Test 1,2,3. Test.

…ask for a little background. Where and when were you born?

A: I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts 1923, September 23rd.

M: Okay. And what neighborhood did you grow up in?

A: Lower Highlands.

M: Uh huh. And what were your parent's occupations?

A: My father worked in a felt cutting mill, and my, he died in 1938. (A: Hm) And my mother worked in a shoebox factory.

M: And what schools did you attend?

A: Powell Street School, the Lincoln School, the Morey School, and Lowell High School. And I took courses in Northeastern, MIT, LTI.

M: Oh yeah? (A: Uh huh) Great! What was your first job after you got out of school?

A: Let's see, I went to work for Tuttle & Green at the Ingersoll Rand Plant, which became a G.E. Plant up off Broadway and whatever the street is, where Stevens Street intersects down there, that plant there.
M: Yeah, the one they just ripped part of it down.

A: Part of it down, that's correct.

M: And um, what did you do at Tuttle & Green?

A: I was a laborer working in the plant overall, converting it to be utilized for the war effort. [Phone rings] Excuse me.

M: Um, now you were working at Tuttle & Green, and where did you go from there?

A: I went into the army.

M: Did you? And did you serve during the war? (A: Uh huh) And when did you get out?

A: Um, December '45.

M: Uh huh, and what did you do after that?

A: I went to work for my father-in-law in the ice and oil business.

M: Uh huh. And what were you doing?

A: Lugging ice and lugging oil. (M: Yeah?) Yeah.

M: Back in the ice days, huh, the icebox days.

A: Yeah, and installed oil burners.

M: And how many years did you work for him?

A: Oh, jeepers crow. Uh, did you turn it off?

[Seems tape was turned off and then on again]

M: And um, uh, how did you, how did you come to be appointed to the Planning Board?

A: I was building homes and uh, um, uh, the City Manager, Mr. Barrett, Frank Barrett at the time, appointed me. I think somewhere along that line I was the President of the Local Home Builders Association. (M: Uh huh) And uh, I think he appointed me at the time so that he'd get representation from the builders themselves.

M: I see. What was the social and economic condition of the city at that time?
A: [Long pause] Well I don't rightly remember exactly. You have to look at my notes. I don’t' remember a lot of these things all the way back. I know that uh, uh, rent, rental space was hard to come by and houses were hard to come by. (M: Yeah) And the city was selling off their lots of land for $25.00/$50.00, or whatever the auction would bring. (M: Uh huh) And some of the developers would go out and build houses on them and subsequently sell them to the people that were, that needed homes. (M: Yeah) And the uh, the need was pretty great at that time. Let's see.

M: Well, so, there was, was there ample rental units available, but maybe not (--) 

A: Not at that time, no. (A: No?) They started to come along just; I don't know exactly what the dates were, but they were starting to build the public housing and so forth to accommodate to the low rental people. (M: Umhm) Uh, and I just don't know when the period of time was that they, they really had the influx of the, I think the first one was the one on Dummer Street, right in that section [unclear].

M: In the Acre?

A: Yeah, the Acre was the first one. And they did, I should qualify that further. They had a lot of housing that they, whereby they had torn down barracks in the uh, from Fort Devens and so forth, and reconstructed them, and/or built them from scratch to alleviate the rental housing conditions. And exactly what the date was, I don't exactly know. I know they built some of the first street over, and they built some in other sections of the city as well, and took it from there.

M: Yeah, so those were like Shaughnessy Terrace and [unclear] some of those.

A: I don't know exactly which ones they were, but I know if you know where the first street over was, it's where the Hunts Falls Bridge comes in now. And they (--) 

M: Okay, was that like Army/Navy Street? Coast Guard Street?

A: I don't recall. I don't recall. I know we delivered a lot of ice down there.

M: Yeah.

A: Um, now why do you think a Planning Board for Lowell was created?

M: Um, The state set up statue in such a way the cities and towns could go ahead and accommodate planning, so that they could go ahead and have better neighborhood conditions and better commercial areas. Whereby they'd be separated from the residential areas, and not have a [gut?] of mixed housing and commerce and industry together, whereby people would have a better way of life.

M: Hm. So they saw planning as a way to segregate those different usage?
A: That's correct. Uh huh.

M: Now what were the responsibilities of the Planning Board when you were on?

A: To protect the safety, welfare and the well being of the people of the city of Lowell and the surrounding areas.

M: Yeah. And what were your duties as a member?

A: Uh, to listen to cases presented to us and make decisions as to whether they were right or wrong; and make amendments to plans that were submitted (A: Umhm) insofar as adequate safety and welfare of the people; adequate service of the roads; and adequate ingress/egress and open space that would be needed according to the zoning.

M: Hm. Now you uh, how did the Board interact with like City Hall and its Planning Department?

A: Uh, at that time the City Hall didn't have a Planning Department as I can recall. They had a City Planner. (A: Hm) And uh, he had a small staff. And subsequently it's just grown over the years. (A: Yeah) But it was the, plan is to go ahead an plan the residential and commercial areas in the city of Lowell, to try to do the best they could to try to foresee what would be happening in the future.

M: Yeah. Now when, when the planning or the City Planner came up with a plan, did that have to be approved by you guys?

A: Uh, any, anything that became an ordinance per se would be recommended by us, (M: okay) and the Council would act on it. They'd either say yes, or no according, or make provisions so that the planning board could go ahead and work, work with it.

