

Oral History Interview
John Miele
WH063

(written transcript and digital audio)

On September 11, 2009, John Miele was interviewed at the Henry Inman Library by Brenda Velasco at 12:45 P.M. (John T. Miele is also the author of **Then and Now of Iselin.**)

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

John Miele: My full name is John T. Miele.

Brenda Velasco: What was your date of birth?

John Miele: April 24, 1921.

Brenda Velasco: And you live in Iselin.

John Miele: I was born in Iselin and lived in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: And you're still living here.

John Miele: And still in Iselin.

2. How long have you lived in Iselin?

Brenda Velasco: How long total have you lived in Iselin then?

John Miele: Eighty-eight years.

3. Why did you or your family originally move to Iselin?

John Miele: Well, my mother came from Brooklyn because they came from Italy and the family wanted to settle somewhere where it was peaceful and quiet and she had gone to South Plainfield and fell in love with the farmhouse and the farm that she talked my grandfather into buying and they moved there.

Brenda Velasco: So first it was South Plainfield?

John Miele: That was my mother.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

John Miele: Then my father came from Long Island. He was about, from what I understand, around twelve years old when he came from Long Island. So add ten or twelve years to my age so that's about how long they were living in Iselin. My mother was about the same time when they came to South Plainfield; and my father met my mother by doing some plowing of ground for my grandfather so they hooked up together that way at that time.

Brenda Velasco: And he convinced her to move to Iselin then?

John Miele: Then he brought property on Juliette Street and he built the house all by himself and moved to Iselin. I was about four years old when we moved into the house.

Brenda Velasco: Do you still live in that same house?

John Miele: I don't live in the same house I live right next door to it.

Brenda Velasco: Not too far then.

John Miele: My niece lives in that house. My sister wound up taking the homestead over before she passed away.

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

Brenda Velasco: So you've seen a lot of changes that have occurred in your section of Woodbridge-Iselin.

John Miele: Right. I saw from the overpass on Green Street when there was a terrible accident. Right after that, they did away with the overpass with the railroad tracks and they put a bridge there and they made it go under the tracks.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall the year of that accident?

John Miele: I was about thirteen years old so 1935 or 1936.

Brenda Velasco: How about the houses, the amount of houses and the streets?

John Miele: Well there was no street when my father built our house which is a couple of hundred feet from the main road.

Brenda Velasco: Which is Middlesex.....

John Miele: Middlesex Turnpike and he had to cut the trees down and make the roadway and he was the first house on Juliette Street. There were maybe a dozen other houses around in Iselin and that was the extent of Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: What was the rest of the land then at that time?

John Miele: The rest of the land was **Cooper's Dairy**. There was a cow pasture and hay fields and corn and Cooper's owned quite a bit of property.

Brenda Velasco: And this was off of Middlesex Turnpike?

John Miele: Off of Middlesex Turnpike.

Brenda Velasco: Right across from the Metro Park area or.....?

John Miele: Yes, that was all Cooper's property, the Metro Park area, and then they had property down at the park.

Brenda Velasco: Merrill Park.

John Miele: Merrill Park. That was Cooper's property at one time.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

John Miele: And Cooper and I believe there was a dairy farm, **Berger's Dairy**, where they were the biggest land owners at the Merrill Park section.

Brenda Velasco: When your dad built his house, did he farm the land also?

John Miele: No, he just had a couple of lots. He was a landscaper and gardener and what have you.

Brenda Velasco: How about the services at that time? Did you have any township services such as your sewers, your sidewalks or your curbs?

John Miele: The sidewalks were just starting to come into Iselin. A lot of streets didn't have sewers and my father and uncle and eventually I became a volunteer fireman. There was no high school. There were grade schools up to sixth grade.

Brenda Velasco: We're going to get to the schools for question five as well as the firehouse where you were a volunteer fireman. How about stores, did you have any stores there in Iselin?

John Miele: About the only stores were on Oak Tree Road. There was like an **A&P**, a paper store, a drugstore and maybe a gas station and a bakery shop.

