a special group. So Mr. Stover told me he was coming, told me the hour, and he also said, "Make sure that the girls or the fellas don't ask for his autograph, because he's on a tight time schedule." In fact, he was coming with, I believe it was, *Life Magazine*. They were going to

photograph Frank at his old desk, photograph him in the gymnasium tossing one of the basketballs.

So Sinatra came. I was backstage, I spoke to him, I went out and I introduced him -- mentioning that he was formerly with Tommy Dorsey's orchestra, and that now he was on his own, appearing in New York at the Paramount Theatre. So Sinatra came out. He gave a very interesting talk --

Q: What did he talk about?

A: He talked about being kind to other people, advocating loving one another, being a good person. He was noted for that. He was going around to a lot of schools, preaching "Americanism."

So after his talk, which was maybe fifteen or twenty minutes, the audience started saying, "Sing! Sing! Sing!" I'm watching Sinatra from backstage, and he says, "I have no music. I have no orchestra," and they kept saying, "Sing! Sing!" So Sinatra sang something like four or five songs without any music -- and I tell you, that's not easy. What a crowd! What an enthusiastic group -- especially the girls.

Now I remember Stover telling me he was on a time schedule, "Keep the girls out of the back. Don't let them in," because they would tie up the time schedule when he got through talking on the stage. So while he's singing his last song, a group of girls started to march in. There must have been around thirty of them, and I'm saying to myself, "How the heck am I going to keep thirty girls out of this place?" So I said to them, quietly, "If you're very quiet, I'll let you stay" -- sounding as if I had the authority to keep them there.

So they all were very quiet, Sinatra comes out, I thanked him for his talk, and I said, "Mr. Sinatra, these young ladies here would like your autograph." He looked at me and he said, "I'd be delighted." So as the girls came up, he signed the autograph that the girls had, and every time he signed he would look at me. Another girl came up, he would sign it and look at me. And I'm saying to myself, "Why the heck is he looking at me?" Then it dawned on me that maybe he wanted me to ask for his autograph. So at the very end, I had the speech, which I had memorized, introducing him, I pulled it out, and said, "Mr. Sinatra, may I also have your autograph?" and again, he said, "I'd be delighted." So he signed it, he left, and that was the last time I

spoke to him. I did see him at some theatrical performances, but that was the last time we spoke.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was 1943, a year before I graduated.

Q: What was your favorite part of that high school?

A: Let's see. Debating -- I liked debating. I liked economics. I took economics. I wasn't too keen about mathematics, but I did all right there. It's hard to think back all those years, as to what you really liked.

Q: Now did you work at the Union Club, while you were young?

A: Oh, yes. I worked two nights a week at the Union Club. I worked Friday nights and Saturday nights, and Dad was very particular. He said, "When you work -- before you go to work, you have to rest up." So

after dinner, on a Friday and Saturday, I would go to bed around 6:30 and I would awaken around a quarter to 9:00.

Q: And what did you do at the Union Club?
What were your responsibilities?

A: Well, at the beginning, when I first started working there, I was in the office. Lots of times phone calls would come through, so I would go out and get people, or I would announce it over the public-address system. After that I worked in the hatcheck. The hatcheck girls, especially when it was very, very busy -- we had three girls, and they could use help. After that, as I got older, when I was about sixteen or seventeen, I was cashier in the upstairs ballroom bar. Now I was a cashier at about sixteen or seventeen, working behind the bar -- which was technically illegal, you see. [Interruption]

Q: You were saying that you were cashiering at sixteen, when technically you should have been twenty-one.

A: Yes. That's correct.

Q: Okay. Now, speaking of the Union Club and the bar -- talk about a trip that your father asked you to make when you were a young boy, with a paper bag.

A: When I was quite young, perhaps maybe ten or eleven years old, Dad told me to deliver this envelope to this address on Washington Street, upper Washington Street. I think it was around 11th or 12th Street. When I got there I rang the bell, and this elderly gentleman came out, with white hair, and he said, "Oh, hello. How are you?" I told him who I was, he shook my hand, and he was so friendly. I said, "My dad told me to deliver this envelope to you when I got to this point." "Oh," he says, "fine." He took the envelope, he said, "You're a nice-looking young boy. Give my regards to your daddy." So I left. A few years later I found out that I was delivering graft money to the chief of police of Hoboken -- McFeeley -- and he was the type that if you didn't pay the annual fee for being in business, he would put you out of business. He was actually a mean old man.

That's what I remember of him, and I also remember meeting him later on, in City Hall -- a man who was well disliked by all the policemen who were on the force except his favorites (he did have favorites on the

police force). In those days, the way they operated, if you wanted a promotion you had to pay for it. Anything that would help the city -- or, I should say, that would help the chief in gaining more money -- you could buy yourself almost anything. Let's put it this way. Teachers could become principals; nurses could gain favor in hospitals in Hoboken; everything could be bought at a price. If you didn't have the knowledge to go behind what you were advancing to, it didn't make any difference. As long as you were in with the administration and had the ability to pay, that was it.

Q: What about when Grandpa owned the Union Club, and he got into trouble with the law?

A: Well, when we had the Union Club it was around 1944. We used to get a lot of dancers on Friday and Saturday nights from various clubs with big bands. People would love to come and dance. One of the nights, I think it was on a Friday night, the police found out that three of the girls who were there were underage, and they had been drinking. It was funny how the chief got a hold of this. It was at another restaurant, which was technically -- or a hotel -- which

was technically our competitor, that these three same individuals were having drinks, intoxicating drinks -- alcoholic drinks, I should say -- when the chief of police's nephew was in the hotel. He saw these girls with a Chinese gentleman. The girls had already been served the drinks, the Chinese gentleman had his drink, and the relative on the police force of Chief McFeeley just didn't like the idea of three Caucasian girls drinking or being entertained by the Chinese gentleman.

So he came over to the table and asked some questions -- "What are you doing here? How come you're with these three girls?" and the Chinese says, "I am a good friend of the father. I was at the Union Club, and we were enjoying the dancing." Apparently, this hit some sort of a bell in the detective's mind. He let the three go, and the next day he found out, or he surmised, that these three girls had had alcoholic drinks at the Union Club. So he interviewed the waiter who had served them, and we were brought up on charges by the local ABC board as serving alcoholic beverages to underage people.

It always amazed us how we were indicted for serving them; yet they had the same drinks -- three Tom Collins' -- at Meyer's Hotel, and nothing was ever

mentioned in the papers that they were served there, underage.

So it was apparent that there was something afoot. Then we found out the reason. We fought them at the local board, and our lawyer told us that we were going to lose the case (he knew it ahead of time), but he brought along a stenographer, who took all the records, everything that was said down, and we appealed what happened to the ABC in Newark. (That's where they were located at the time, not Trenton, but Newark.) The thing that got Dad aggravated was that even though we served three underage girls, the penalty for that would be about a twenty-day closing, and that would be about it. Yet, McFeeley, when it came to making the final decision -- and I was there at the board meeting -- they said, "Revocation of liquor license." Period. In other words, you're out of business. If you don't have a liquor license, you can't serve liquor -- which really surprised us. That's why we got the lawyer and fought this.