M: Okay. So could you describe kind of like the step by step process how something like that would be approved?

A: Uh, if the Planner came up with some, Planner and the Planning Board came up with some ideas as to what should be done, uh, it would be presented to the Council and the City Solicitor in such a way to make, to draft it and to uh, proper regulations. And then the Council would advertise it and make a recommendation that it be done. In their advertising they'd have to go ahead and let it be known that they, when [unclear] as you were. And the final draft, it would come to us and we'd go ahead and we'd have a planning, we'd have a public hearing. And then in turn with our recommendation, or denial, or whatever it may be, it would go back to the council for final ratification. (M: I see) And they'd have to advertise this thing again now as well.

M: Yeah. Um, what were the major goals of the planning, City Planner that you, you recall?
A: Uh, let's see. Major goal of a Planner. There was so many different things that we can [unclear] and I just don't remember all of the goals at the time. If I had known some of these questions you'd have, I have piles of stuff that I'd like to go through out there.

M: Yeah. All right, well let's move on and we can say um, how did the Board help in the city's Urban Renewal process?

A: Uh, it helped in just such a way that we approved the area and approved the planning and the zoning as it was presented by the uh, by the city itself.

M: Okay. So the Planning Board had no um, how do I want to say it?

A: We didn't have any input insofar as a draft was concerned.

M: Okay, right. In the creation of the idea? (A: No. No) So the Planning Board was more of a, just another step in the approval of such a plan.

A: That's correct. I think what happened in those days there, that the Federal Government came out and made appropriations for certain monies for different fields. And then the cities and towns would go ahead and activate a plan, and a study to find out how they can go ahead and work with the Federal Government to get these federal monies in order to go ahead and get the uh, get the thing in operation so that the housing could come about.

M: I see. Now um, did the Board help also in the approval of uh, industrial development for the city?

A: Only in the sense that it would go ahead and approve, or disapprove the site plan, or a plan itself insofar as the zoning application was concerned, and the regular subdivision regulations if needed.

M: Yeah. Now those subdivision regulations and those things, were those drafted by the State House?

A: No, the State House had the, had set up the statute in such a way you could go ahead and make these, adopt these subdivision regulations as per the state statute. And the city could supplement them, city and/or town could supplement them as they so wish as long as it goes through the proper procedures in adopting the law through the Council.

M: And so um, the Planning Department would create say a regulation on some aspect of, of uh, like subdivision development, and then (--) A: Yeah. See what happens is the state had the guidelines that they had set forth. And then from these guidelines you could go ahead and you'd have to follow in a must situation the definite guidelines that they'd have. So that you'd be able to go ahead and
not have any dispute with the law in case somebody appealed this. And uh, I have a short attention span.

M: Well you answered the question. How did zoning come in play with the Planning Board?

A: Zoning came into play before the Planning Board as I can recall. There were certain zones that you had to [re ?], but there was nobody to oversee the zones. (M: Yeah) And then the uh, the zoning in itself is a part of the, the Council and the City itself. The subdivision regulations are sent forth by the Planning Board.

M: Okay. Now I think in the mid 60's they, did they um, redo the whole zoning for the city?

A: Uh, we redid the whole zoning for the city, yes, and had many subsequent hearings, uh, many hearings that we had, and input from the various sections of the city as well as from the Planning Board members themselves. (M: Umhm) And then subsequent to that we had a final hearing and then recommended the adoption by the City Council.

M: Hm. Okay.

A: Okay.

M: Um, do you know how area planning evolved? You know, to include the towns as well as the city?

A: Uh, that (--) Yes I do. Uh, let me just stop and back, because we were, I was on the first Area Planning Commission that we had. (M: Oh) Uh, we had a fellow by the name of Charlie Zettek that was the City Planner at the time. (M: Yeah) As I can recall. And the state, I think Governor Sargeant was the Governor at the time. And what he did was go ahead and get, get the city planners and town planners involved in fact where we have and Area Planning Commission. (M: Uh huh) And we had a meeting down at DOT as I can recall. We had several meetings down there.

M: At Department of Transportation?

A: Yeah. Uh, that was where the meeting hall was. Whether it was convenient or not, I don't know as it came under their jurisdiction. (M: Yeah) And where it went ahead, we went ahead and had meetings so that the sole purpose was this, was so that we could go ahead and try to work with the neighboring cities and/or towns so that we wouldn't infringe upon their jurisdiction. In other words, we wouldn't want to go ahead and put a smoky industrial site uh, next to a highly good residential area in the town of Chelmsford, or Dracut (M: yeah) and visa versa accordingly. (M: Yeah) And subsequent to that the Area Planning Commissioner became more fruitful and did more work for the cities and towns. The city in itself was only, was able to do some of these things financial, where at the time the towns didn't have any money to afford a Planner. And as a result the Area
Plant, the Area Planning Commission and the Planner went ahead and helped the cities, help the towns and/or the cities in some cases that would be neighboring us, therefore reflecting on Lowell to go ahead and set up a plan for good development insofar as resident/commercial space is concerned.

M: Um. What year was that Planning Commission established?

A: I don't know. (M: Okay) I don't really know. Bob Flynn could probably tell you. He wasn't the Area Planning Commission at that time, but he must have an historical section that's there.

