

## Oral History Interview

Donald Peck

WH082

(written transcript and digital audio)

Originally Donald Peck was interviewed at Evergreen by Brenda Velasco on May 21, 2010 but due to technical difficulties there was no audio. Participating in the first interview were students from the Gifted and Talented Program: Samantha Czapik (CMS), Madison Kaye (CMS), and Julian Palermo (CMS). Nancy Paugh, Supervisor of the Gifted and Talented Program, also was present.

A second interview successfully was recorded on August 10, 2011 at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 1:00 P.M. Donald Peck is a noted historian, author of several books, president of Raritan/Millstone, associated with the Proprietary House, a businessman and a long time resident of Woodbridge. I have cut out many of the things that he does because we only have an hour for this interview. Also there is one other thing which is the Historic Preservation Commission as well as the two (HPC) brochures which are outstanding that came in first and second place. (Historic Walking Tour of Woodbridge, Volume I and II)

### *1. Identify individual-name, section date of birth.*

*Donald Peck:* My name is Donald Peck. I was born on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1938.

### *2. How long have you lived in Woodbridge?*

*Donald Peck:* I lived in Woodbridge from 1942.

### *3. Why did you or your family move to Woodbridge?*

*Donald Peck:* My parents lived in Metuchen and then moved to Perth Amboy to live with my father's parents. It was a difficult time, the late Depression. I moved to Perth Amboy with my family in 1942 and we lived in a rented house that belonged to Martha Schwenger whose family owns **Schwenger Brothers Trucking Company**. She was my father's first cousin and within a couple of years my folks were able to buy the rented house at 187 Rowland Place from the Schwengers and a few others of her siblings who owned the property. So I grew up at 187 Rowland Place, a wonderful street. We had twenty-two children on our block.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this was in Perth Amboy?

*Donald Peck:* Woodbridge, Rowland Place. We had twenty-two children on our block. They were all the same age. We all went to school together either to Woodbridge schools or to Woodbridge Catholic schools. I went through the entire school system; School No. 1, School No 11 and the old Woodbridge High School on Barron Avenue. I left Woodbridge to go to college, Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana in 1956. My family moved from Rowland Place to 37 Hollywood Drive and then subsequently both my mother and father and I moved to Colts Neck, New Jersey. We lived in two separate places. I returned to the Fords section of Woodbridge in 1997, partially as a retirement effort. I was commuting my entire business career and I'm still in business after fifty years. I moved to the Fords section of Woodbridge where my father and his business partner, Hans Clausen, had begun what is today the

**Clausen Company**, a company with international sales and one of only four manufacturers of automotive refinishing products in the U.S. in our field and the only one ever in New Jersey. My family is not from Woodbridge and I'm the only one that still lives there, of course. I live at the old historic Cutter farm on Main Street. The foundations of my house are an old barn. It was built in 1690 and the house, of course, was changed from a barn to a gentleman's country cottage and then to a nice home over a period of time. It's well preserved. It's been one of my goals to maintain that property and preserve it for future generations.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's one of the few in Fords.

*Donald Peck:* And it's one of the only two historic structures still standing in Fords.

*Brenda Velasco:* Knowing your background and your love of history, this is perfect for you.

*Donald Peck:* It is and my neighbor, of course, has the main house on the old farm. So together these two building structures constitute the oldest structures in Fords; the barn is probably the only existing barn in Woodbridge Township with a foundation that dates back to 1690. I've been a long time preservationist over my entire career.

#### **4. What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area you lived? –houses, streets, stores, houses of worship, schools, etc.**

*Donald Peck:* As far as physical changes that have occurred in the area which I live I remember Main Street Woodbridge very well as a boy. I remember the houses that were on it and I remember the buildings that are no longer there. My first bank account was at the Woodbridge National Bank which is no longer a bank. My family and I were members of the Woodbridge Methodist Church.

*Brenda Velasco:* ...which is still there.

*Donald Peck:* Which is still there and where I spent all of my entire childhood. I had perfect Sunday school attendance, I never missed a Sunday, and I was very active in my church and decided to go into the Methodist ministry. That was why I went to Earlham College to study for ministry. I remember when the church burnt down. My job, as a kid growing up to earn money, was to be the sexton at the Woodbridge Methodist Church.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, you have to tell us what a sexton is.

