

**Oral History Interview**  
**Edward Kocsik**  
**WH008**

(written transcript and cassette tape)

On May 12, 2008, Edward Kocsik was interviewed at the Woodbridge Community Center by Brenda Velasco, Rupesh Chinta (Lafayette Estates School # 25) and Rita Nasr (Port Reading School #9). In the audience were Vincent Soccodatto (supervisor) and Glen Lottman (G&T) as well as other G&T students: Katherine Marciniak, Ruhy Patel, Louis Polise, Srujanee Pradhan and Midori Yang.

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

My name is Edward Kocsik and we'll be very informal. I live in Fords and my date of birth is May 17, 1924, which makes me how old?

*Rupesh Chinta:* About eighty-three years old.

*Edward Kocsik:* Perfect and as a matter of fact, I will have a birthday next week and it will make me eighty-four.

*Brenda Velasco:* You fit the criteria.

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

All my life. I was born and raised in what was known at that time as Keasbey; the borderline of Keasbey and Fords was Crows Mill Road. At that time, it was Keasbey. As the years went by they decided to have that section of the town named Fords.

*Rupesh Chinta:* Isn't there still a part of Woodbridge still named Keasbey?

*Edward Kocsik:* Oh, yes. As a matter of fact there were three sections with Fords the largest section and Hopelawn.

**3. Why did your family originally move to Woodbridge?**

My grandfather came from Europe-Czechoslovakia in 1896 and my mother was born here around about 1900. She passed away about 10 years ago. We were born and raised here and we never did leave.

*Rupesh Chinta:* Why did your grandfather come over?

*Edward Kocsik:* At that time immigration was soaring. People were coming over because the saying was that you come to America -the streets were lined with gold-with money. Everybody was coming over and they found work but they didn't find the money. They worked very hard

*Rupesh Chinta:* He came looking for opportunities?

*Edward Kocsik:* Yes, that would be the answer.

**4. What physical changes have occurred over the years in the area where you have lived?**

Well, I guess many of them. The towns of course in those days were nothing but dirt roads. People owned horses and farms. In their backyards they raised chickens, I

remember that, and they raised cows. People who were here at that time had rather large pieces of property, they had small farms.

*Rupesh Chinta:* The car was invented in 1904 and I don't think a lot of people had them back then.

*Edward Kocsik:* No, they didn't. They didn't have the money and, like I said, the roads were not that good enough to take the cars on.

*Rupesh Chinta:* Except now they've got it paved.

*Edward Kocsik:* Yes, they do.

### **5. What public buildings/property were there?-post offices, library, parks, firehouse, schools, etc.**

Well going back to when I can remember in the late 1920s and 1930s, the post office in Fords operated out of a small store. As the population increased, they had to find new quarters and they put up a post office. Churches at that time also began to rise because the people wanted houses of worship. There are many houses of worship in Fords.

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

Recreation, well, I can tell you we did many things because there was open land. Now for myself, I enjoyed **fishing and crabbing in the Raritan River**. We would walk probably a mile with the crab equipments and fishing gear. Neighborhoods started to expand a little, so there were more families-more boys and girls. Boys would always get together and we liked **baseball**. At that time, there were many open fields in Fords especially in different sections of Fords. We would have many kids living a mile a part and we would organize ourselves and make our own ball teams...The drawback was that there were no fields which were made like it is today. We would take our rakes and shovels-walk about a mile, the whole gang of us-and we would rake the field of stones and clumps of grass and everything else. That is how we played ball. Bases were...we got a piece of wood or a rock and this would be first, second and third. There were no officials officiating, no official umpires. If we saw someone who was a little older on the sideline we would ask them if they wanted to be an umpire. Okay so he would be the umpire but he didn't last long if he didn't call the strikes. We would chase him out and get somebody else who was more normal. We had fun that was. We had no organizations like you see today, no Little (League) but we did enjoy ourselves.

*Brenda Velasco:* Before we go on, today it's the Woodbridge Youth Recreation League that organizes everything. There are over ten thousand children in it and it is up to the Township and the League to prepare the fields- quite a different operation, quite different from back then.

*Edward Kocsik:* There were no foul lines. So we would get a stick and draw a line along first and third. We would get a branch and stick it in the corner where right field should be and that's how we would know where the foul lines were.

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

*Edward Kocsik:* Focal point of ..... ?