M: Okay. Is that the guy that's over at the train depot?

A: Yeah.


A: Uh, John [Keenan?] from Dracut. Uh, Farrington was on the School Committee at the time, the Lowell School Committee and he passed away.

M: Is that the guy that became Senator, John Harrington?

A: No, Farrington.

M: Oh Farrington.

A: No, John Harrington was (--). No, his name was Farrington. And oh, there was a French fellow that became a Selectman in Tyngsboro. Uh, who is the guy that sold out his Real...oh, Brad Emerson, he was from Chelmsford. (M: Uh huh) And uh, either before or after Brad Emerson and Bob McKittrick, I think his son runs McKittrick's Hardware now. (M: Okay) Bert McKittrick was his father. (M: Yuh) See I don't remember the names of these guys that came from (--). We had one from Tewksbury. [Name unclear] from Dracut. There was a French fellow as I can recall that came from Tyngsboro. (M: Yeah) And I don't remember the Westford fellow's name. And we had, along about that time, Concord was um, wondering whether they should join the Boston Area Planning Commission, or the Greater Lowell Planning Commission. And I was on a panel with uh, uh jeepers crow, President of the Bank, Editor of the Sun. Ken Wallace. (M: Oh yeah?) And we, at the time I made a recommendation that Concord should join Boston Area Planning Commission because they were already up and running, and we were just a fledgling. It was just getting started and didn't have much of a budget. (M: Yeah) But whenever, just about that time, if you can date that that's fine. Otherwise I've got tons of literature upstairs I have to check out.

M: Okay. Well I'll be interested in seeing some of that stuff actually. Um, do you think that the Area Planning Commission was successful in its infancy?
A: Uh, I think it ultimately became successful, but initially there was probably a lot of jealousy because of the fact that even though Lowell was paying, at that time we were paying ten cents per capita, was the assessment to the cities and the towns. And even at that time the towns thought it was a big infringement on their budget.

M: Okay, this is for the Planning Commission?

A: Area Planning Commission.

M: Okay.

A: Uh, and uh, what happened is that the towns felt as though, it may be that the towns felt as though they weren't being represented properly uh, with the budget that was there. And Lowell was benefiting even though Lowell may have been paying 75 or 80% of the overall hit from it. Uh, and as a result of that it came out (--) Let me see. Oh Johnson, Johnson was from Billerica. I forget what his first name is. I know him. He became a developer afterwards. (M: Yeah) Uh, George O'Meara was the Area Planning liaison man at the time. (M: Oh yeah?) Because at that time uh, that's where politics came in [few words unclear]. Dick Howe was on the Council. I'm just trying to think there.. George O'Meara was instrumental in helping out Ted Kennedy insofar as the Greater Lowell Area is concerned. (M: Yeah) And uh, and subsequently to that I think the Board felt that possibly because of the relationship that George had with the, with the Senator, that it would be pretty well if we can go ahead and make him the liaison man that would be there.

M: Now he was liaison to?

A: To the Area Planning Commission, for the cities and towns, to work with the cities and towns, and try to do what he could. And in addition to his other duties unofficially if the town needed something, he was, I can't say for sure, but he may have been the POC for the towns to go ahead and make a contact with the Senator at the time. (M: I see) At the time, in those days the Senators and Representatives didn't have the large staff that they have today. (M: Oh really?) And as a result of that it was pretty hard to get in, I shouldn't say it would be hard, but it presented difficulties in making contact with these people on a personal basis, or with their staff. I know Edith Nourse Rogers had an office where the Sun building is located now. Um, and I don't know if any of the other ones had a local office, or not.

M: So how did George O'Meara help out the Planning Commission?

A: Oh, he would go ahead, as I can recall he worked for the Planning Commission. (M: Okay) And he in turn would go around and try to get to the other towns and the city, and try to explain to the Selectman and all the Councilors, and the people in town, and their Representative of the Area Planning Commission what we were trying to do to help out
the area. Uh, and this includes studies of transportation, studies of the different beltways that would be coming into Lowell. At that time we were also talking about an airport?

M: Really?

A: Yeah. And the question was whether or not that we could put an airport out where the Dracut High School was, or put the airport in the old location where the airport was out at Raytheon.

M: Yeah, in South Lowell.

A: And that didn't come to fruition at all, because I guess the state knocked it down, that they didn't have the funds to go ahead and support another airport here.

M: Yeah, yeah. Well um, thinking about some specific sights around town that maybe the Planning Board had involvement in, and if that's not the case maybe if you have any general perception of the history of these places. Um, the Church Street Urban Renewal Area?

A: The Church Street Urban Renewal Area. I don't recall if that was classified as an Urban Renewal Area. (M: Okay) You're talking about where Zayre's and them went in? (M: Yes. Yup) Uh, I don't recall if that was classified as an Urban Renewal Area, because I don't know if there was any federal funds in that or not, and there could have been. (M: Okay) Uh, (--)

M: Um, how about the Harvard Brewery land that turned into Sears Plaza?

A: The Harvard Brewery land that turned into Sears Plaza, we didn't have anything to do with the Harvard Brewery land itself, except to try to maintain the condition of the, of the buildings themselves. I didn't know that the, I don't recall that the area where they put in that plaza was owned by Harvard Brewery. It could well have been, but I don't remember.