Driscoll, who later ran for governor, was the head of the ABC board. He didn't want to go against the city; yet he mentioned that this was a very strong penalty; that we shouldn't have a revoked liquor license. So he made the penalty ninety days -- which, to our way

of thinking, was way out of line. Of course, ninety days is better than being put out of business completely. That was another thing that the chief of police and Mayor McFeeley did which antagonized not only us, but a lot of other businesses who had similar problems.

Q: You said there was a reason behind it, once the reason became clear. What was the reason?

A: The reason behind it was our lawyer was James Brown, and our lawyer's partner was very active in politics. He was a very good friend of McFeeley. What happened was, they used to go out double-dating. McFeeley was single, and our lawyer's partner -- I'm trying to think of his name. It'll come to me -- he was divorced, and they used to go out together. One time when they were out -- Guilford. That was it. James Guilford was the name of -- he was City Clerk, also, or County Clerk. So when Guilford went to get the coats at this restaurant, when they were leaving, and one of the girls was in the Ladies Room, he was close to Guilford's girlfriend, and he tried to make time and make a date with her. So that night, when she got home, at the door, she told Guilford what had happened, and this created a rift between the Mayor

and -- Guilford really told the mayor off the following day, when he did see him. The mayor was a vengeful man. You couldn't argue with him, and you supposedly couldn't win an argument with him.

So what he did was, he tried to ruin Guilford's business. He knew Guilford was our lawyer -- which was actually James F. Brown. Guilford was very busy with city politics, but his partner, James F. Brown, was the one who handled all our business. So, as a result, to himself, he must have said, "I'll ruin you." So he went after us, to prove to Guilford that he could be a mean son of a bitch -- pardon the language.

Q: Now I want to clarify something. The detective was related to the police chief, or the mayor?

A: No, the police chief.

Q: But it was the mayor who went after you.

A: Yes.

Q: And the police chief and Mayor
McFeeley were brothers, correct?

A: Yes. That's correct.

Q: Now wasn't Grandpa closed down during
Prohibition or something, too?

A: During Prohibition, when things were
really bad, during the Depression, there was a certain
amount of money that was expected twice a year from every
business man. So when the graft man came along to collect
his money, Dad told him, "I can't give you the full
amount. Business has been very bad. I'm just about ready
to lose the hotel, financially. All I can give you is
this amount." So it was less than what McFeeley expected,
and the bag man said, "Joe," my dad's first name -- he
said, "Joe, you don't do things like that. McFeeley will
get after you. If I were you, I would pay the full
amount." So my dad says, "Look, that's all I've got to
give. I'm in bad shape. Take it or leave it."

So when he presented the money to
McFeeley, Dad had to be made an example. So one Saturday
night, at the Continental Hotel -- where we had a grill

room and we used to sell liquor, even though it was Prohibition, and food -- he set up a phony frame-up. They said there was something going on with one of the women underneath there -- prostitute or something -- and they closed the grill room down. It took Dad weeks to find out the reason why he was closed. The city would say, "Well, it's not us, it's Hudson County police." Hudson County police would say, "Well, gee, we don't know anything about that. That's local. Go see the mayor." So it took a while.

Then they said to Joe, they let him know that, because of the smaller amount of money he gave for graft, that was his penalty. He had to be penalized; after all, if everyone started giving less, it would set an example.

Q: Now what was the cause of Grandpa going to jail?

A: Well, during Prohibition, raids would be made every so often by federal men, if you were serving liquor. Hoboken was almost an open town. People would come from New York, Weehawken, all different places, to enjoy themselves in restaurants, speak-easies,

night-clubs, taverns, bars. Dad was informed the first time that federal officials were coming over. Usually, when you were informed, you put all your liquor away and you tried to hide everything. You just showed that you were serving near-beer or just soda. But the one time Dad wasn't informed (and I guess McFeeley might have been mad at him, because he was the one who would do the informing; he knew who was coming), Dad wasn't informed. They came in, they found liquor behind the bar, and they closed Dad down. A month or so later Dad was fined, and also given a prisons sentence because it was his second offense. He was sent to Hudson County jail for one month. It was a jail that didn't have any locked doors; you could wear your own suit; you could go out during the day or night if you wanted to, to have dinner out, so long as you were there at night.

So it was really a joke, the whole thing. One time we kind of missed Dad. We didn't know where he was, and Mom said, "We're going to go and see Daddy. He's in Chicago." So we got on the Jackson trolley, went up to Jersey City, made a couple of turns, got off, and there was the Hudson County jail. I think it was my brother who said, "Wow. Mom. Chicago isn't that far away. It's pretty

close." So we went to see Dad and we had a nice afternoon.

But one thing I wanted to mention -- Dad could have, if he had wanted to, get a substitute person to go to jail for him for a month. In those days you could do that. But Dad says, "No, I could use the vacation. I'll go to jail, take my penalty." And that was it.

Q: Speaking of vacations -- what was Hoboken like in the summers, without air-conditioning, in those days?

A: Oh, it was extremely hot. The only air-conditioning at that time was at the Fabian Theatre, which was a new theatre that was built, I think, in 1929. That was always loaded in the summertime. People would go in there to relax (even if the movie was a crummy movie, the place would usually be crowded), so people could enjoy the cool air.

Now the Continental Hotel, in 1939, when Dad did the bar over and made it into a nice tavern, we installed a Carrier air-conditioning unit. We were the

first business in Hoboken, after the theatre, to have air-conditioning.

Q: Did the people come a lot because of the air-conditioning?

A: Oh, yeah. It really helped business. The place was quite modern. It was a horseshoe bar. Behind the bar there was a great, big tank with goldfish swimming around. It had a lot of nautical scenes on the walls, and the room next to the bar resembled a ship. It had an artificial railing against the wall, and there were ships in the distance painted on the wall. At night there was a romantic moon, with a light behind it, shining out. So people kind of liked it. And there were booths on the side.

Q: What was Hoboken like during the war years? During World War II?

A: Hoboken was extremely busy during the war years, because of the docks. We had a lot of docks, and a lot of ships were pulling in -- merchant ships. A lot of soldiers and sailors were coming into Hoboken, and

a lot of them were stationed in New York. We had the Holland line; we had the American Export line; the Polish line; and a couple of other, smaller lines, that operated out of Hoboken. But those bars and taverns were filled all the time, because of the sailors, soldiers, and Navy men.

Q: Growing up, what was it like being Italian in Hoboken? Was it okay?

A: No, there was discrimination against the Italians, and there was discrimination against the Irish. Many times the Irish would be fighting with the Italians, and the Italians were getting mad because the Irish were gaining control of the politics. McFeeley was Irish, and everyone in politics was Irish. The Italians were starting to resent the fact that they were being left out, so McFeeley did appoint one Italian, to the City Commission. That was Fred M. De Sapio, who owned a business in Hoboken. Later on, when things got really tough, right after the war, he appointed another Italian to serve on the City Commission. But there was friction there, for a time.

Q: What about African-Americans? Were there African-Americans in Hoboken?

A: No, very few. I do remember one African-American being in one of my classes. I think it was the third or fourth grade. The guy's name was William Spearmint, as nice a guy as you'd ever want to meet. I was always forgetting my pencils at home, and he always had an extra one to give me. Yet, he disappeared. One time we came to class, and he was gone. They had moved out of Hoboken. I never did see him again.