Brenda Velasco: You did have a bakery?

John Miele: Yes, right.

Brenda Velasco: Where was that bakery located, do you recall?

John Miele: It was right on Oak Tree Road.

Brenda Velasco: How far from.....

John Miele: It was between the movie house which was Correja Avenue and the drug store which was... Oh, I forgot the name of the street.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

John Miele: Going towards Middlesex Avenue. It would be Correja Avenue and Middlesex Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, but you had a movie house in Iselin.

John Miele: The movie house was right off Correja Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: I remember that. So you had an **A&P**.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Is that where your mom shopped?

John Miele: Yes, and then there was a **Morris Butcher Store** which was the main store. They did most of their shopping in Rahway.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so Rahway was the *mecca* for shopping.

John Miele: Yes, they had buses going to Rahway vs. Woodbridge and it was kind of difficult.

Brenda Velasco: Right. Where did the train stop in Iselin at that time?

John Miele: It was the same spot.

Brenda Velasco: The same spot, okay, because in Colonia.....

John Miele: Close to Green Street.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, okay.

John Miele: This was the train stop which was right alongside of Green Street.

Brenda Velasco: And it's right in your book. (**Then and Now of Iselin** by John T. Miele)

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: On the cover. Okay, how about houses of worship? Did you have any houses of worship there?

John Miele: No, the Catholic Church (pastor) they came from South Amboy on Sundays. Oh, St. Cecelia's Church was a barracks doing World War I and it was moved from Colonia to the present address in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: On Oak Tree Road.

John Miele: On Oak Tree Road and the priest would come on weekends for services.

Brenda Velasco: And he came from South Amboy.

John Miele: South Amboy.

Brenda Velasco: And then eventually that church became the main church where St. John Vianney was a mission church.

John Miele: Yes, it broke.....

Brenda Velasco: Yes, it broke away.

John Miele: It broke away from St. Cecelia's.

Brenda Velasco: Yes, but originally was the barracks.....

John Miele: It was the hub.

Brenda Velasco: It was the hub from Colonia. Okay, back and forth.

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

Brenda Velasco: What schools did you go to?
John Miele: I went to School No. 6 on Green Street and then Woodbridge School through eighth grade in Woodbridge.
Brenda Velasco: Eighth grade in Woodbridge?
John Miele: Yes, and then high school in Woodbridge, Barron Avenue.
Brenda Velasco: Which school did you go to eighth grade in Woodbridge? Do you recall?
John Miele: It was on School Street right in Woodbridge. It was the only.....
Brenda Velasco: Okay, School No. 1 then.
John Miele: Yes, School No. 1, you're right.
Brenda Velasco: How did you get there?
John Miele: Bus.
Brenda Velasco: Was it a public bus or a school bus?
John Miele: It was a school bus. As a matter of fact my grandfather had the bus route.
Brenda Velasco: Now how many other students bused with you to Iselin?
John Miele: Well, whatever the class consisted of, about twenty or twenty-five kids.
Brenda Velasco: So they rode on the bus with you then.
John Miele: They went on the bus.
Brenda Velasco: Did you graduate from Woodbridge High School?
John Miele: I graduated from Woodbridge.
Brenda Velasco: What year were you?
John Miele: 1940.
Brenda Velasco: Just before World War II broke out.
John Miele: Oh, yes, I went from school to the war.
Brenda Velasco: Unfortunately, yes. Now how about the post office, did you have a post office in Iselin?
John Miele: The post office was in a private home on Harding Avenue.
Brenda Velasco: Did you have mail delivery?
John Miele: No, ma'am, no mail delivery. As a matter of fact, in my book it tells you when you had mail delivery.
Brenda Velasco: Okay, did you have a library?
John Miele: You know what, if I recall, the library came the same way I think probably in somebody's house.
Brenda Velasco: Until later it was built.....
John Miele: Oh, yes, Iselin Library.
Brenda Velasco: Yes, on Green Street. How about parks, did you have any parks that you played in growing up?
John Miele: Well Roosevelt Park was built during the Depression which was what?
Brenda Velasco: 1930s.
John Miele: So actually we did have a park, we had Roosevelt Park.
Brenda Velasco: Well how did you get there?
John Miele: Walk. That's only two miles.
Brenda Velasco: From your house. Did they have Merrill Park back then too?
John Miele: No, Merrill Park was after the war.
Brenda Velasco: Okay, and the firehouse. You're a volunteer fireman.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

John Miele: They are dates in there with the first fire company.