*Donald Peck:* A sexton is a caretaker and my duties were, in the wintertime: shoveling the snow and chopping the firewood to heat two wooden furnaces. In the summertime, of course, I cut the grass. I, also, on the weekends, took care of the entire cleaning of the building. For that work, every weekend for two years, my freshman and sophomore year of high school, I was paid the magnificent sum of twenty-five dollars a week.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Donald Peck:* I was there in 1954, the evening that the church burnt, and it was a very sad time because I invested so much of my own life and effort into caring for that structure. It was a very, very sad day.

*Brenda Velasco:* Do you know what caused the fire?

*Donald Peck:* The fire was caused by a spotlight that illuminated the Good Shepherd window which is a replacement now in front of the church. But the original one was illuminated by a single spotlight and the interior of the church was covered with John

Manville's asbestos siding which was a cost preventative and a heat help for that church. The workmen had come to paint this siding, which was now very faded, and in the process they put a plastic tarp over the spotlight. Well the spotlight came with a timer and when it came at the appointed hour in the early evening, it caught fire to the plastic. And then, of course being an old structure, everything began burning and by the time the fire company got there the church was pretty well demolished. I remember that evening very well in 1954. That particular congregation then went, fortunately, to the Masonic building on Green Street and they held their services there for two years. I taught Sunday school there as well my junior and senior years of high school. I didn't have my church choir anymore so I decided to take organ instruction at the Congregational Church. And as a result I was talented enough, and I've always sung, that I was able to take on the full time duties as organist and choir master at the old White Church, the First Presbyterian Church of Woodbridge, my senior year of high school. I remember my time there very well. My first wedding the bride was late and I only had a limited repertoire and I had to keep playing over and over again. When Reverend Delaney, who was the minister there, preached his famous sermon about his mother always teaching him to change his underwear in case he had an accident and was hit by a car, he preached that on Mother's Day, I remember that very well. I remember all of the old families of that church whose names are part of Woodbridge history and whose graves are in the old churchyard. They were all friends of mine because they all liked me and some of them sang in the choir.

*Brenda Velasco:* What were some of the names?

*Donald Peck:* You know the names just escape me at this point. If I had thought about it I might remember it; it might come back.

*Brenda Velasco:* We'll come back to it.

*Donald Peck:* At any rate, I earned enough money playing for the Presbyterians to put myself in my first year of college and buy myself a new car and have plenty of money for gas. It made me popular in my senior year of high school. So that's what happened to me, I was a college prep student. I was told from the time I was a little boy, you are going to college so I had no choice I was going to college. My field was the ministry. All the churches of Woodbridge were something I remember very well. I remember very well, as a boy, being told by my Catholic playmates on Rowland Place, that if I didn't change to Roman Catholicism that I was going to Purgatory. I would walk by the old St. James wooden structure, never went in, and I would see the little blue and red lights flickering in the distance by the high altar and I would wonder, what's going on in there, it looked so mysterious. Then one day, a very moving day in my life after Pope John XXIII (1958-1963) was elected and made major changes within the church, our church, the Methodist Church, was invited along with the other Protestant churches in Woodbridge to go to St. James for a unity service which happened to correspond as I recall with what we used to call Reformation Sunday. On Reformation Sunday, in the Protestant Church, you would hear about Martin Luther and you would hear an anti-Catholic sermon. But now we were in St. James Church as a community of Protestants and coming up the aisle were the choir and nuns and the priest. They were all singing Martin Luther King's famous hymn, *Almighty Fortress is our God*, which we would sing every Reformation

Sunday when the minister would then get in the pulpit and blast the Catholics. It was a very, very touching experience. I remember that very well.

*Brenda Velasco:* It must have been.

*Donald Peck:* Overwhelming for me personally.

*Brenda Velasco:* This was Pope John XXIII who was very ecumenical.

**5. What public buildings/property were there? Post office, library, parks, firehouse, schools, etc.?**

*Donald Peck:* I remember, of course, the Barron Library. That was my library, that's where we all went. One of the flaws I had there was studying about Woodbridge history. In our freshman year in high school, we were given a full semester about Woodbridge history and of course we had to do research. I spent a lot of time there looking up things that I could find about Woodbridge history.

*Brenda Velasco:* So you had a full semester in high school then?

*Donald Peck:* A full semester, yes, my freshman year. I forgot what the course was called.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, that's quite unusual.