Q: Was he the boy who, when they asked what you wanted to be when you grew up -- there was one boy, when they asked him what he wanted to be when he grew up -- you had a very sad story about that.

A: No, that wasn't in Hoboken. That was told to me by one of the musicians who worked for me. He said in school -- this was interesting -- they asked everyone, "What do you want to be?" And all the Caucasians would mention a "lawyer, doctor, businessman," and when they came to this colored young man, he said, "A garbage collector." The teacher stopped

and said, "What did you say?" and he repeated it. She said, "Don't you want to be something better than that?" and he said, "Hey, I'm colored. What else can I apply for?" Which, when the musician told me that story, I thought was kind of sad; that the guy thought he could only go so high or so far in life. Of course, that's changed now.

Q: That was not in Hoboken?

A: That was not in Hoboken. There were very few colored people that I know of in Hoboken.

Q: Throughout the years you lived there.

A: Throughout the years. I don't recall any being in grammar school or even high school.

Q: Now tell me about the African-American church group, was it? That kept applying to the Union Club.

A: There was a professional group that was headquartered in Jersey City, and they were composed

of doctors and lawyers and engineers. In fact, one of the women of, I think it was, an engineer (it might have been a lawyer), of Joe Louis, the fighter's, ex-wife. They called up and they wanted to rent the ballroom on a Friday night. In those days, there was a lot of, I guess, bad feeling against blacks. Most Caucasians, or Americans, just didn't want to have anything to do or associate with them. So they kept calling and calling, and finally Michael said to my dad, he said, "Look, Dad, we can't refuse them. We've got to let them come."

So we gave them a date. It was a Friday night, they came -- all in tuxedos and evening gowns, looking terrific -- they drove up in fancy automobiles, including a Rolls Royce (which was the first and last time we ever had one in our parking lot!). They ordered the most expensive liquors on the menu. They were extremely quiet, they enjoyed the music, and when the music was over they left quietly. That night they spent more money for one of our dances and evenings than any other affair that we had.

Q: Were they repeat customers?

A: They were repeat customers, but by that time we had sold the Union Club.

They were ordering the best liquor.

Q: Why was that shocking?

A: I don't know. You think of colored people as being in low-down jobs -- garbage collectors, maybe working as street cleaners --

Q: A little prejudice there.

A: In those days it was that way.

Q: Not always.

Tell about the fire at the Union Club.

A: Okay. The fire at the Union Club, which was, I believe, in February of 1949 -- We were living at the hotel, and the room clerk downstairs called us in the morning, about 5:30, and he said that, "The milkman who delivers milk to the Union Club is down here, and he says there's smoke coming out of the Union Club. He fears there might be a fire." So my brother and I got

dressed in about four minutes, we rushed down, and the milkman was still there. We got in his truck. By that time the room clerk had called the fire department. We got to the Union Club just before the fire department came, and we opened the doors by key. Because if the fire department got there before us, they would have smashed the front door down.

So when we got in, it looked like a fire in a panel of one of the electrical rooms where the main switches were. So I said to my brother, "Gee, this doesn't look like a serious fire. Perhaps once the firemen put it out, we might be open tonight again, for business." The fireman (I think it was a captain) said, "Now go into your office and take out anything of importance, any books or ledgers or anything, or money in the safe. Take it out of the safe and take it out of the building to a safe place." I said, "Why do that? It doesn't look like -- " He said, "Look, we know from experience."

So we took the main things out -- the books and the money -- and my brother, when he was taking out the money from one of the drawers (we had three drawers), he said, "This drawer has been forced open, and there's no money in it" -- which surprised the two of us.

We looked at the safe door; the safe door was not scratched or in any way worked upon, with hammers or anything. So we knew that somewhere along the line it had to be an inside job.

Q: Clarify this -- the drawer in the safe had been --

A: The drawer in the safe.

So we took the money out. We went outside the building, and by that time a tremendous amount of smoke had been building up in the ceiling of the Castle Bar, which was the main bar of the nightclub area. So the firemen said, "This isn't going to be like you thought it would be. We think this is a serious fire." So they called for more fire trucks. It was an extremely cold day in February, where all the water started to freeze and you had to be very careful when you walked outside. They finally put the fire out, but while they were working on the fire our neighbor across the street -- Joe Peccarino's family -- invited us upstairs. They lived on the fourth floor, the top floor of the apartment house, and we could see everything going on down below. We could see the roof catching fire, of the Union Club, flames

coming up -- it was really a very, very sad thing. My dad and my mother were on vacation. Because once my brother and I were old enough to take over, Dad worked less and less and took more time off -- which he deserved.

So they were away on vacation, out West. So while the fire was going on, this former employee of ours, whom Dad had fired for stealing four or five years earlier, came up to us, and we were shocked to see him. He said, "I'm sorry to hear what's going on with the burning of the Union Club. Can I have my old job back?" And the way he said it was very odd. We said, "Sure." He said, "I'll come to see you tomorrow." Then he disappeared in the crowd, and my brother looked at me and he said, "You know, he may have had the keys to the Union Club, to get in," because there was no forced entry, "and he may have known the safe combination." Which we found out later, from Dad, that during the war, when we were both away, he was an assistant general manager.

Q: That gentleman, that you saw.

A: Yes. Assistant manager.

TAPE 1, SIDE 2

Q: You were saying that the gentleman you saw outside the Union Club, on the day of the fire -- who requested his job back -- you later found out that he had been assistant manager during the war years, while you and Mike were away, and that he did know the combination of the --

A: -- safe.

Q: So you believed he set the fire.

A: Yes, we really believed that.

Q: Did they ever find someone?

A: No. We told the police that, and we were hoping he would contact us. He didn't come the next day, but we figured, "Maybe during the week." Because he had a glassy look in his eye. I don't think he was mentally all there. But we never did see him again.

Q: And what about liquor disappearing.

A: Oh, yeah. What had happened was -- I had wanted to get back into the Union Club while the fire wasn't that intense, and the fireman said to me, "You can't go in there, you don't have any boots on. It's wet and sloppy. You need boots." So I got on the bus, went six blocks to the Continental (the Continental was only six blocks away from the Union Club), got my boots, put on my raincoat, and went to the Union Club again. When I tried to get in, he said, "You can't go in." I said, "Why not? I've got my boots." He said, "Nope, we're not going to let you in." I said, "Look, when I was in the Navy I was in the fire department. I know how to act in fires." He wouldn't let me in, even though I insisted.

Then we found out, when the fire was all over, that some of the bars -- we had, I think it was, four bars. Two of the bars that were not touched by fire -- they broke into the cabinets, and all the liquor was gone. And downstairs, the main liquor room -- they had tried to open the main door. Thank god it was strong enough, and they couldn't get in. But a lot of the liquor had disappeared. Now who do you think stole the liquor?

Q: Well, wasn't there a picture of at Stevens -- ?

A: Yes. Stevens University, in their monthly magazine, they had a cartoon of the firemen fighting the fire and walking out with bottles of booze sticking out of their boots. That's probably how they stole the booze. Because when we were watching it, we didn't see any booze going out of the building.

Q: But, obviously, someone from Stevens must have seen something.