M: Hm. Now you said you tried to upkeep the property?

A: Well what we wanted to do, somewhere along the line there we had an Historical Commission that was established. And as a result of that we had the Brewery, and we wanted to go ahead and try to keep as many of the mill buildings per se, and industrial buildings that we had. And the Planner at that time, whoever it may have been was trying to get these buildings to be preserved and be utilized, rather than be underutilized and torn down, (M: Yeah) because many of the mills and buildings were torn down at that time. (M: Right)

M: How about Northern Canal area?
A: Uh, okay. Northern Canal area. [Pause] I'm trying to put my fingers on it. I can see the thing, how it was before and everything, and I just don't recall many of the particulars. I'll be glad to, my wife wants me to get rid of all the stuff that I have upstairs. And I've yet, and I've already given the Planner the opportunity to have any and all my notes and booklets and so forth that I have up there. And I'll be glad to give it to you. (Wife: when are you going to get rid of it? That would be great!) (A: laughs)

M: Well if, you know, if you want to donate it to the Historical Society we'd be, we'd be glad to take it. We've been trying to get you know, stuff from WW II on, because there's a big (--) You know, we have plenty of stuff on the mill girls and that, but we need to bring history into the 20th Century now. (Wife: Oh for crying out loud!)

A: I had a uh, I can't think of the fellows name. He built a house on Rogers Street. He's sitting high on the hill up there in back of Fairmont Street. (M: Umhm) I gave him a lot of historical data. My mother as I can recall is probably a first family in Lowell. My great-uncle was the Fire Chief in the City of Lowell. (M: Oh neat) Hosmer.


Wife: I think he was an Alcott.

A: My mother was an Alcott. (M: I see). Somewhere between the Hosmers and the Alcotts and the Sweetzers, there were Sweetzers out in Chelmsford next to where Brad Emerson had his office. They were there, they were my mother's cousins.

M: Yeah.

A: Come to the question again, I went off on a tangent.

M: I was looking for information on the Northern Canal Area, Little Canada.

A: Um, what had happened is that the uh, I don't know which had the President, uh but Little Canada was an area that was destined for Urban Renewal and acquisition by the state for the University high rise dormitories that they had there. (M: Yeah) I delivered, in those days I delivered the oil and ice into the four and five tenement blocks that were there. And Laurier Park is there where the uh, um, ball field is, the Spinner's Ball Field is now. And then Jack's used cars came in after that. (M: Yeah) And whether they contaminated the area or not, I don't know. But all of those things as far as history is concerned, it was a known fact that it was contaminated before. (M: Yeah)

M: What was the neighborhood like when you were delivering oil and ice?

A: Oh, neat, clean as a pin. And the people paid cash for everything. They never owed any money. The ice was ten cents, or fifteen cents. They'd either pay you directly there, or pay you by the week. At the end of the week they'd leave the money in the ice chest.
and you take it from there. And before we had laws that we were on the books for fire prevention and so forth, people had their 50-gallon drums out on the porches.

End of tape

Side II, side I begins

A: You'd never, it wasn't like it was today where you'd just go in and dump into a 275 tank, or a 500, or a 1,000. Uh, a big sale was 50 gallons. [Both laugh] I used to buy the ice for $3.00, uh, $1.1/2 and I'd get $3.00 for it, for a bar, 300 pound bar.

M: Wow. So did, did the make-up, the physical make-up of the neighborhood change from the time?

A: Oh definitely. Because what happened is, initially it became a little bit stagnant as most areas do without the uh, [few words unclear]? It improved the neighborhood in many areas. All the blocks along the Northern Canal going down towards the Courier Citizen Plant and so forth, in the wintertime it was really atrocious. Because all the ice that would be out on the canals would be full of rags, and cans, and all kinds of garbage that was real real messy. And then when they started tearing, tearing things down it, each successive year it became cleaner all the way through, as I can recall it. And uh, when they put the housing on Merrimack Street, and whatever that street is that's through there. (M: Moody Street) Yeah, Moody, Race Street Firehouse was there. (M: Yup) One of the conditions were that when they tore down the Race Street Firehouse that they'd have to contribute more parking, because the parking wasn't what we thought would be adequate at the time. And subsequently to that they added more parking spaces to that area. And it's, it's really made a lot of great improvements over the years, from the blocks and so forth that were there. When you look at other cities and towns, they could have really been firetraps, because they had no fire proofing to speak of in those days. And uh, when a block caught on fire, that was a real fire all over the place.

M: Yeah. Yeah. Now why do you think Little Canada was selected for Urban Renewal?

A: I have no idea why, why it was. That's something that came about from somewhere else.

M: Uh, do you recall any um, of the history of the Merrimack Mills in that area?

A: Uh, I can recall some areas of the Merrimack Mills that was in the area. And I can recall uh, I went to apply for a job at some company that made, they had an office in Andover as well, uh, and that this place here was paying a lot of good money. So, I didn't get a job there anyway, but uh, all I can, I can only really I guess, say that I do remember the mills were there. And we'd cut around the back of the mills to go over to
Suffolk Street. We had a ball game over there. The kids from the different parks, we played at the Lincoln Park, and we'd play a team that would be up at Highland Park, or we'd play a team that would be over in the park in Centralville. And you'd cut through all of those places.

M: Now when those mills were ripped down, did the Planning Board have any say on the utilization of the property?