*Donald Peck:* Well along with other things it was like a civics course but it was very much concentrated on Woodbridge history. Let's see, as far as other changes are concerned, of course I remember when the Heard's Brook and the Woodbridge Park would flood and that was a mess until that all got straightened out. I would walk to school; that's something kids don't do today. I never took a bus and I never had a ride in a car. I walked to school all twelve years of my time in Woodbridge that was important. I went home for lunch most of the time. When I got to high school we were on split session, so I went home for lunch because I didn't have lunch at school unless I stayed for the chorus which was an elective.

*Brenda Velasco:* And naturally you were involved in the chorus.

*Donald Peck:* I was very much involved in the chorus all through high school. Public buildings.....

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh, wait a minute let's go back to some of the stores that you remember.

*Donald Peck:* Well I remember **Choper's**. My family shopped at **Christensen's Department Store**.

*Brenda Velasco:* And **Choper's** was also.....

*Donald Peck:* **Choper's** was another store which was on the same side of the street where the Italian restaurant is now; I've forgotten the name of that corner, it's diagonally across from **Jackson's Drug Store**. I would go there for my ice cream sodas and across from the Reformed Church, on that corner, around the corner from **Jackson's**, was a little luncheonette and I had twenty-five cents that I was given for my lunch when I didn't go home. I would go there and I would get a sandwich and a glass of milk and I would have four cents left. I'd save my four cents in my piggybank, of course, so I was able to accumulate quite a bit of change.

*Brenda Velasco:* Those were the days.

*Donald Peck:* Going to the movies, the **State Theatre**, I remember that very well. In fact, I want to mention this, when we would go to the **State Theatre**, for twenty-five cents we saw two movies and we would see the newsreel. This was during the Second

World War and they would have, in the news, distorted pictures of Japanese persons with big teeth and slanted eyes looking very ugly in cartoons and they were designed to help boost our energies to fight the war in Japan. I developed a prejudice against Japanese people because of that. When I went to college, wouldn't you know, in my junior year I had a Japanese roommate. He didn't look at all like these cartoons. He was a very fine human being and we roomed together for a year and became very good friends. I had to overcome my prejudice against Japanese people. It was largely due to what I saw in the **State Theatre**. My mother would collect the dishes at the **State Theatre** from time to time and we had a set of dishes that were right from the **State Theatre**. They were around the longest time. They were made in Japan probably and the occupied Japan and they were probably white with a little rose pattern on them.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you remember that?

*Donald Peck:* Most families in Woodbridge had a collection of those.

*Brenda Velasco:* Where did you do most of your shopping then?

*Donald Peck:* There was a store on Amboy Avenue just up from Grove which was a meat market. That building is still there but it has another use. They had groceries and meats and during the war we had rations (cards). My mom would send me over there to pick up something, maybe a pound of sugar with a ration, or a piece of white material that you mixed with colored powder and it became butter. There was an **A&P** downtown. I remember the **A&P** very well because they had the most wonderful coffee machines next to the cash register. As you walked into the **A&P** you could smell the ground coffee, the *Red Circle*, the *Bokar*, and one other one. My folks always got the *Red Circle*. The floors were wood and oiled, I remember that very well. And of course the 5&10, I remember the 5&10 very well. My mom, in my junior and senior year, worked in the 5&10 part-time and she was paid ninety cents an hour which was the highest wage paid for a part-time woman working in that store. All the ladies in that store had been there forever and ever and were very jealous of her because the manager, Mr. Dobb, paid her more because he said she was worth it.

*Brenda Velasco:* Nice compliment.

*Donald Peck:* I was always proud of my mother being willing to do that to help our family.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you go outside Woodbridge for shopping or was this self-contained?

*Donald Peck:* No, quite frankly, it was either the little grocery store, the **A&P** downtown, **Christensen's** or **Choper's**. There were no shopping centers of course. When I was in high school getting ready to go to college we would get on the train and go to Newark to the college prep, **Hahnes** I think it was.

*Brenda Velasco:* You're right, **Hahnes** and **Bamberger's**.