Brenda Velasco: How long were you a volunteer then?

John Miele: Sixteen years if I'm not mistaken.

Brenda Velasco: When did you join then?

John Miele: Let's see I came out of the service in 1946, about 1950.

Brenda Velasco: And how long were you a volunteer?

John Miele: I did it more like thirteen years because it interfered with my business.

Brenda Velasco: Were you in the landscaping business, too?

John Miele: Yes. The fire whistle used to go off in the daytime and I'd have a truck load of asphalt and I was a truck driver. I would drive the truck and by the time I would get back to the asphalt, I had to get a jackhammer and get it out of the truck. So I said, I can't keep this up.

Brenda Velasco: No, you had to take care of your family.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: There was a conflict there.

6. What did you do for recreation?

John Miele: What you always do, catch woman.

Brenda Velasco: Well, other than that.

John Miele: Well, we went to St. Cecelia's who had recreation. As the years went on they were more organized and there always something at St. Cecelia's. I belonged to St. Cecelia's, you know.....

Brenda Velasco: CYO, did they have a CYO?

John Miele: No, they didn't call it a CYO or anything but I was an altar boy and so I belonged to St. Cecelia's so they always had something going on.

Brenda Velasco: They had the fair.

John Miele: Yes, they had the fair and I used to help at that.

Brenda Velasco: Now you had a lot of fields by your house too.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So did you play baseball?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How about ride a bike? Did you have a bike?

John Miele: Yes, I'd ride a bike down the muddy streets and stones.

Brenda Velasco: Did you help your dad out with the business?

John Miele: Oh, that was a must. You automatically did that. Then I just stayed right in it. Then fate takes over.

Brenda Velasco: You also mentioned that you belonged to a church band.

John Miele: Yes, St. Cecelia's had a band. When I went to high school, I was in the high school band.

Brenda Velasco: What instrument did you play?

John Miele: Trombone.

Brenda Velasco: In both instances?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: For St. Cecelia's?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Wow!

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

Brenda Velasco: What was the main focus of your community as you were growing up? Was it the church, the family, Oak Tree Road?

John Miele: Well with me it was the church and then the fire company. So it was always for the community. Whatever it was necessary, it was there. We used to work at the fairgrounds for St. Cecelia's and the fire company had fairs.

Brenda Velasco: When did they have the fairs, the firemen?

John Miele: The firemen had..... Then when St. Cecelia's came in they more or less took over. Then the firemen cut back and eventually did away with it because it was a lot of work.

Brenda Velasco: A tremendous amount of work.

John Miele: So they couldn't keep both going.

Brenda Velasco: And so the property where St. Cecelia's.....

John Miele: St. Cecelia's had property.

Brenda Velasco: Right, for so many years it was right off of Middlesex Turnpike across from the firehouse basically.

John Miele: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, so that was the big event and that was usually in July?

John Miele: Yes, 4th of July around that time.

Brenda Velasco: Then when you went to high school that became a focal point for you as well?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: How many hours did you give for that fire company, a week?

John Miele: Well it would depend. You know some weeks there wouldn't be any and then some week it would be too many. So it was pretty hard to say how many hours you gave. I couldn't afford to spend all my time at the firehouse because I had a business but some guys they never left the firehouse. I mean I went when it was necessary, then I had to come and do whatever I had to do.