A: Uh, no, because there wasn't anything that would come up. It was zoned industrial at the time anyway. And the only thing that would be coming into is the Historic Board would come into jurisdiction insofar as what would be coming in there. (M: Yeah) This is one of the things that, if private industry had gone in there they were going to have to reconstruct the towers and so forth as they were. Which maybe I was a conservative and I didn't believe in, in spending all that kind of money to do that, when they could go ahead and tear a part of it down and come in with something that was really half way decent. Which we haven't yet, but hopefully we will.

M: Yeah. Do you know any information about the industrial park in Chelmsford Street?

A: Uh, I know what had happened in there at the time as I can recall, is that they were coming in with the Industrial Park to try to promote industry in the city of Lowell. Because in that era we lost, most of the mills were becoming vacant, and manufacturing jobs were going south and other places at the time. (M: Umhm) The Carolinas and Georgia, and Alabama. And what we would try to do as well as other cities and towns, is provide for some of the industry that was coming into being, and growing. And as a result we set up, it was initially set up so that we have the industrial park in there with strictly industrial buildings that were Class A construction with beautiful façades and so forth. (M: Yeah) Because of the fact that we weren't able to acquire this industry and maintain this industry, we were more or less grabbing at straws, and if something was going to give us employment we allowed the buildings to come in. And either grant variances for the type of construction, or deleted the need for the type of construction we could have.

M: So the original plan was changed to meet the needs?

A: To meet the needs to provide employment for the people.

M: Um, how about the industry that was built over in Pawtucketville, along the Boulevard?

A: Um, when you're talking about industry, you're talking about (--)  

M: At the old Waterworks area?

A: Yeah, but that, that was just the Wang Laboratories that went in there. Uh, and that was, at the time that went in there we didn't have the so-called flood claims that we have
now. And that was an opportunity that we had. I guess the city owned part of the land, and they purchased part of the land, however it may have resolved. And that was to go ahead and give Wang the opportunity, because they were really in their hay day, and expanding as much as we could. And we wanted to go ahead and have Wang in our, in our city to keep promoting jobs as much as we could. We were in the technology revolution at the time, and we wanted to keep as many people as we had. As I can recall when Wang started in Tewksbury, and then they came in and we had the Wang Tower, which became the Wang Towers. And they put the two buildings up. And they had the groundbreaking ceremony and so forth. They had these little glass units that were, where the Wang Towers is, I don't know if you've seen them or not? (M: No.) I think I have one around here.

M: Oh yeah! I'd like to see that. [Chuckles]

A: Honey! I don't know where she went. Downstairs probably.

M: Yeah. Now did (--) How did the city encourage industry to come into the city?

A: We had, we had an industrial liaison person at the time that worked with the city, that worked for the city, that would in all probabilities read up on New York Times, or the Wall Street Journal and business magazines and so forth. And it was his job to go out and interview these people, and try to sell the city of Lowell on locating their industry and plants here if he possibly could. (M: Yeah) Um, Tom Markham was one of the fellows who was here for a long time. I don't know if you heard of him. (M: Yeah) But he, I think he's since passed away. (M: Yup) But that was his job, was to go ahead and try to sell the city, these cities, these people that wanted to come in to, that were looking for expansion into other areas. And that's when they came to here.

M: Now did the city offer tax incentives?

A: I don't think the city, at that time I don't think they had the [unclear] in the statutes to allow that. I don't, I don't know for sure. (M: Okay) But they, the greatest thing was that they were trying to promote what the city was all about. What we had for our cultures, the ethnicities, and the way that the city was in itself. (M: Right) And the proximity of the various universities in Boston and the city of Lowell insofar as it being a good city to go ahead and have a good lifestyle, as every city and town is trying to do. They going to try to put their best foot forward.

M: Yeah. So they weren't able to offer tax incentives. How about, how about the land? Were they, did they offer that at a less than market value, or some, something like that?

A: Uh, they, they would, I'm only saying this because I don't know whether it's factual or not, but I guess they would go ahead and they'd, they'd put a decent market, market value on the package that they'd have insofar as the land was concerned. I don't know the legalities, or what they did in the finality of all that. Honey! I thought I heard her out
there. Ruthie! (Wife: what?) Oh, got a minute? Do you know where that Wang Tower glass thing is?

Wife: Oh good heavens! Wang tower? I don't know if we still have it.

A: Okay, well I'll, I'm sure we have it.

Wife: It would have to be up in the attic(—)

A: I've got all of this stuff up in the garage attic (Wife: in the garage) up there. I'll try and (—)

M: Well the next time you're digging through and you find your notebooks and stuff.

A: Well I'm going to be going through, because my wife wants to get rid of all that stuff.

Wife: I told him to just throw it out!

M: No! Give it to me if anything and we'll preserve it.

Wife: As long as there's a place for it, fine! As long as it's out of my way. [Laughs] Look it, I'm in the process right now of getting rid of people's stuff.

A: Oh, you probably know of the fellow up in the University of Lowell, who was a Librarian. Joe something, I think he was a Lithuanian, was on the Historic Board with us.

M: Oh yeah!

A: Uh, big, heavy set fellow.

M: I know Martha Mayo, I think was on it.

A: Martha came in after her, after he did.

M: Yeah.

A: And then Joe passed away. (M: Yeah) Nice guy.