*Donald Peck:* **Bamberger's**, right, we went to **Bamberger's**. As far as Perth Amboy was concerned we didn't shop in Perth Amboy but as a kid I went by bus from the corner of Green and Amboy Avenue to Perth Amboy every Saturday by the time I was seven until I was about sixteen. I took piano lessons with George Ruddy on State Street. George Ruddy was also the organist at the Methodist Church and we became good friends. One of my good recollections is Miriam Deval Bergen who

was a member of that church and who was the historian for the church. She and I were very good friends. She got me invited to a number of soirees where I would entertain by playing the piano and maybe accompanying a vocalist for a group called *The Salmagundi Club*. They were a really swell group of Woodbridge elites who would meet on a monthly basis in elegant homes in Woodbridge and Sewaren and the women would be dressed in the evening gowns and the men in tuxedos. They would have a dinner party and they would call in the people to entertain. I attended a lot of those parties because I played the piano.

*Brenda Velasco:* And all that helped you in making money, too?

*Donald Peck:* Yeah, I made money and it all helped towards that college fund.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Donald Peck:* So what did I do for recreation?

*Brenda Velasco:* What about public buildings.

*Donald Peck:* Let's see, the post office, I think, was on Pearl Street. As far as parks were concerned in the summertime, if I had some free time, I would go to the Woodbridge Park near where the old firehouse was and the first aid squad and they would have supervised games and we would sit there on the park benches and play games.

*Brenda Velasco:* So the township had a recreation program going on.

*Donald Peck:* Yes, they had a recreation program. I remember playing dominos there and I'm not sure what other games were played.

*Brenda Velasco:* And the firehouse was always on that location?

*Donald Peck:* The firehouse was opposite the No. 1 School. There wasn't any first aid squad then. It was finally built around the corner much later. I'm not sure where they kept the local ambulance.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay and that gets us to recreation now.

#### **6. What did you do for recreation?**

*Donald Peck:* I was in athletics so I rode my bike.

*Brenda Velasco:* Good exercise.

*Donald Peck:* I would take rides with my friends to the Woodbridge clay banks and the clay banks that I went to with my bike were accessible by way of Green Street. We would cross Route 9 into what is now the Woodbridge Shopping Center and that was a vast complex of woods and clay banks and a very large lake. I never went swimming in the lake because we were told that there were caves and it wasn't safe to swim there and that peopled had drowned there but that was always a good adventure to take the bike there. I also played the piano that was a recreation for me. And, you know, I played the normal games kids do growing up like hide and seek and we would play street games. Rowland Place is a concrete street and we heated our house with coal. All the houses, at that time, were heated with coal until they converted to oil. We would take pieces of coal and we would draw trails on the street and we'd make bases. We used our imaginations. We had that street pretty well marked up until it rained and then it would be all washed away.

*Brenda Velasco:* You were creative and you used what you had.

#### **7. What was the focal point of your community?**

*Donald Peck:* For me it was the church. My whole social life took place at the church and it was a very meaningful experience. As a young person I was always into leadership and I became what was called the president of the MYF, Methodist Youth Fellowship, when I was in my early high school years. Then went on to become the sub district president and then I became a conference president in my senior year for the entire Methodist church of North Jersey where we would meet at Drew University. I had that car that I paid for with the money that I got from the Presbyterians so I could drive up to Madison in my car. My community was the church.

*Brenda Velasco:* This is one of the oldest Methodist communities.

*Donald Peck:* Well the Woodbridge Methodist church is one of the oldest Methodist communities. It was established sometime around 1786 and like the Catholics in town we met in houses until we were able to buy the old Quaker Meeting House which was purchased in 1784 and 1787. Then the Methodist met in the old Quaker Meeting House at 71 Main Street until they were given the land next door which was 69 Main Street. It was an acre lot and they were able to, in 1832, erect a small little church and then use that property for their burying ground. So at the Methodist church in Woodbridge it was one of the oldest communities in the United States. The Methodist church itself, nationwide, was founded, I believe, in Baltimore or Philadelphia. It only dates a few years before the Quaker Methodist moved in.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, so you're tied into the early history of the United States with this church as well as Woodbridge.

*Donald Peck:* As a boy growing up I was fascinated with Woodbridge history, you know, and the old Woodbridge names. I knew that the parsonage of my church was the foundation of the old Quaker meeting house and that this was a Quaker property and that there were Quakers buried around that whole parsonage in the lawns in the marked graves. I knew that story very well.

*Brenda Velasco:* Because this was the Quaker procedure, unmarked graves.