8. What did you like about living in your section of Woodbridge-Iselin?

John Miele: It was small and it was quiet and people got along pretty good. I just appreciated the fact that it was someplace you could go and get away from the hustle bustle of living in the fast lane.

Brenda Velasco: Even though you lived close to the train station. You didn't live too far from the train station right?

John Miele: No, I enjoyed all the noise the trains made because I could tell which way it was going, Pennsylvania or New York. I enjoyed the railroad's noise because I lived only a couple of hundred feet away from the tracks.

Brenda Velasco: Did you have family other than your parents living in Iselin at that time growing up?

John Miele: Yes, on my father's side there were ten kids and then on my mother's side it was the same thing, ten kids. We always saw each other or went to parties or what have you. I mean that way we were close.

Brenda Velasco: And they lived nearby.

John Miele: Yes, South Plainfield, six miles away and my father's family all lived in Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: So you had a lot of relatives nearby.

John Miele: Oh yes, now I'm about the only one. I'm down to a couple.

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

John Miele: Well there was a big train wreck in Woodbridge.

Brenda Velasco: Right.

John Miele: Then there was a big one in Menlo Park by Roosevelt.

Brenda Velasco: Then you've been around for a couple of train wrecks then.

John Miele: Right.

Brenda Velasco: Alright, let's get to the one in Iselin.

John Miele: Well that one I was about thirteen years old. Like I said you used to go over the railroad, it was like an upgrade (grade level tracks). And as a matter of fact we used to go there and hang on to the gate when the gateman used to crank it for the cars to go by; then we'd get chased.

Brenda Velasco: Good.

John Miele: Then they had this train wreck which was a truck loaded with contractor's equipment and what not. It was pretty bad. Then they started to worry about what would happen if there was a long term accident on that track. You couldn't get from one side of the tracks to the other for emergencies or anything. So that's when they decided to really do something about a tunnel or an underpass.

Brenda Velasco: Because it was at grade level at one time.

John Miele: Well, it was inclined but there was a gate there. Then when the wreck was there, that cut off for any emergency to go on the other side because you had to go to Metuchen to get to Iselin then across the tracks or you had to go to Rahway to get to Green Street.

Brenda Velasco: Were you there for a train wreck in Menlo Park which isn't very far from you at all?

John Miele: I went there.

Brenda Velasco: You went there?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Do you remember what year that one was?

John Miele: I was in high school, second year, about 1937. The wreck there consisted of a car that was going to **Bambergers** with silverware and utensils and one car loaded with pigs. I was there trying to catch a pig and I played hooky, the first time I ever played hooky from school. It was the first time in all the time that I was going to school that I missed a day in school.

Brenda Velasco: Alright and you were trying to catch a pig.

John Miele: I was trying to catch a pig and I got sick. I played hooky and so after that I had plenty of time off. I had a whole week off.

Brenda Velasco: Was anybody killed in that accident?

John Miele: No, just the pigs. For a whole month there were pigs in everybody's house. Whenever you went to visit somebody you would sit down and have ham. It was a riot.

Brenda Velasco: Was anybody killed in that Iselin accident?

John Miele: No, I can't recall.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was good. Now the Woodbridge accident there was a high number of fatalities with that in '51. Were you at that Woodbridge accident?

John Miele: No.

Brenda Velasco: How about construction, were you involved in any construction or witnessed the construction in Iselin?

John Miele: I built a couple of ball fields for the school and I would bid on different projects that would come up, mostly running tracks and ball fields for the high school.

Brenda Velasco: What ball fields did you build?

John Miele: Iselin ball field.

Brenda Velasco: Where is that located?

John Miele: Indiana Avenue.

Brenda Velasco: Did you do any running tracks?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Which ones?

John Miele: Woodbridge High, Kennedy and Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: That's quite a few.

John Miele: Well that was my business so I used to bid and I was fortunate to outbid the other guy and I got the job. Besides, I did good work.

Brenda Velasco: Well that's always important. Quality counts and you were a homegrown boy, you're from Iselin. So that was three pluses for you.