A: Yes. And that was kind of sad -- to know that the fire department stole, that way.

Q: Did you rebuild the Union Club?

A: Yes, the Union Club was rebuilt. The insurance we had on it never covered the full damage. We never thought there would be that serious a fire. What we did find out was that the ballroom upstairs, the main ballroom, apparently, years ago, did have a fire, and some of the beams were charred, and some of the beams were weakened, and the beams were placed too far apart. With the new building codes, beams have to be placed

closer together. So Dad said, "You know, maybe it's a good thing this fire happened, because with these new dances, like the Bunny Hop, with people jumping up and down, we could have had a cave-in, and people dying. That would have been awful. It would have been an awful tragedy. At least nobody got killed."

So we rebuilt the Union Club, and we used all-steel girders. The whole interior of the Union Club was all steel. When we got through rebuilding it, it was really a job that would last for years.

Q: Now you were involved in the Junior Chamber of Commerce?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that?

A: That was a group of young men who were interested in the city of Hoboken. I was, I think, the second or third president they had, and we would run a lot of civic affairs. The money was donated to charity. We ran oratorical contests, and I remember this young woman from Stevens Academy (which was the high school,

the private high school, in Hoboken) won one year. She was really very good, an excellent speaker. So we did a lot of good for the city.

Q: Would you talk a little bit about the tearing down of Stevens Castle?

A: Okay. Stevens Castle, which was located at Stevens University, on their campus, was the oldest building in Hoboken, the *oldest*. It was built from that green rock, that's famous around the Hoboken docks, around the hills. I was president of the Chamber at the time, and I found out on a Friday that Stevens was going to demolish the castle and put up a thirteen-story building. The building would be on a high bluff, and be the equivalent of about a thirty-story-high building.

So we got quite concerned at the Chamber. I called up a lot of the officers and members, and we decided that on Monday we were going to go and see the one in charge at Stevens. But by the time Monday came, Stevens Castle was completely demolished -- which we thought was a tragedy. They could have moved it. After all, they were engineers; they knew how to move things. We thought they would move it to another section of the

campus. So that's one of the major tragedies that happened in Hoboken -- eliminating and tearing down.

Q: What was the relationship between the college and the town when you were growing up -- from the '20s through the '50s, let's say?

A: Stevens, you're talking about?

Q: Yes.

A: It was a fairly good relationship. The town was a little bit peeved at Stevens buying a lot of the buildings on -- I'm trying to remember what they called it --

Q: Castle Point?

A: -- Castle Point. These were homes that were built by the very elite and prosperous and wealthy Germans, who had factories in Hoboken -- "Kerfel & Esse," and some of the other big companies. These were gorgeous homes, specially built, overlooking the Hudson River, and also overlooking the 10th Street park. That was one thing

that concerned Hoboken, because these houses that were bought up wouldn't be paying any taxes. Once Stevens got a hold of them, that was the end of that.

So that's about the only thing I can think of that the city of Hoboken and Stevens were at odds on, at times.

Q: Okay.

Do you remember going to any funerals, as a child, in Hoboken? What was that like? Were they at home? Or were they in funeral homes?

A: I remember this one boy in my class had passed away --

Q: How old were you?

A: Oh, gee. I must have been eight or nine. We all went to pay our respects. It was on the second or third floor of this tenement building, and in those days, I guess, the people who didn't have any money would have the wake inside their own apartment. So, as a result, when we went upstairs -- it was a small room. It was, I guess, part of the living room, where the casket

was against the wall and the young boy was in view there. Then there was another funeral I went to, when this young man who lived across the street from us -- he passed away. He was a nice guy but a little bit on the wild side. He would jump on trolleys and ride the trolleys in the rear. Apparently, what happened was that he fell off the trolley and got killed by an automobile.

So we went to his wake, which was the same way -- in a private house, or an apartment house. That was on the second or third floor. Thomas Magic was the guy's name.

Q: What factories do you remember? Where were the factories?

A: Well, there was Lipton Tea, which, of course, they've now made into a beautiful apartment building. There was Tootsie Roll. The funny part about Tootsie Roll -- Tootsie Roll, around the '50s, brought in a lot of Puerto Ricans to help them in the factories. Then a couple of years later they relocated to Chicago, and all the Puerto Ricans remained in Hoboken but without jobs. It took a while for them to get jobs, again. Then there was the rattan factory, that worked on bamboo

sticks and they made furniture out of that. There was another one called Automatic Graphics, I think it was. My aunt worked there, before she married my uncle. Automatic Register. Then there was "Shulttan" Men's Cosmetics, or Men's Shave Creams and Lotions. Then they moved out of Hoboken. Then there was Davis Baking Powder. They were in Hoboken. And there was Wonder Bread. Wonder Bread was located in Hoboken, and every year, around Christmas time, the beginning of November, they would hold a big dinner -- the Hoboken Chamber of Commerce would hold a great big dinner at the Union Club, and each of the companies in Hoboken would donate a sample of their products. They'd put it in a great big shopping bag, and it was something that everyone looked forward to. The lumber company that was in Hoboken -- I think it was "Dykes" Lumber Company, in Hoboken, would donate a big, thirty-six-inch ruler; Davis Baking Powder would donate a can of their products; Jello; General Foods; Standards Brands was also there; Wonder Bread would donate a small little, miniature loaf of bread and some cupcakes. The coconut company (I forget the name of that), they would donate a can of shredded, dried coconut. Then you had "pads" that were being donated -- Newman Leather would donate a small little piece of leather, which you could

use as a coaster or under a plant, at home. A lot of pencils, a lot of pads, and I'm trying to think of what else -- because the whole bag was really filled to the top.

Q: What about Maxwell House Coffee?

A: Oh! And Maxwell House Coffee would donate a small can, a miniature can of their coffee. In fact, I still have a can, that's over fifty years old, in my possession, and that was Sanka Coffee.

Q: Now could you smell the coffee when you went by the plant?

A: Oh, yeah! Anyone who went by the plant could smell the coffee being brewed. We took a tour of the plant one time, because they were very good customers at the Union Club, having banquets and retirement dinners, etc. Maxwell House also made tea, they also brewed tea, but apparently their teas weren't that popular. Maxwell House tea -- Lipton was the most popular tea being served at that time.

Q: What percentage of the population who lived in Hoboken at that time would you say worked there?

A: Well, I can only take a guess, but most of the people who lived in Hoboken worked in Hoboken. I know a lot of the people who worked at Maxwell House lived in Hoboken. Lipton Tea had a lot of employees. I knew them from the banquets they used to have at the Union Club. Some lived in Hoboken, but some of them lived out of town. A lot of the maintenance crews lived in Hoboken, some of the bus drivers.

But you know what I forgot to mention? The trolley trestle. That started from the Lackawanna ferries. It was elevated. You would go up a big flight of stairs and you would get on the trolley, and the trolley would go up this trestle to Jersey City. The one line was the Jackson Trolley, and it would take you to Journal Square. Many times we would take the trolley to go to the theatre. There were some nice theatres on Journal Square. Later on, I took the trolley when I was going to St. Peter's College.

That was a nice ride. But at the end of 1949, the year before I graduated, they took down the

trestle and they had buses. The buses did all the work, and the trestle was gone.