Wife: Do you want any old time post cards on the city of Lowell in the 1800's? [Laughs]

A: He'll take it, he'll take it. If you have them handy he'll take them with him.

Wife: When I'm in the process I'll save it all for you.

M: Okay, great. Great. I'll call back next week or something.
Wife: Oh, that's too soon. I'm very slow. [Both chuckle]

M: How about the Hale/Howard area?

A: Uh, the Hale/Howard area was something that came about as I can recall, the blocks, the tenement blocks along the Hale Street area were becoming run down, if you may call it that way. And they didn't have much there. And along Howard St, Grand Street, the extension of Howard Street, and it was abutting Tanner Street, which at the time had some junkyards. And Resilin (sic – Silresim) Chemical was there, Scannell Boiler Works were there, Gulf Corporation was there. Socony Mobil Oil was up further at the lower end of Main Street. (M: Yeah) And Shell Oil was there. Where Carragher Brothers took over Shell Oil Corporation areas, and I guess part of that became Resilin (sic – Silresim) Chemical. And subsequent to that we had, well Chelmsford Street came into Hale, and Howard and Grand. We had three Synagogues that were there, and the Synagogues were relocating as they did up on Westford Street, uh, Steven Street and W. Forest Street I guess it was.

M: Yeah, out further into the Highlands.

A: And they were becoming vacant. And the houses and everything along Railroad Street were, there was a high vacancy rate. And as a result of that, that was just right for going over and trying to get the Federal Government to help us get rid of this so called blight and utilize it as we did. And subsequently we had some industrial plants that came in on the Hale Street, Chelmsford Street, whether they were integrated or not, I don't know. And [unclear] friend of mine that owns a plumbing shop, George Elston, built a building on Cambridge Street. And the City of Lowell and the Housing Authority put up a few units on, on Cambridge and Hale Street that were theirs. Maurice Polasky built them I believe. He built, he did the ones on Lakeview here, they were the same style. (M: Yeah) Um, then it just came about, it just became blighted and/or developed accordingly from there on.

M: Was there community support for urban planning back in those days?

A: There was community support for those people that became vociferous and came out for it, because we always had hearings on these things. (M: Yeah) And by and large the support came from the people that wanted to get rid of the blight. And you had a few people that were opposed to it because they probably may have been profiting from the blight, or didn't ver from the area because they had rental units in the area themselves, or they've lived there a long time and they didn't want to just leave. That there wasn't any basic good reasons for why it should, or should not have been taken down as it was.

M: Yeah. Now who were some of the community leaders that supported the planning?

A: I guess starting on successively would be all the City Managers. When I was here it was Frank Barrett was the City Manager then. And Dick Howe was always in supportive of it. Farley, Farley's gone, he passed away. He was supportive of it. Uh, Ellen
Sampson was supportive of all the stuff at the time. George Eliades was supportive of all the stuff. (M: Yeah) George's father. (M: Yeah) Yeah, uh, I guess most of the people who were involved, Jim Cooney's father was supportive of all of these things.

M: Uh huh. And why do you think that was?

A: Well I think his father was part of the community. He grew up in, became successful, and he wanted to see the city be restored in some way, as I can recall. (M: Umhm) And he had some property of his own that he tried to fix up, and keep going as much as he possibly could.

M: Yeah. How about other business leaders?

A: I have to stop and think, because uh, the business leaders that were involved, I guess the people that owned Pellon Corporation was supportive of what was happening. And any business leader should be supportive of it, because if you're, if you're bringing in new development, new industry is going to help them successively, and turn over the dollar, some of the dollars that are generated are going to help them successively. (M: Right) And it just trickles down so that everybody gets a little piece of the pie.

M: Um, who were some of the opposition people that you remember?

A: I can't think of anybody that was really an opposition. The only person that I can remember being in opposition is, well there were others, but I'd have to remember back. Levasseur was opposed to some of the things. Levasseur was opposed to the high-rise units that were, that the Lowell Five financed over in back of John Street there. You know, those high rise units (M: near the Post Office?) yeah, that Princeton Property owns them now. (M: Yeah) And uh (--)

M: And who, who was this Levasseur person?

A: He was just an ordinary citizen that was, he worked for E.A. Wilson, he was a truck driver. (M: Uh huh) His wife is still living I think.

M: Yeah. Now they aren’t Levasseurs from Stedman Street, are they?

A: They uh, they were (--). They could well be, Levasseur it is, they owned the property, or did own the property on the corner of Westford, Pine and Monadnock. That place is falling down. (M: Okay. Yeah) They owned the property on outer Chelmsford Street just before the Industrial Park when the house was there, and they had a pair of cement steps and it was always falling down.

M: Yeah, that house just got ripped down.
A: Yeah. [Sounds like: As I say you may have been in opposition] My notes would reflect these things because I kept most of the minutes except for the ones that got wet and damaged. (M: Okay) I did have most of those.

M: Yeah, great! Um, do you think the Urban Renewal Program for the city was a success?