John Miele: I took pride in what I did and what I got out of the town.

Brenda Velasco: And you made a lot of contributions to the town, too, with either your volunteer work or ensuring that it was good quality.

John Miele: My father always said what you take from the town give back a little bit.

Brenda Velasco: What about any sporting events that you were aware of?

John Miele: Like what?

Brenda Velasco: Any football games? Did you play sports or anything?

John Miele: I didn't have time for that.

Brenda Velasco: No, you were too busy working too.

10. What do you like about Woodbridge today?

Brenda Velasco: You haven't moved out, you're still here eighty-eight years later.

John Miele: Now it's too busy. I don't have too much to say about it.

Brenda Velasco: And you're still working.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You're eighty-eight years old.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: And you're writing a book.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Another book. (Volume Two)

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: So you keep very busy.

John Miele: I've got time for all of it. I would be bored stiff if I didn't have something like this to do.

Brenda Velasco: I know when we scheduled this interview we had to fit it into your schedule. You were working this morning from nine to eleven and it's raining and cool out and you're out there working.

John Miele: Well, people say how come you're still working. I said I'm eighty-eight years old. If work got me this far, I'd be a damn fool to quit. And besides I'm off Tuesdays and Thursdays and by three o'clock I'm bored stiff. I did my chores outside, I had this to do, I had a little nap and holy mackerel when is this day going to be ending.

Brenda Velasco: You got a lot of energy but you channel it positively.

John Miele: I go in one room, my wife goes in another room. I don't bother her, she don't bother me. I wait for the next day to go back to work and that's today, Friday.

Brenda Velasco: Yes that's today.

John Miele: And you know what? I was so involved in what I was supposed to do and come here at one o'clock that I forgot my check and I forgot my jacket. I had to borrow money. I said man I better get together and stop all this here.

Brenda Velasco: Well I'm enjoying the interview and I found out a lot about Iselin.

John Miele: Good.

Brenda Velasco: You know, going back to the church, do you recall the first pastor of St. Cecelia's, first pastor or priest that you had fulltime?

John Miele: Father Brennan came from South Amboy and he used to come back and forth. Eventually they built a parish in Iselin and they moved him into a rental house or they bought a house over by Indiana Avenue. He was the first main priest, then came Father Wilus.

Brenda Velasco: Right, he's the name I remember.

John Miele: Yes, Father Brennan first.

Brenda Velasco: And then Father Wilus who was the permanent pastor.

John Miele: Father Wilus.

Brenda Velasco: Well, after Father Brennan.

John Miele: Father Brennan was the guy who really did everything. He got the people to build a church. The church was there and they excavated under the church and made a recreation room down underneath the church and that was quite a project. My father and I, of course, got involved again.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, I was going to ask you. Yes, Miele's to the rescue, okay.

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

John Miele: Yes, a couple of uncles; one aunt and a couple of uncles. I just lost a sister a year ago so I got one sister who still lives here.

Brenda Velasco: Do they live in Iselin as well?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: They all live in Iselin?

John Miele: Yes, more or less.

Brenda Velasco: So you still have family here?

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Could that be a reason why you stayed in Iselin?

John Miele: No, I don't have time for that kind of stuff.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

John Miele: I'm too busy doing.

Brenda Velasco: Well I'm glad you came for the interview.

John Miele: I used to dress up as Santa Claus and take my entire loader or backhoe. Two days before Christmas or Christmas Eve, I'd go from door to door delivering something; I played Santa Claus.

Brenda Velasco: The kids must have loved that with the backhoe.

John Miele: Oh, yes. I'd put a record player in the backhoe and here comes Santa.

Brenda Velasco: That must have been fun?

John Miele: Oh yes, that was fun. As matter of fact, I don't know if you knew him, he passed away, Gene Tomasso.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

John Miele: I used him a couple of times. I'd put him in the buckle and he was freezing as an elf and I was in the cab with the heater on. He said let me drive once in a while, you come out here.