Q: Did Hoboken have theatres, besides the Fabian?

A: Yes. It had the U.S. Theatre, which was on Seventh and Washington Street, and that was also owned by Warner Brothers, who owned the Fabian Theatre. That was a Warner Brother theatre, and that had vaudeville, years ago. I remember seeing James Cagney stay at our hotel, the Continental.

Q: Oh, really? When was that?

A: Oh, well, that must have been -- I was a little boy then. That must have been around 1928-'29, something like that.

Q: Were there other celebrities who stayed at the hotel?

A: Probably so, but I don't remember.

There is a theatre, the Lyric Theatre, where George Burns met his wife -- Allen, what was her first name?

Q: Gracie.

A: Gracie Allen. That theatre was closed for many years; then, in the '50s, it was torn down and made into a parking lot. But Hoboken, at one time, had something like thirty-thirty-five theatres.

Q: Thirty-five theatres?

A: Yep. Most of them were vaudeville type theatres, and some of them were silent movie theatres, when they started.

Q: Now when you were a young man of a certain age, and you would take a girl out on a date, would you take her out on a date in Hoboken, or would you take her into the city?

A: I don't think I ever took any girl out in Hoboken. I always went to New York City.

Q: Why?

A: Oh, there were more restaurants in New York City, more theatres in New York City, it was easy to get to New York City -- you could take the tubes, which was the Hudson --

Q: PATH.

A: It's PATH now, but it was the Hudson and Manhattan tubes. You could take the ferry. I don't recall buses going to New York, although they may have.

Q: Okay. Were you in Hoboken when they filmed *On the Waterfront*?

A: Yes.

Q: What was that like?

A: Well, it generated a lot of interest in the people in Hoboken. Some of the scenes were photographed on the roof of the Continental Hotel. Of

course, they had to get permission first. Some of the scenes were also -- I think the wedding scene was at the Grand Hotel. They rented that. They hired as many local citizens to be in the film -- I remember my old gym teacher was in the film, and several other people I knew were in the film. Everywhere they went you would see people following them. But then -- it's funny -- when they found out that it was a film about graft and corruption and all that, they didn't want Hoboken to be mentioned, so in the movie --

Q: Who's *they*?

A: The people of Hoboken and the city fathers. They said, "It's going to be a black eye. It's nice to have them here, but don't mention -- " so Hoboken was never mentioned. I did see Marlon Brando and I did see Eva Marie Saint, though I never approached them. I wasn't an autograph hound. They stayed in New York, and they would come over by limousine and do the scenes. There was a young boy who lived close to the Continental Hotel, about six houses away, and he was the one they used in the film as the buddy of Marlon Brando. If any of you have seen the movie, you'll know who it is -- a nice

young man, who did a terrific job of acting. But, unfortunately, Hollywood can do good things and bad things. They promised the poor kid the world -- that they would use him in some other movies -- and as far as I know, he never again appeared in another movie, and it sort of broke the poor kid's heart. But he was a good actor.

Q: In the movie, they show the pigeon coops. Do you remember pigeon coops in Hoboken?

A: Well, they built one special -- When they were filming the scenes and showing New York in the background, they were on the Continental roof. However, the roof next to the Continental was where they built this pigeon coop, for the scene. That wasn't on our property, but I do remember seeing it, because I did go up on the roof.

It was amazing, the amount of equipment they took on the roof -- cameras, big search lights, even though they filmed in the daytime. They had all sorts of microphone equipment, booms, lights -- the whole works.

Q: What year was Mayor McFeeley finally ousted from office?

A: I believe it was '47. I was twelve weeks short of my twenty-first birthday. I was very disappointed that I couldn't vote in that election. But that was some election.

Q: What made it such an election?

A: Well, through the years McFeeley and his cohorts, and his brother -- they created such ill will. They were so bad that if anyone ran against the mayor, he would be destroyed after the election. Most of the time the guys running against the mayor were phonies that the mayor put up, so they weren't destroyed or harmed in any way. But through the years, the years he was there, he made so many enemies. Now the war is over (the war was over in '45), the men are coming home from Europe and the Pacific -- we fought Tojo, we fought Hitler, we fought Mussolini, and here we've got McFeeley, who's just as bad as these dictators were -- and a lot of the people coming back said, "We fought over there, he's got to go. We're going to clean up Hoboken."

That's eventually what happened. They got together and Fred De Scapio, before he was Mayor, who was a good friend of McFeeley, broke with McFeeley -- because there were certain things he wanted McFeeley to do, to correct, and McFeeley wouldn't do it. So he ran, Grogan ran -- John Grogan, who was president of the shipbuilders' union, and also served, I think, one or two terms in the Assembly in Trenton, very knowledgeable and very intelligent, a great speaker. Gee, when he got up, Grogan, he really could talk. Then they got Mangiello, who was a lawyer, who did a very good job. Then there was Borelli, who had the Seven-Up franchise, his company, distributing Seven-Up products. Then there was a fifth one. Oh. George Fitzpatrick, who was the policeman of duty when all the newspapers from New York photographed him --

McFeeley hated Fitzpatrick. Fitzpatrick was one of what they called "rebel cops." McFeeley was nasty to a lot of the policemen, except his close entourage, and he wanted to punish this individual, this particular policeman --

Q: I'm sorry -- Mayor McFeeley or the police chief? Who are we talking about?

A: I think it was the police chief, but the police chief and the mayor were in cahoots. They usually agreed on things. And since he was one of the rebels -- Fitzpatrick -- they decided to put him on "punishment duty." And what was "punishment duty?" Placing him on active duty in front of -- he directed traffic in front of City Hall, where they supposedly could keep an eye on him. He couldn't be relieved from duty; he had to stay on the job. So the newspapers and the newsreels started photographing Fitzpatrick eating a sandwich while directing traffic -- a sandwich in one hand, with the other hand directing traffic.

I'll tell you, that was the worst thing McFeeley and his brother, the chief, could do, because they got such bad publicity from the New York and Newark newspapers. And Fitzpatrick was made police commissioner, when the new regime took over.

Q: Now how come he was voted out this time, and not before? Just because people were upset?

A: I don't follow you. Say that again.

Q: Was it just that people were upset with McFeeley that he got out? If he was that crooked, wouldn't he have done stuff with ballot boxes and -- ?

A: Oh, yes. The main thing was, a lot of people were afraid to vote against McFeeley. They always felt that somehow, on paper ballots, he would put some sort of a sign, or signal, or checkpoint underneath. A lot of people felt that the city administration would know how they voted. So what they did was, civil service -- they started to work on civil service, and McFeeley, of course, was dead set against civil service.

Q: What was civil service?

A: Civil service was a law that would allow people who worked for the city to be more or less independent. They didn't have to depend, more or less, on the city for doing things; that they could do things on their own. [Interruption]

Q: You were saying that the civil service law was what?

A: It was a law that was passed that prevented the city from firing someone unless they had an extremely good reason, and most of the time they didn't have a good reason.

Q: You mean, in the past, when someone was fired.