*Donald Peck:* As far as the Methodist graves were concerned at 69 Main Street those stones were by and large all standing as I was a boy growing up right through until about the mid'60s. I changed my membership to another church in the mid'60s. My best friends were all standing and when I was the sexton there I remember very well in the basement of both the Sunday school building and the church seeing the bones of people who were buried underneath the church who had been partially disinterred when they had to excavate to put in the furnace to heat those two facilities and those bones are still there.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's go to Question #8.

### **8. What did you like about living in Woodbridge?**

*Donald Peck:* Well I'll tell you, that's a good question because as I look back on it it's similar to what I like about living where I do now in Fords; everything was handy. Everything that I needed and that my family needed was within walking distance. We could walk to the bus, we could walk to the train and we could walk to all our neighbor's houses and our friend's houses. We could walk to church and we could walk to town. It was location, location, location. During the '40s and '50s you did not lock your doors, it was safe. No one ever talked about safety issues, no one

ever worried about someone breaking in and we were a very homogenous group. We were basically working class people and middle class people who had the same outlooks. Most of the kids that I knew wanted to go to college and all did. Most of them moved away and never came back.

*Brenda Velasco:* And you moved and came back.

*Donald Peck:* I came back primarily because my business is here, that was really what kept me close to here. It's nice to have that connection to a place that you're welcome. I feel very, very connected to the soil of Woodbridge Township. I know just about every inch of it not only because I've lived here but also with my time on the Woodbridge Preservation Commission working various sections to come up with the history of the township and the marking for the markers and the storage and all. I've learned a lot about Woodbridge. It's a unique story and one that needs to be told over and over again and preserved. Woodbridge has a fantastic history. The thing that really impressed me recently that I learned about was its major importance in the American Revolution. We had twenty-nine scrimmages here in Woodbridge and we had a very patriotic community. We had many, many officers to serve in the Revolution who are all buried in the White Church cemetery. In terms of the proportion of people who fought for the Revolution as overall populations of the Township of Woodbridge we had a very large number of its citizens who distinguished themselves in the war and that's something that I'm not only proud to be associated with but I think it's significant that Woodbridge has that American Revolutionary War background. We don't think about it today because we don't see the sights or the evidence of it. What it felt to learn that Janet Pike Gauge was a patriot. Yet (we are told of) Molly Pitcher, who was born and raised in Pennsylvania, never came back. Here we have a New Jersey woman who raised the first liberty pole and her husband was not happy about that because he was a loyalist so it's very significant I think.

*Brenda Velasco:* And right near Main Street, right?

*Donald Peck:* Right on the corner of Main and Amboy Avenue where the **Cross Keys Tavern** stood.

*Brenda Velasco:* So there is a lot of history and we have to publish it and promote it and publicize it.

*Donald Peck:* Well, the thing you can't see the history because so much of it has been destroyed or covered over, covered over like the Barron family house on Rahway Avenue. The Old White Church has been covered with brick. Now there are very few vestiges of how things really looked. The Bloomfield House has been changed a lot.

*Brenda Velasco:* But they're still being used though-that's the whole thing.

*Donald Peck:* Yes, they are still being used. The **Cross Keys Tavern**, we're very fortunate, has not changed and that building is still intact. As far as I'm concerned it's the most important historic site in the township, period, and it deserves to be showcased and saved to really focus on Woodbridge's history. I don't know if that'll ever happen in my lifetime but it's certainly within the realm of possibility if there are people who have a will to see it happen.

*Brenda Velasco:* Okay, let's go down to Question #9.



**9. Did you experience any significant happenings in Woodbridge-construction, accidents, sports events, riots, discrimination, etc.**

*Brenda Velasco:* While you were growing up, Woodbridge radically changed after World War II but by that time you were still in high school, right?

*Donald Peck:* Well I remember the construction of the New Jersey Turnpike. That was in 1949 but I remember all of that construction very well. Of course I remember the train wreck in 1952. I didn't go to see it because we were told to stay away but I remember the evening that it occurred and the television coverage and all the stories about it. As far as sports events that wasn't part of my interest. Parades, of course, I remember the Captain Kurt Carlson Parade very well, I was there for that. I went to school with his daughter so it was important for me to identify with that. As far as riots are concerned I wasn't in Woodbridge during any riots. In fact, I was overseas in Europe when we had the riots of '65. But I did participate, sometime in the mid-'60s, in Civil Rights marches in Woodbridge. Both my father and mother and I were part of that.