Brenda Velasco: That's right. He was a former ouncilman too, wasn't he?
(Councilman: 1966-1973)

John Miele: He was a ouncilman, yes. So he helped a couple of years with me.

Brenda Velasco: But you got the warm seat, he didn't.

John Miele: I did just what my father said, you give and take, and I gave to the community whatever I could.

12. Are there any other stories or events that you'd like to discuss?

John Miele: Well I'd be bragging.

Brenda Velasco: Well how about why you chose to write a book?

John Miele: What?

Brenda Velasco: How were you able to do this book, **Then and Now of Iselin**? Why did you choose to do that?

John Miele: My sister, who passed away a year ago, lived in my mother's and our old house. She was straightening up and she came across pictures, stories and newspaper clippings and what I didn't take from the house and what my mother had salvaged through the years she said look you take care of this stuff. So with that I got my niece to help me and we put the book together.

Brenda Velasco: Terrific. All the memories you must have!

John Miele: The pictures, look, who would save all these things? I was on-call, Woodbridge dumpster was on fire and I lost my bulldozer in the dumps.

Brenda Velasco: Oh my goodness, and this was on page 101 in your book and that shows it.

John Miele: You've got to check the book. You'll get a lot of stuff out of here.

Brenda Velasco: I'm sure.

John Miele: And I put four years in the Marine Corps.

Brenda Velasco: Right, we didn't even talk about you in the Marine Corps.

John Miele: Four years; the best years of my life

Brenda Velasco: So you got right out of high school in 1940.

John Miele: I was twenty-one.

Brenda Velasco: You were twenty-one years old when you went into the Marine Corps?

John Miele: Yes, I didn't want my mother or my father to sign for me. I waited until I was twenty-one.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, and by that time this was World War II.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, because Pearl Harbor was 1941, December 7th, so you went in 19.....

John Miele: 42.

Brenda Velasco: 1942.

John Miele: May 4th.

Brenda Velasco: And the war was big in the Pacific as well as Europe. Which campaign were you in then?

John Miele: I was in Guadalcanal, November 10th, Armistice Day or whatever it is. I was in till the end and then I was Okinawa.

Brenda Velasco: So you saw a lot in the Pacific then?

John Miele: I had thirty-seven months over in the Pacific. I was away from home for four Christmases.

Brenda Velasco: And you came from a family that was big in Iselin.

John Miele: Yes. I got to go to New Zealand that was beautiful.

Brenda Velasco: Have you ever gone back to New Zealand?

John Miele: No, I'd want to stay.

Brenda Velasco: Then you'd be separated from all your memories and family.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Anything else you want to relay John? Your mind is good.

John Miele: What?

Brenda Velasco: Your mind is very sharp. Okay, if there's nothing else I'm going to thank you and thank you for my autographed copy.

John Miele: You'll get a lot out of the book that you'd be asking me normally. I mean just go through it roughly. This is the sister who passed away and gave me.....

Brenda Velasco: Who encouraged you to do this book?

John Miele: And my mother she worked until she passed away at eighty-five.

Brenda Velasco: So you come from a family with good genes.

John Miele: That's me of course here in the book. That's my mother and father; that's the way they courted. (We perused his book, **Then and Now in Iselin**)

Brenda Velasco: With the house and buggy.

John Miele: Yes and my uncles from Plainfield. There's the Brooklyn store front. My grandfather had a store in Brooklyn. This is the old homestead where my father grew up. There's the.....

Brenda Velasco: **Iselin Theatre**, right. That's a great picture of it.

John Miele: That building was moved from Colonia.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was the barracks you said in Colonia for St. Cecelia's Church.

John Miele: That's the old train station.

Brenda Velasco: Yes.

John Miele: That is I've got relatives in there, the school.

Brenda Velasco: School No. 6.

John Miele: Here's School No. 6 and School No. 15.

Brenda Velasco: Did you go to School No. 15?

John Miele: No.

Brenda Velasco: No you only went to School No. 6.