*Brenda Velasco:* What was the main center where people gravitated?

*Edward Kocsik:* Well, now we're talking about the 1930s and the early '40s. In Fords alone a bowling alley was built, the **Fords Recreation Bowling Alley**. That's where the

all the younger people in their late teens or early '20s would gather and we all bowled. We enjoyed bowling. Then as the **churches** grew, they had basements or annexes and they would provide dances for us. That's how everything went in those days.

*Brenda Velasco:* Did you have a movie house in Fords?

*Edward Kocsik:* Yes, we did.

*Brenda Velasco:* And that was right on New Brunswick Avenue by the current Olsen Towers, I think?

*Edward Kocsik:* Yes, just about a hundred feet that's all. To gather, we had **Katz's Drug Store** on the corner and this is where the late teenagers would gather. He had a soda fountain in there and you would sit by the soda bar, if you know what that is, and order what you wanted-ice cream, soda or whatever it is . And the girls who work would get your drinks for you or soda, ice cream.

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

Today or in the past? ....

*Brenda Velasco:* In the past when you were a teenager.

*Edward Kocsik:* At that time, Fords was just developing and you seemed to know everybody. I had a paper route; I was a paperboy. Today you have trucks going around throwing papers around. You had a bicycle or a wagon and you would load up with papers. We all had a certain section to cover to deliver the papers. That's how I myself got to know quite a bit of the people in Fords. It was a small community and it was safe. You never heard anybody... robberies or whatever. You left the doors open when you left the house. For Fords, we enjoyed that part.

*Student:* It must be hard remembering.

*Edward Kocsik:* Laugh ... Today Woodbridge is paved, clean, more organized and still safe ... welcoming. Well, I partly answered with that answer there (see question seven). Like I say, right now all the roads are paved, the sidewalks are paved, the people maintain their properties and everything is clean. You can still walk down the streets and it's relatively a pretty safe attitude of the community.

*Brenda Velasco:* You still live in Fords then?

*Edward Kocsik:* Yes, Liberty Street.

*Brenda Velasco:* Oh right, Liberty Bagel Shop is down there?

*Edward Kocsik:* That's on New Brunswick Avenue. I am up the other way, about three blocks down from the Liberty Tavern. One thing that I might want to say is that I lived in Fords and I saw it grow. Before I married I lived on New Brunswick Avenue by the cemeteries. This was when I was around ten or fifteen years old. I was able to walk up a dirt road through a small wooded area and there was a field there called Possum's Field. It was a baseball field but it was a very undeveloped piece of land. Here again the people had to clean the place. After World War II that area was built up; the land was taken, the houses put together, and that's why I say there are very few open fields, land, anymore in Fords. But there were so many of them that we were able to play our sports.

*Student:* At least there weren't too many smokers back then.

*Edward Kocsik:* I didn't understand.

*Student:* At least there weren't too many smokers back then.

*Edward Kocsik:* Smokers, no.

*Brenda Velasco:* That costs money, too, though they were not as expensive as today.

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

Yes, the gentleman before me spoke about the Woodbridge train wreck and I don't know about any horrible accidents, just the usual amount. But I might want to say going back to all these fields before construction and roadways came through there was a section in Fords, again on the boundary line of Hopelawn, and if you know where Route #9 is right now, that's on the border of Hopelawn and Fords. In about the year **1938 a hurricane** came through, that's when this road was being built, and down the roadway it destroyed quite a few houses but there were no fatalities (tornado-1941). In that area there were so many fields. There was a big open field called **Steve Sheeney's Field** and every so often **circuses or carnivals** would come. Once a year a carnival got a permit to come into the area and they would set up a sideshow with platforms with canvas covers on them and they would set up a merry go round, Ferris wheels, and the rides. They stayed for a week and then packed up and were gone; the same thing with a circus. But there was an area in Fords, in the same area, where motorcycles were getting popular and **a motorcycle club** was in the area. With the games they played on this field they would all ride on this field with helmets on and they would have a soda cracker taped on their head and they had a handkerchief rolled into a ball. They would ride and the aim was to hit the guy next to you on the motorcycle and try to hit that cracker on top. This was their way of playing. It was funny at times and, like I said, the circuse had sideshows. In another field in Fords, where Crows Mill Road and New Brunswick Avenue meet, there is a bank on the corner which was put up years ago. A **medicine show** would come in. They built a platform with a tent on it and everything else. The man there, with entertainment of a little singing and dancing in the background, would sell their own brand of medicine; snake oil they called it.