*Brenda Velasco:* And who sponsored them?

*Donald Peck:* I don't remember who sponsored them but I remember being so proud that my mom and dad were walking with me down Main Street as part of the Civil Rights demonstration and then finding out later that the FBI were taking down the license plates of our cars. We put ourselves in some kind of ticklish position which never ever became ticklish.

*Brenda Velasco:* But this involved a varied mix in the community like different churches.

*Donald Peck:* There were a number of churches involved. My recollection is not good. I just remember I lived out of town at the time. I lived in Colts Neck but my parents lived here and I remember walking down Main Street with my parents being part of that to show my support.

*Brenda Velasco:* And this was in the early '60s?

*Donald Peck:* This was during the time of the Civil Rights riots in the South.

*Brenda Velasco:* So we're talking mid-'60s.

*Donald Peck:* Mid-'60s, '65 or '66, something like that. Of course I can talk about discrimination if you want me to.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, that's part of our background.

*Donald Peck:* When I was in high school we had only two black students in our school all twelve years I went to Woodbridge Township schools. One was a girl who was very poor who lived up near the Woodbridge clay banks on Metuchen Avenue in a shack. She couldn't bathe because she didn't have any running water. She sat behind me in eighth grade in homeroom and she took a liking to me. I was one of the few people who would talk to her. Well, when it came time for the eighth grade Friday afternoon dances they'd line the boys up on one side and the girls on the other and then you would walk towards each other and that's how you got your partner for the dance. This girl, whose name I used to know but I can't remember anymore, she would always line herself up to dance with me. And I'd go home and say mom but she smells; she doesn't bathe. Her name was Wilhelmina and she always wore the same dress, the poor thing. And my mother would say to me you go back there and you dance with Wilhelmina and I was taught not to be prejudice against Wilhelmina

or any other blacks. We had one other girl in our class who was black. Her name was Brenda something and she graduated with me in '56 and I understand she was very intelligent. She went on to become some kind of a nationwide reporter. I'm not sure about the details but I was told that she had a big job in television.

*Brenda Velasco:* Wow!

*Donald Peck:* Just the two black families in Woodbridge. As far as other types of prejudices are concerned people didn't talk about differences. People didn't talk about blacks first of all. The difference is we were a homogeneous community so we had Hungarians, we had Poles, we had old WASPY families like my family and we had Protestants and Catholics. My next door neighbor was Scottish and my neighbor across the street was Danish. On one side was Irish, we had Hungarian families on our block and German families, a real mixture.

*Brenda Velasco:* We had a potpourri of European people.

*Donald Peck:* And people were not prejudice against each other. There was none of that kind of thing going on that I recall. I certainly didn't experience it. The other issue that we talk about today which we couldn't talk about in those days was human sexuality. All of the issues that people know about today with respect to human sexuality whether it's homosexuality, bisexuality or transgender that people can openly discuss today and understand and accept. In those days nothing was talked about. Neither was divorce; you did not divorce. I knew nobody who was divorced growing up. Nobody in my family would ever divorce. Divorce was a total no no, so was promiscuity. I knew of no promiscuity whatsoever growing up among anybody that I grew up with. You were expected to behave like a lady and a gentleman and you were expected to remain that way until you found a partner to get married.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was a much more rigid society going back to that time.

*Donald Peck:* It was a very rigid society and of course it all changed over the years. I was fortunate I didn't grow up in the drug culture. I never knew what alcohol or drugs were growing up. My family was not teetotalers by choice; they just simply didn't want to drink. Neither did my grandparents so there was no alcohol or no drugs. Cigarettes yes but in high school kids did not smoke only what we would call "the hoods" who wore jeans; in those days we called them dungarees. They might be caught behind the high school smoking but nobody smoked, nobody drank, nobody misbehaved.

*Brenda Velasco:* It was a different milieu.

*Donald Peck:* It was a totally different time.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it was easier to grow up I think at times.

*Donald Peck:* Yes, much easier than now.

*Brenda Velasco:* You knew what your parameters were.

*Donald Peck:* Or you didn't even think about it because you didn't know what the other side of life was like; everybody was in the dark.

*Brenda Velasco:* Now you came back to Woodbridge. You're still here and you mentioned you were going into your retirement stage.