A: Yes, definitely, because we got rid of many of the blighted areas and uh, in many areas that they, you had blight mixed in with a lot of good property owners that kept their properties up, and successively it decreased the value. A good example of this is to, uh, it wasn’t a renewal area, but if you look at the Portuguese section of the city of Lowell, and you look at how the mixture is there. Most of the Portuguese people have utilized every square foot of land that they have with, uh, by keeping their houses painted and decorated. And they utilize it with grape arbors. And they, they grow fruits and vegetables, and do whatever they can. They’re very meticulous and it works out very very well. And this is, what happens is that you get some people, or so-called landlords that live in other cities and towns and don’t care about what happens to the city. They’re only looking to the dollars. Uh, this is really affecting the properties of the people that are maintaining the properties properly.

M: Um, why do you think Historic Preservation became important to Lowell?

A: Uh, so that people coming up in the future and in the next century, and people who are living in this century can see what their so-called forefathers had to put up with, and know how they can capitalize on the mistakes of others, if there were mistakes.

M: Um. Now did you notice the change in the attitude of people from supporting Urban Renewal to Preservation at one point?

A: Uh, yeah, I noticed the change. And I can’t say that the people that were affected by the change were happy about it, because many a places that they were, they thought that they were being pushed to do certain things that they didn’t really want to do, that they didn’t think was economically feasible. But the city and/or state, and/or federal government helped to subsidize the improvements to these oh so-called historic properties. But the only bad thing is that once you have this so-called historic property it makes it difficult in years to come to make improvements, or to make demolitions when it need be, when the need becomes.

M: Yeah. How long did you stay on the Planning Board?

A: I, I think I’m there thirty-five, forty years I think. Thirty-five, thirty-eight years, something like that. Dick Johnson can tell you when I was appointed.

M: Yeah. So you must have enjoyed the uh?
A: I enjoyed it. It was fun if you want to classify it that way. It was good comradery with the people that I served with, the people that were in the administration. (M: Yeah) And the people that would come in to the various hearings that were able to contribute a lot to the development of the city in bringing up things sometimes that we didn’t think about that really enlightened all of us to some of the things.

M: Yeah. What were some of the important planning controversies during the 60’s and 70’s?

A: Controversies? I don’t know that we had any on the Board. I can’t place the time really, because I don’t have, I have a good memory about an awful lot of things, but to put them in date-wise, I’d have to refer to my notes upstairs.

M: Okay. Um, how about any interesting stories about during the time that you were on the Planning Board?

A: I don’t know if we had any interesting stories, we had a lot of fun with the comments with one of the Board Members, Danny Moynihan had, because he was a Postman (M: Yeah) and he had traveled all the routes of the city of Lowell. And when people would come up with a problem on an area that they’d have, Danny would say, “oh yeah, you live next door to the house that had the little brown dog that used to bite me once in awhile. You know, little things come up like that. This is why I said it was a lot of fun at times. We had a lot of humor, but we were serious about what we did.

M: Yeah. Who were some of the more important Board Members that you served with?

A: Well they were all, they were all important insofar as that’s concerned, but I had a good relationship with Mary (--) Charlie Hatem, Mary Barrows, um, Charlie [name unclear?] is a really good friend of mine. Danny Moynihan. My present Board Members, George Zaharoolis. And see, I can’t remember even some of the people I’m looking at at the time. And uh, that’s Farrington lived on Wentworth Avenue. Jeppers, I can’t think, he just passed away too. His father owned an awful lot of property in Lowell at one time in lower Belvidere. (M: Yeah) And then he, they owned Highland Cleaners. Do you know the kid that (--) (M: Antons?) No, Highland Cleaners. (M: Oh) He went to climb the mountain in China and Tibbett there. Kilimanjaro. Uh, oh, it was his brother. I’m sorry but I just don’t remember these guys. I’ll try to get to it afterwards.

M: Yeah. That’s all right. Uh, I have a couple of names from the early period when you first joined the Board. Um, Antonio Gagnon. Did you serve with him?

A: I didn’t serve with him.

M: No. How about David Lepinsky?

A: Dave wasn’t on the Board at the time. (M: No?) I know David.
M: And how about Morris Nelson?

A: Morris Nelson wasn’t on the Board at the time. (M: No?) No, he played golf at the Vesper I guess. I know who he was.

M: Um, talking about some other people, um, what was your relationship with Frank Barrett? Did you work with him a lot when you first came aboard the Planning Board?

A: Well, um, I shouldn’t say I worked with him. I mean he had, he had things that were presented to us by way of his administration and whatever it came through, and we acted independently of everybody in the City Hall as far as that’s concerned. If it was right, it was right. Fortunately we had a good Board. If it was right, it was right. And if it wasn’t right we’d argue why it wasn’t right. And we may have gotten into conflict sometimes with some of our votes, but that’s the way we felt it should be done.

M: Did you ever feel that political decisions affected people on the Board?

A: It may affected some, but I don’t think as a result over all it hurt the Board in any way, because I don’t think that was the finality of what the vote may have been. (M: Yeah) There was a lot to do about the uh, where the Epicure was where the bank is now on the corner of Market, Middle and Central Street (M: Yeah) as I can recall there was some people that were in opposition of tearing that stuff down. In about that time we had an arsonist that burnt down many of the office buildings that were there. One of the ladies got killed in there. They had the answering machine service in that building. And Kittridge’s Bowling Alley is upstairs. That building was burnt down. The building where the merit station was, that was burnt down. Uh, there was another one on, where the Elks was, uh, the back of the Strand Theater, Warren Street, (M: Yeah) that was burnt down. There were quite a few buildings that were burnt down at the time. (M: Hm) They had to be destroyed. And uh, but the controversy on that, because some people didn’t want to see the building turned down, they didn’t want to loose the 5 & 10 that was going to be there. (M: Yeah) People were wondering what was going to be coming to the sidewalk, because at the time the building itself went under the sidewalk.