John Miele: They had an auditorium. We used to go up there for any activities and that's the firehouse.

Brenda Velasco: That's the firehouse right on Green Street that you were a member of.

John Miele: This is uptown.

Brenda Velasco: How about when the Parkway came in that made a big difference because the exit is right in Iselin.

John Miele: Yes it cut **Cooper's** right in half. And this is a big parade in Iselin back when I was ten years old I guess.

Brenda Velasco: Do you recall what the parade was about?

John Miele: The dedicating of Oak Tree Road when it was completed with concrete. This is my father there with the horse and my grandfather with the horses.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, and there's an airfield too.

John Miele: This is my uncle with a parachute. There's Father Brennan. Yes, see, my mother saved all of that, it's amazing.

Brenda Velasco: Yes it is.

John Miele: Here I am up here with the trombone.

Brenda Velasco: Right, that's what you played.

John Miele: Here's where I live now.

Brenda Velasco: On Juliette Street.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: No, Middlesex Turnpike just around the corner right next to it.

John Miele: Yes. This is all Green Street and Oak Tree Road.

Brenda Velasco: And Father Brennan again.

John Miele: Yes, a football game. There's **Cooper's**.

Brenda Velasco: Oh, okay.

John Miele: **Cooper's**. They were some people; they did a lot for Iselin.

Brenda Velasco: Well I know **Cooper's Field** also.

John Miele: Yes they gave their pocket and their heart. This is all **Cooper's**.

Brenda Velasco: And we see the dairy cows.

John Miele: And then they had a big fire and they lost the barns.

Brenda Velasco: Wow! Oh this is when you were in the service.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: You were in the Marines, pg.142.

John Miele: That's what we did build bridges and airfields.

Brenda Velasco: And this is in Guadalcanal.

John Miele: This here is on Guadalcanal, yes. There's our washing machine. The wind would turn it and we had a bicycle and then we'd put an old helmet on the ends and then when the wind would turn this, you know how on the bicycle when you

pedal, well this thing would go up and down like a plunger. We'd build a fire under there. (Guadalcanal)

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is when you were in the service on page 81 in your book. It's not how your mother washed. I want to make it clear because nobody knows. We're not videoing yet.

John Miele: No, this is the way we washed.

Brenda Velasco: When you were in the service.

John Miele: This was on Tinian. It was funny, there were all kinds of windmills, little ones, big ones and when the wind would come you would see all these things going. But there were four of us in a tent, four to six guys in a tent, and one day a week one guy would stay. You worked twelve hours on and twelve hours off because we were engineers so we had to work. And one guy would stay behind and he'd wash everybody's clothes.

Brenda Velasco: He got stuck.

John Miele: He got stuck. It worked out good. We always had clean sheets and clean clothes. This was in New Zealand.

Brenda Velasco: And you said that was beautiful, New Zealand.

John Miele: Oh, yes, especially the women. When we got there they had been at war for three years so we had no problem getting anything. Getting their cars, we had the gas, we used to get gas from the engineer and they welcomed us whole heartedly.

Brenda Velasco: Your mother was a real saver.

John Miele: Oh, yes, letters and everything. This is my business. We'd do the driveways and that was my bulldozer. I went to help Woodbridge put out a fire and one of the councilman said, go over there and help them over there. I'd take off with the bulldozer, there was garbage all over, I hit the spot and the bulldozer just went down twenty feet like this. It didn't go fast, you know. So all I did was crawl off the back. Then we pulled that out.

Brenda Velasco: This was the dump on Main Street right where the Community Center is now?

John Miele: Right. See, they even had a diver to hook it up.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, through the garbage.

John Miele: Yes. It cost me like six or eight thousand dollars to put that bulldozer back in shape. It never was the same. Every time I went by it would spit out a garbage can. Oh, I used to follow the football team. My son played for Kennedy Mustang's and I got this horse; it's got an electric motor and I used to put a cheerleader on the top.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, this is on page 107.

John Miele: Yes. I never stopped doing things.