A: In the past. If McFeeley didn't like someone, he'd say, "You're fired. You're out." Or he'd do some sort of a nasty thing -- like one time there were a bunch of teachers that he didn't like. He was a very deceitful type of guy. He got these teachers, and he had them all switched, gradually, to School #7. So now School #7 has all the teachers that McFeeley doesn't like. So what does he do next? He closes the school. No more jobs. Where are the teachers going to go?

So civil service prevented all these types of shenanigans. Then another important thing was the voting machine. Before that, you voted by ballot, and, of course, he always had his people inside the voting booths, and he always won. Many times people thought that, actually, McFeeley had lost, but somehow finagled

the votes to be reflected in his honor, more or less, to make him win a particular election.

So McFeeley fought this very hard. He did not want voting machines; he did not want civil service. And he lost. I think this is what really did him in. Because now people could vote without worrying, "Did somebody see my ballot? Was someone looking for a certain sign on how I voted?" Because most people were really afraid. That's what did him in.

Q: What happened to him, after he was kicked out of office?

A: Well, he was so embittered and so angered that he did not attend the inauguration, where the old mayor introduces the new administration -- which is usually what they did, years ago. Just like the new president -- when the new president took over in Washington, the elderly, outgoing president would be there, participating in the ceremonies. He was so embittered he wouldn't make any comments to any of the newspapers, he just faded out. About six months later I did see him in the drugstore we used to buy things from. The drugstore was about a block and a half away from the

Continental Hotel. I was very pleasant -- I said hello to him, "How are you?" -- and that was it. We didn't see him again, and he died, I think it was, eighteen months later. He died.

Q: How long did you own the Union Club, and why did you decide to sell when you did?

A: We owned the Union Club exactly twenty-five years. The reason we decided to sell was two-fold.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was in 1960.

What had happened was Hoboken was starting to slide and go downhill. The big companies were all moving out of Hoboken. There wasn't enough land to expand. I don't know about the labor market -- whether there was enough of a labor market, though there probably was -- so a lot of the companies started moving out -- Wonder Bread, Davis Baking Powder, all the biggies -- and we used to get a lot of parties, from all these big companies. And we were having trouble with the union,

too. We were all-union, and the union president was a bad character. He worked for us years ago, as an extra, and we had him fired for stealing. He never forgot that. When he took control of the union, he made it very difficult for us. It was every year, a new contract -- not every three years or every five years, but every year a new contract.

So Dad called my brother and I into the office one time and he said, "You know, Hoboken's going downhill. All the big companies are moving out. The union is demanding so much. We're above New York City (pay scale)," which was a competitor, "we're above Newark, in our pricing and in the wage scale. We're not going to make it. If we don't sell now, and Hoboken keeps declining, we'll never get the price that the Union Club is really worth." So we thought it over, we analyzed it, and thought it was a good idea. So that's the reason we sold.

Q: Now at this point, you were living in an apartment house, next to the Union Club.

A: Yes.

Q: And when you sold the business, you decided to move to your shore home?

A: Yes. We sold our home, which was next to the Union Club, which was a brownstone, we took all of our furniture and moved down to the shore, and we made the shore home, which was a large, fifteen-room house, into our year-'round residence.

Q: Now you purchased an antique car in 1955, in Hoboken. Would you tell a little bit about what you knew about the car, and how you came about it?

A: Well, I was interested in old cars, though I didn't own any old cars, and I thought it would be a nice hobby to be in. We had a station wagon from the Union Club, that was purchased from Varley Motors -- which was, I think, on Willow Avenue around 15th Street, just before you went over the bridge to go to Weehawken. I would take the car in for servicing every so often, so I said to one of the Varley brothers (there were two brothers, nice young men), I said, "I'm looking for an old car (I'd like to belong to the hobby), probably a Model-T." So he says, "Oh! Model-T? Follow me." So we

went across the street to his warehouse, where he had all these new automobiles --

Q: New, 1955 automobiles.

A: Yes, all new 1955 -- and way in the back is this four-door Model-T. "Oh," I said, "Beautiful." I looked it over. "Gee," I said, "What do you want for it?" He said, "No, it's not for sale." I said, "Why are you showing it to me?" He said, "I thought you liked old cars." "Well, I do, but I'd like to buy it." He says, "No, we're going to fix it up, and we're going to use it for parades, to advertise Varley Motors." I said, "That sounds reasonable."

So about a year or two later, when I was in there having the car serviced, he said, "Paul, we've decided we're not going to be doing anything with the automobile. If you'd like to buy it, it's yours." So I bought the automobile. I forget what I paid. I think it was \$400. I told him, "If I buy this car from you the first time, I'll have you put it in shape." So I had them do the motor over. I had the body shop paint the car. So when I picked up the car, it was in fairly decent shape.

I had to get new tires for it. He said, "Those tires are really old."

Q: What about the safety glass?

A: Well, the only safety glass it had was the front windshield, and that did disturb me, because the car was very big. It was an enclosed automobile (it was a sedan), with very big windows. So I decided, "I'm going to have safety plate put in all the windows," and I eventually did, about a year later. I had that put in. I had to buy all new tires, from Montgomery Ward. They were the only ones who sold those tires.

The antique automobile hobby was not quite that popular around the '50s, and a lot of tire makers were not making antique car tires. So you could get an old car, and if the tires on it were usable, great, but most of the time they were all dead rubber. But finally, James Melton talked Firestone into making antique automobile tires. But Montgomery Ward made these tires for some of the old tractors. Not so much tractors, but a lot of Model-Ts were still on farms, still being used.

Q: Now who owned your Model-T before you did?

A: It was owned by a tavern owner who was downtown Hoboken -- Biggio. I never met him, but I understand he kept the automobile all week long in the garage, and on Sundays he would take it out. He'd take his family for a ride, and he would also take the kids in the area around the block a couple of times. From what I've gathered, he must have been a nice individual.

Q: Speaking of individuals -- when you look back at Hoboken, who are the people who stand out in your mind?

A: Well, of course, Mr. Stover. He stands out in my mind. He was a very find gentleman. Mr. Hackey, William Hackey. He was the manager of the Continental Hotel, that Dad owned. Charlie Cerutti who was the manager of the Union Club. He stood out in my mind. I'm trying to think of others.

Q: Teachers, kids you played with --

A: Well, Miss Mooney, also, was a very fine teacher. Miss Hayes was another fine teacher.

Q: What grade was Miss Hayes?

A: I had Miss Hayes in two grades. I think it was the second grade, and the fourth or the fifth grade. She was really a nice woman. I remember one Christmas she bought a lot of little toys and gave them to us. I guess the money came out of her own pocket, which most teachers wouldn't do.

I'm trying to think who else. There were other teachers I liked, but I can't remember their names.

Q: When you go to Hoboken now, what strikes you the most?

A: What strikes me the most is the waterfront. For years, I remember, the big docks -- North German Lord, Hamburg-American line, the Holland line, the Polish line, Scandinavian line. They had all these piers, and they're gone. There's a beautiful, terrific walkway, right on the water, where you can walk from First Street, I guess all the way up to Sixth or Seventh Street, up to

Sinatra drive. That's really something. And all the new buildings that they put up along River Street, on the property that used to be dockside property.

Q: Now you would go back to Hoboken in the '60s and '70s, in the early '80s, when it wasn't in good shape, to visit family. What was that like?