*Donald Peck:* Yes, well I came back to the Fords section of Woodbridge in 1997 and the purpose was to be close to my business which is just one mile and one traffic light away. What I liked about that was, again, everything within close proximity of where

I wanted to go. What a joy it was when **Wegmans** opened up! I didn't have to go to the **A&P** over in Tano Mall anymore. **Wegmans** and I are close friends.

*Brenda Velasco:* To a lot of other people, too.

*Donald Peck:* I'm not a shopping person. I don't go to a shopping center but I tell you I like the fact that Woodbridge has so many wonderful restaurants available, too. If I do need to get anywhere the accessibility of the roads is wonderful. I can hop on the Parkway, the Turnpike or Rt. 287. I can be in downtown New York on a nice day in thirty minutes although I don't go anymore because it's so expensive. Once in a great while, and I can hop down to the shore easily. I can be in the Jersey country very quickly. I love traveling in the country visiting historic sites and we have plenty of those to hop, skip and jump to. We are sort of like in the hub of so many wonderful things.

*Brenda Velasco:* We're called the "*crossroad of New Jersey*" so we may have the traffic but we have access to all over and you're right.

*Donald Peck:* I don't know how it is in other sections of the township but I don't live in any fear of being robbed or people breaking in. The streets are clean, the garbage is picked up properly, it's well maintained and the roads are wonderfully maintained. I'm sorry to see downtown Woodbridge looking a little shabby because of economic conditions but basically it's a very outstanding community to be a part of. And what is exciting for me in particular is the fact that Woodbridge Township, thanks to the administration, has a very strong interest in promoting its historic past. It was such an honor to be asked to serve on the Woodbridge Historic Preservation Commission and to see firsthand the dedication of the commissioners who are on that group and the work that they have been doing for so long and are continuing to do which is so important for Woodbridge. Now to find that we are going to have a Woodbridge History Museum we'll be able to showcase our story to a broader public and invite the public in to see what we have is very meaningful to me as a preservationist because we need a place to tell our story. We also need a place where people who are like minded can come together and work together on historic projects and this museum will provide an opportunity for people to have a meeting place.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, which is important-one location.

*Donald Peck:* And a community location, not a church and not a library, a neutral community location in the heart of the historic district.

*Brenda Velasco:* This is why it's so exciting. We are just waiting for the DEP. A letter was sent for their approval because it is on Green Acres next to Parker Press so cross your fingers that's all I can say. So many of us are excited about this and it has parking facilities as well.

*Donald Peck:* And land to have reenactments.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes, we just had the Civil War reenactment there so it's good.

*Donald Peck:* You can come in by train.

*Brenda Velasco:* Yes.

*Donald Peck:* Get off the train station and walk to our facility.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's a perfect location and as you said when your parents moved and you came back, location is very important.

***10. Do you have any family members still living in Woodbridge today?***

*Donald Peck:* Well I have cousins. I have fourth cousins in the township but no one else in my family.

***11. Are there any other stories or events that you would like to discuss that we haven't covered that pertains to Woodbridge?***

*Donald Peck:* I don't think so. You know there's nothing that really pops out in my mind as a memory of growing up in Woodbridge that I would like to share. I would encourage people who are interested in Woodbridge history to get involved with visiting our churches. We have a wealth of history associated with all of the parishes of this township either the buildings and the people or their burying grounds. It's a cultural resource that really we shouldn't neglect as part of their education and to know about our churches, to know about their architecture and their stained glass and for people who have memories there and their history. We have many, many wonderful churches we can talk about.

*Brenda Velasco:* And it's a variety of denominations.

*Donald Peck:* And even today with our new Indian community there's a whole new world of learning about Asia that has been brought right to our doorstep and we don't think about it.

*Brenda Velasco:* And we've got two of our churches right now on the registry as landmarks, historic sites, Trinity, the White Church and the Presbyterian Church where you were the organist so you've been intertwined with a lot of the history as well even though you are very young. But you've been involved with the churches, a different variety of the churches. Okay, well I thank you very, very much for finding the time. I know you're busy so I appreciate you coming in and I'm sorry about the technical difficulties last time.

*Donald Peck:* Thank you Brenda. It was nice to be with you.

*Brenda Velasco:* It's always informative to be with you Don Peck.

*Donald Peck:* Thank you.