Brenda Velasco: And you still haven't and you're eighty-eight years old.

John Miele: This is my yard. That was on Gills Lane. This was my yard, the Garden Center, and movie stand, jack of all trades. Am I keeping you?

Brenda Velasco: No.

John Miele: It gives me a chance to brag.

Brenda Velasco: That's what I wanted you to do. I wanted you to talk about your experiences.

John Miele: That's what I wound up with.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that's on page 117, **Miele Plaza**, right on Gills Lane, not too far from the train station.

John Miele: No. It took me forty years. I tore it all down in forty days and built that. I was paying him three and a half dollars an hour and he was charging me a hundred dollars an hour when he became a lawyer. I put him in the book and I gave him a check.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, that was page 119. This is the VFW and this is in Iselin, right?

John Miele: Right. It's amazing, you know, I get more calls the past six months. This book is catching up with people when we used to be in Iselin. They'd say the same thing, where did you get all that stuff?

Brenda Velasco: Your mother was terrific to collect, and your sister didn't throw it out.

John Miele: No. Well, they learned from my mother, you know. There's the guy that was the first postman. He was a Marine too.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and that was on page 128, the first postman. And these were some of the parades?

John Miele: Yes, and there's the fire company.

Brenda Velasco: Okay this is all Fire District 11.

John Miele: Yes. There's Father Wilus.

Brenda Velasco: Father Wilus, okay.

John Miele: St. Cecelia's. Even this.

Brenda Velasco: That's the Presbyterian Church. You've got pictures of that too. Not too far.....

John Miele: Yes, my mother took a lot of pictures.

Brenda Velasco: Yes. She must have known you were going to write a book.

John Miele: This is the Knights of Columbus. I landscaped all that.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

John Miele: My father always had horses. They had a pony track over there on Indiana Avenue behind the library.

Brenda Velasco: This is the First Aid Squad on page 157.

John Miele: Yes, **Cooper's** was responsible for that. Jimmy the Shoemaker, he had an orange tree.

Brenda Velasco: Okay, here's the cemetery and the Parkway. You have pictures of the construction there. This is great, the Parkway divided.

John Miele: Yes. There's my place.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and these are pictures around page 163 and 164. Oh and you have a section for Ron Osborne.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Okay.

John Miele: She gave me quite a bit of stuff. (Councilwoman Pat Osborne)

Brenda Velasco: And there's Pat.

John Miele: Yes.

Brenda Velasco: Did your son have Mr. Osborne for a coach?

John Miele: Yes. They gave me an eightieth birthday party.

Brenda Velasco: Okay and I also want to mention also at Metro Park with the renovations a lot of the artwork comes from your pictures right?

John Miele: Yes, from my pictures. Well I was going to call you and tell you they are going to have the ribbon cutting. I think they're going to have it the week before the elections. They cancelled twice.

Brenda Velasco: I know they cancelled because I called you. Well we'll see what happens. Okay and this is the ambulance which is now part of Woodbridge Township. Okay well I thank you very, very much. We're going to conclude and I'm going to look at the book on my own. Thank you very much.

John Miele: Okay, enjoy.

John Miele – addendum

After the formal interview, John Miele phoned with some additional information. He recalled the terrible snowstorm of 1947/1948 which paralyzed much of the surrounding area for a week. This was during the early post WWII years when heavy equipment-bulldozers, plows-were not in major production and not as available to the public or businesses. Mr. Miele had purchased a surplus Army bulldozer for his business and was one of the few private citizens who had this equipment in Iselin.

On the second day of the storm, he received a call from the Menlo Park Veterans Home. The vets had been without food delivery for two days. Mr. Miele used his bulldozer and made a roadway down Gills Lane and the Middlesex Turnpike to the Veterans Home. As he approached the Veterans Home, he stated that all the vets had their faces pressed to the windows and viewed him as "their salvation". For the next ten years he had the snow plowing contract for the Menlo Park Veterans Home and Engelhard Industries.