A: Well, it was a city that was dying. It was kind of sad to see -- a lot of vacant apartments, a lot of old houses, nobody fixing them up, companies closing. On Washington Street there were some vacant stores, though not that many. But there were some vacant stores. First and Hudson was First Street, going all the way down to the western part of Hoboken. That was dying. There were a lot of businesses there. Joe La Paglia's florist business was there. He was related. We were related, through Dad; that was his cousin. On Washington Street there was "Geysmer's," and eventually "Geysmer's" moved out, and that was a very fine men's store. A lot of your good stores started to move out or close down. A lot of these guys just retired.

So it was sad to see Hoboken going in that direction.

Q: As you look back, what years do you think were the worst years for Hoboken?

A: I think the years around the late '50s and into the '60s. Then I think it started to turn around, in the late '60s. It was amazing -- new apartment houses going up. You take like the downtown of Hoboken, the western part -- the places where it abuts up to Jersey City -- that was in terrible shape for many years, all broken-down houses. There were people who did maintain their houses down there, but in general, a lot of the buildings were just deteriorating. Now, when you go to Hoboken, new apartment houses have sprung up down there. It's not an old city anymore, it's a revitalized community.

Q: Speaking about back there -- do I recall your telling me about when the river would flood? Do you remember Hoboken being an island, with the marshland?

A: I don't remember that, but I remember reading about the history of Hoboken, going way back;

that during high tide, Hoboken would look like an island. There would be water surrounding it almost on every side.

Q: But that wasn't the case when you were a child.

A: No. No, I don't remember that.

Q: Did you have cobblestone streets when you were a child?

A: Yes. Washington Street -- let me think now. Washington Street, which had the trolley cars -- yes. Most of the streets, going way back, were cobblestone.

Q: When did they get paved over?

A: Boy. It must have been in the late '30s and '40s. Yes. We had trolleys in Hoboken, then they got rid of the trolleys, and they put in these buses that had these electrical lines, that were hooked up to where the old trolley, electrical, overhead lines were.

Q: They just used the same lines.

A: Yes. So that was nice. So they didn't use any gasoline; they just used electricity. Then they took that away. But there was a trolley line that went all the way down to the Lackawanna Ferry.

Q: From where?

A: I think from Weehawken. In fact, somebody said there was one line that went all the way to North Bergen.

Q: Okay.

Are there things that you remember that I haven't asked about, that you want to talk about?

A: Yes. There were several automobile dealerships in Hoboken, that sold automobiles. I understand there's none there now.

Q: What automobile dealerships were there?

A: Chrysler and Dodge.

Q: Where was that?

A: They were downtown.

Q: In the western part.

A: In the western part. And Varley Motors was downtown, as I mentioned before, near the bridge going over to Weehawken. AZ Motors (they sold Chryslers), which was next to the Continental Hotel. They had a showroom. Oh. And behind the Union Club, years ago, was a Ford dealership. It may have been the same one -- Varley Motors -- but his father, at that time, owned it. Later on, that became the A&P -- Varley Motors. Behind the Union Club. That was on Washington Street. The Union Club was on Hudson Street, then there was an alley in between. So when I bought the Model-T, the garage where I kept the Model-T was next to the Union Club, and it was almost diagonal to where the car was first purchased --

Q: Oh, really?

A: -- yeah. Which I thought was kind of amusing, to note that the car had come, many, many years ago, from across the street.

Q: What else do you remember?

A: I remember the festivals they used to have downtown Hoboken, the Italian festivals. They'd have all sorts of candies and food and lights at night. That was a nice thing, to go to the festivals.

Let's see. I'm trying to think. Then they used to have the American Legion parade every year, down Washington Street, then part of Hudson Street. Most of the people who marched there were from World War I, and some of the veterans' children, such as my brother and I, we'd sometimes march. We had special hats made.

And, let's see. I remember the first time we bought an automobile. Dad never did drive. In 1939 Dad decided we needed an automobile, and Mom says, "But you don't drive." He said, "We'll get somebody to drive it." So in 1939 we got a hold of this young man who did the driving for us. I think his first name was Al. Then, unfortunately, he was drafted for the war.

He did work for us. In the winter time, when the car wasn't used much, we had him work at the Union Club. The 1939 LaSalle was a beautiful car, very spacious, very comfortable. Then Dad got a letter from the Cadillac company, saying they were no longer making LaSalle automobiles, but they are making, now, a special Cadillac, at a reduced price. So then Dad says, "Let's get a Cadillac," so we got a 1941 Cadillac. That was just before the war.

Q: Was Mike driving at that point?

A: Mike was driving. I couldn't drive, but Mike was driving at that point. I learned to drive on Hudson Boulevard, in 1943, when I was seventeen -- 1943. But there was a garage on Hudson Street, just a block from the Continental Hotel, where we used to put the car. The car was always garaged; we never left it outside. They had a special service; if you wanted them to, they would come and pick you up.

Q: This is the garage?

A: So a lot of times at night, when we were real tired -- around 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning, when the Union Club would be closing down -- we would call them -- not often, but we would call them -- the guy would get in the car, come up to the Union Club, get us and bring us back. So that was a nice feature. We enjoyed that.

Q: Speaking of parades -- you mentioned parades. You marched in the centennial parade, right, for Hoboken?

A: Yes.

Q: What festivities do you remember around that? What was that event like, when they celebrated the 100th anniversary?

A: I do remember wearing my American Legion uniform. I was commander at the time. It was an extremely cold day. It must have been in March or April, a windy day, marching down Washington Street. We started, I think, at 14th Street. There were other activities going on at that time, that we participated in. I'm trying to

think what they were. We're going back more than fifty years.

Q: Were there a lot of people at that parade?

A: Oh, yes. Yes. A lot of people participated. We had several bands, also. We must have had some sort of festivities, where we got to dinner for dinner or something. But Hoboken had one recently.

Q: Well, this year it's celebrating the 150th.

What else do you remember, that you want to share with us?

A: Well, I remember I always wanted a bicycle when I was in Hoboken, and Dad and Mom thought it was dangerous. We would pester Mom and Dad, and I guess we must have worn them down. So in 1937, Mom says, "You can get a bicycle, but you can't ride it in the street. You have to ride it on the sidewalk." We agreed to that.

So the thing is -- where do we find a bicycle? I think it was in North Bergen, there was a

Sears, a big Sears store. So we took the trolley, we went up there, we picked out a bicycle --

Q: Just for you, or did Mike get one, too?

A: No, it was for both of us.

Q: One bike for both of you.

A: A bike for the both. Mike and Mom and I went up there, we bought the bike, and we bought the one that was on display, because they came apart. We told the guy we were going to take it with us, so he said, "Okay, take this one," and he tightened a few of the bolts.

TAPE 2, SIDE 1

Q: You and your older brother, Mike, were going to share.

A: It was an Elgin bike, all black, with cream-colored striping -- really a nice bicycle. So we get outside, we go to the corner where the trolley is,

and the guy -- when the door opened, my mom says, "Where can we put the bicycle? In the back?" There was room in the back of the trolley. They were big trolleys. "No, we don't allow that," he said, "You don't allow it?" He wouldn't let us on.