*Brenda Velasco:* I am glad you clarified it. This wasn't the medicine that was sold in a pharmacy, this was magic medicine.

*Edward Kocsik:* Like they would make money to sell it. They would also put on a boxing show. They would ask any boys in the audience, early 20s or late teens, if they wanted to box with the man that came with the show. There were a few takers but, of course, those that showed had more experience. But this was the entertainment that was provided.

**10. What do you like about living in Woodbridge today?**

Well as the gentleman (Todd Howell) said before, it's still a community, it's not a city. We have, of course, shopping centers but we have modern roads, trains and everything else. The shopping centers, I think, are the core of Woodbridge itself. The people flock to these shopping centers and really enjoy it. I know I do. The majority of churches today try to give entertainment, to welcome new members of people in.

**11. Do you have family members still living in Woodbridge?**

No, I don't, not Woodbridge.

*Student:* So you are the last one?

*Edward Kocsik:* No I have family members living outside of Woodbridge Township.

*Brenda Velasco:* But nobody lives in Woodbridge anymore; they all moved out.

*Student:* So you are the last one.

*Edward Kocsik:* If you want to call it that.

.....

*Random questions*

*Student:* How bad was the pollution?

*Edward Kocsik:* Well, I wouldn't use the word bad but it was noticeable. The factories let out their smoke, the chemical plants. There were no laws where they had to scrub the chemical waste coming out but there were quite a few smells of the chemical plants, they came out of the stacks. The cars had no pollution devices on them. You had the black smoke from the tailpipes, the same as the buses.

*Brenda Velasco:* Just look at the waterways, too. The Raritan River is finally getting cleaned up now. I think you can finally get the striped bass from the river now.

*Edward Kocsik:* At the time I was growing up you were able to fish there. You were able to get weakfish and croakers. There were many ponds in the area which I enjoyed going to. These ponds had sunfish in them, shiners and minnows. The kind of fishing pole you used was nothing but a long stick with a string hanging off the end of it and a hook- a straight pin that you bent the pin and tied it on the end. You had to dig a worm up or you found bugs or something and put it on the end and fastened it in. Within a few minutes you would have a fish on the end. I did that and would bring quite a few home because I had a fish tank at home. These fish that lived in the ponds, they would live in the fish tank in the home. We would feed them little bugs and flies. We would catch a fly and bang put it in the tank. It was fun.

*Rita Nasr:* How did you feel during the Great Depression?

*Edward Kocsik:* Well I was only about five years old or four years old during the Great Depression. My father worked, he worked for the railroad, and we managed to get through. It was a little tough. There weren't things available like when you go to the supermarket today. My God you have anything you want to eat now a day. In those days your parents always had a pot of soup cooking. That was the main thing, soup with homemade noodles.

*Brenda Velasco:* Right and you know why soup, because it is one of the most inexpensive dishes to make compared to steak or shrimp or all that other food.

*Edward Kocsik:* If you had steak like you say or whatever. Veal was cheap back in those days not like it is today.

*Midori Yang:* How did World War II affect your life?

*Edward Kocsik:* In those days, they had what they call rationing. You had to apply for a, I guess you would call it, not a permit, but a ration slip to get shoes. You were only allowed one pair of shoes every three months. Lots of things were like that, even gasoline. You were allowed three gallons of gasoline a week. That was to get you to work or whatever you had to do. There were many things, I just can't recall them right off the top of my head, but we managed to get by. You saved tinfoil, which today is like aluminum wrap. The tinfoil you would just keep making a ball out of it and you would have a ball the size of a baseball or it depends on how much you wanted to save. Here's one that you would like, butter. Butter, as we know it today, wasn't like it was back then. Butter used to be a like a white stick, the size of butter today. You had to get a

little disk of coloring the size of a dime or nickel. You would mix this white butter with this and that's how you had a yellowish or orange colored butter.

*Brenda Velasco:* Quite different from today.

*Edward Kocsik:* Right. Everything is available.

*Brenda Velasco:* Are there any other questions? If not, I want to thank you all for sharing your personal story of Woodbridge, our interviewers Rupesh and Rita, our technical director, Louis Polise, and especially Ed Kocsik.