So from North Bergen, we walked all the way home, to Hoboken. Boy, I got to hand it to my mother, because my brother and I, we're riding, here and there --

Q: You're riding the bike.

A: We're riding the bike, and poor Mom is walking.

We made it back. She didn't complain. Whenever we used to bike, we'd take it from our apartment, the third floor of the Continental, put it in the elevator, and we had to put the back wheel up first, because the elevator wasn't that big. The car was big enough to put the bike inside the car, on an angle.

So that was a nice bike. In fact, we still have that bike, as a memento of our years gone by.

Q: So you always just rode it on the sidewalk.

A: Yes, well, once in a while we went in the street -- which we shouldn't have. But most of the time -- and you know what's funny? We had a house -- we took a summer home. I think it was in Far Hills. One day we asked my dad -- we were riding the bike, and he had come up for the summer. We asked him, "Did you ever ride a bike, Dad?" He says, "Oh, yes, years ago." We said, "Well, you want to ride this one?" He says, "Oh, I don't know." We finally got Dad to ride the bike, and by golly, we were shocked. His balance was great; he just didn't know how to stop it." But he enjoyed it, and we were amazed that Dad could ride a bicycle.

Q: Do you remember stories that your father told of Hoboken, when he was growing up?

A: Well, when Dad came to Hoboken, he was seven years old.

Q: What year was that?

A: That was in 1897, because he was born in 1890. The whole family came over. Let's see now, there

were seven of them all together -- five children and two grownups, his father and his mother. They took an apartment in New York City, when they first came. They stayed with relatives in New York City, and then my dad's father found out that there was a barbershop available in Hoboken; that the owner was going back to Germany -- it was a German who owned it -- and it was available.

So he came to Hoboken with this relative, my grandfather and this relative, and they liked the shop. They liked the terms of the shop, the payment of the shop. Everything seemed to be good. Then they realized they'd have to move to Hoboken. So they got an apartment above the Clam Broth House. The Clam Broth had four or five different buildings, and they were on the most western part of the building, if we can say "western." They lived there, on the second floor, for many years. Dad did take some schooling, but he didn't like schooling at all, so eventually he dropped out and started working on the docks, at first shining shoes, then selling newspapers, then selling flowers. All along River Street, German was spoken. He had a knack for picking up the German language, so he got very proficient. After a while, everyone thought he was German, and, of course, that helped him. The Germans,

knowing he was German, would give him more business, whereas if they knew he was Italian, they might have discriminated against him. I don't know. I'm guessing.

Then he realized that selling papers and flowers -- though he did well with flowers, in the flower business, he sold for some gentleman who would supply the flowers. There were a lot of dance halls with girls that would dance with individuals -- I guess they were dance-hall girls. A lot of the guys would dance with the girls, think they were nice, and they would buy some flowers and give them to the girls. So Dad did very well. Then the girls had so many flowers they didn't know what the heck to do with them, so they'd give them back to my dad --

Q: -- and he'd resell them?

A: He'd resell them. So he says, "Boy, this is a good business." So then he says to himself, "Why should I sell for someone else, when I can sell for myself?" So now he wonders, where does the boss get his flowers from? So one night he followed the boss, on the ferry, and the boss went to New York. There's a flower district in New York, where he bought all the flowers. That's all he needed. He gave the boss notice, went to

New York every day, and bought flowers. Business got so good that he got his cousin, Joe La Paglia, to help him out.

Q: The one who eventually became a florist.

A: Yes.

Q: Joe did the same thing?

A: Joe did the same thing. He says, "Why should I work for my cousin, when I can work -- " So Joe followed my dad to New York, and knew where the flowers were. Good thing it didn't bother my dad.

Q: Now what did he talk about? Did he talk about things he remembered as a child, in Hoboken?

A: Well, he remembered the Titanic going down. When the Titanic went down -- The German lines and the English lines were big rivals. One would build a ship and try to get the blue ribbon. The blue ribbon was the ribbon you would get if you were the fastest ship across,

in less time than any other ship. So what happened was, the Titanic went down; it didn't have enough lifeboats; the captain wasn't at the helm at the time, so the Germans took advantage of this. They advertised two captains on every ship, one in the steering house (or whatever you call it) at all times. And spotlights. They would show these giant spotlights in their ads --

Q: -- so you could see an iceberg?

A: Yes.

So the Germans were doing quite well to begin with, but they picked up a lot of extra business because of this.

Q: And what did Grandpa say about -- So the German lines were in Hoboken, they're picking up business after the Titanic goes down -- did he talk about this?

A: Oh, yes. He said the business increased, because Dad -- By this time Dad had gotten out of the flower business, and he was working at one of the hotels. There must have been about eight hotels in

Hoboken. He worked there as a janitor. Then he worked himself up from janitor to, I guess it would be, equivalent to a bus-boy, cleaning tables. After that, he became room clerk. After room clerk, he became what was known as a runner.

Now what does a runner do? He goes down to the steamship lines, and he mentions to the people coming in who he is and what hotel he represents, and would they like to stay at the hotel? Most of them would stay a day or two at the hotel, then they would get tickets on railroads going out west. A lot of the Germans went to cities out west and to farms out west. So he would go to the German lines, the Holland line -- now that he spoke excellent German -- and he would tell them, "I'm from so-and-so hotel," first it was the Central, then it was the Grand, then it was the Meyers, "and we'd like to have you. We'll take care of all your needs. If you'd like us to get you tickets, to anywhere in the United States, we'll be glad to take care of you."

So he did very well, because a lot of these people tipped him, besides his salary, which wasn't much. Then there was also a stream of people going back to Europe. They had been here since the 1880s or maybe even earlier, they had made their money, now they wanted

to go back to Germany and live a nice life in their old hometown. So a lot of these people who were going back to Germany, to Europe, would want to see America first. They'd never seen New York, or they'd never seen any of the important things that there was, so he would act as a guide, on his time off. He would take them to New York, and, of course, they tipped him. A lot of them would say, "Well, gee, maybe I should get some new clothes to take with me," so he'd take them over to Geismar's, and Geismar would give him a commission on whatever he brought in.

So when most people were making around \$10 to \$15 a week, Dad was making \$200 a week. That was a tremendous amount of money. He even got his brother, Uncle Jimmy, to work for him, helping to extradite matters. Sometimes Jimmy would go to Washington to get special permission and certain documents that had to be filled, if someone was going to Europe.

So he did very well financially, and he does remember Hoboken. He remembers the ships -- the Leviathan and the Fatherland. Well, the Leviathan was the Fatherland.

Q: Leviathan means fatherland?

A: No, Leviathan, I think, means "big."

Fatherland was the name of -- the Leviathan. That was it. The Fatherland was the Leviathan. That was a ship we took control of after the First World War.

These big steamships that came into Hoboken were really giants. They were in the thousands of tons, and a lot of organizations would hold banquets on board the ship, when the ship was in port, refueling and picking up supplies. It would be in port maybe a couple of days, loading up on coal, so a lot of the big organizations, chambers of commerce and what have you, would hold their annual dinners on board these big ocean liners. A lot of the hotels (and I guess most of them were in New York, not so much in New Jersey) resented this, because they felt they were losing all this business. So they put a stop to it. As a result, no more big dinners were being sold on these giant, luxury liners.