M: Oh really! Yeah.

A: And they had all of these little glass things that looked through to give them light in the basement. (M: Yeah) Uh, I think that may have been one place that’s had some controversy. I don’t know exactly what it was all about afterwards, but (--)

M: How about at that, was it the Mongeau Building?

A: The Mongeau Building was the one that got burnt down.

M: Yeah, I think there was a little controversy on that, right? Do you recall?
A: Well, people didn’t want to see it torn down, but it was totally destroyed and there’s nothing that you can do about it. You can probably get pictures from the Sun at that time when that was taken, because it was, it was burnt down.

M: Yeah. Now the uh, people tried to put a gas station there for years and they kept on getting shot by the city council somebody told me?

A: It could be. I don’t recall exactly what happened.

M: Um, how about um, did you ever serve with Danny Walker on Area Commission?

A: No, I knew Danny Walker very well.

M: Yeah. [small distortion in tape] with Bill Leoung?

A: Yeah, he was the City Planner.

M: Yeah, what was he like?

A: Uh, he was pretty good. Some of the Board Members didn’t like him, uh, but overall he uh, he was pretty good. He had a lot of weird ideas, but subsequently he left and another fellow came in, became the City Planner for the City of Manchester. His son, or a person by the same name was a newscaster on Channel 8 [unclear].

M: Is it Jim Minoch?

A: Jimmy Minoch, yeah.

M: Now you said Bill Leoung had some strange ideas? What were they?

A: Well I don’t know, but I mean he was just classified with strange ideas the way he was. He was more of an architect I believe that people thought, than he was a planner. (M: I see) I got along very well with him. I had no problem with him.

M: Um, how about Bill Kiely? Did you ever deal with him?

A: Uh, we didn’t have much to do with Bill Kiely, because he was, he was more or less like a controller of all the construction that was part of the city’s. Bill and I are good friends.

M: Where, where does he live, because I’d be interested in talking to him.

A: He lives somewhere in Belvidere as far as I know.

M: Okay. All right. Did you ever have any dealings with um, Homer Bourgeois?
A: Um, not, not personally I haven’t had. I know, I knew who he was. And he, he did a lot to the city. He did a lot for the charities. And he was able to bring the French monies into the charities pretty much all the way along. He was instrumental in financing a lot of things that came about for the city. He was very partial to the French-Canadian population. And I guess he was instrumental in getting Jeanne D’Arc Credit Union started and promoting things with him, as with the Gagnons that had the Gagnon’s Department Store. (M: Right) And the Montbleau’s and the ooh, can’t think of the name of the people. They had the Blue Moon, and they had an appliance business in the city of Lowell. They took over Gagnon’s Appliance Store. Not the Gagnon’s, the Gagnon’s Appliance, and the Gagnon’s Department were different the most I can recall.

M: Oh, two different families?

A: Yeah.

A: And uh, one of the brothers operated a restaurant in Dracut. And they had the Blue Moon together, and they had the appliance store.

M: Yeah. Now the Blue Moon, you’re talking about the one down in Middlesex Village?

A: Uh, yeah. It’s where DeMoulas’ is now.

M: Yeah, Princeton Boulevard?

A: Yup.

M: Now you said the Union Bank helped fund a lot of the city projects?

A: Uh, I guess, well I shouldn’t say the city projects per se, but they, they were instrumental in loaning money to uh, to different people that were building, or doing different business in Lowell. They were a National Bank. So that’s what their business was anyway. But I think Homer may have taken a personal interest in all of that. The Dancauses were very influential at the time in the city of Lowell.

M: Now when you built homes what bank did you use? Different banks?

A: No, primarily I used the Central Savings.

M: I see. Um, who else do you considered was important in the concepts that evolved during the 50’s and 60’s concerning planning?
A: I don’t rightly recall of anything like that. I never, I may have a crazy kind of attitude, but I don’t figure anybody is important. I figure everybody does their own thing, and some people may seem like their important for the instance, but then it’s just something that becomes publicity somewhat. And then after that they just fade out. It’s, I look at people, if they’re friends, they’re friends, whether they’re Black, White, or purple. They’re just there.

M: Um, anything else you want to share about your time on the Planning Board?

A: Other than the fact that I enjoyed whatever I was able to help out in the city, and hopefully helped to do some things that were right. Some things were wrong, but there’s nothing we can do about that. We, we’ve had uh, I’ve had a great deal of fun if you want to classify it as enjoyment on the Planning Board, meeting the different people and finding out what their various aspects were, and they were being heard. And in most cases it’s always repetitious, it doesn’t have any foundation. As you probably hear, it’s going to promote more traffic. The traffic in many cases is insignificant insofar as the existing traffic is concerned. And, or it’s going to cause more problems with the schools. Well no matter what people are propagating, and whether it’s in this city, or the town, or the next town, the people in the other town are coming to Lowell and they’re going to contribute to the school. People from this town are going to another town and they’re going to contribute to their school. So it’s just evolution if you want to classify it that way. And no matter what, something is going to hurt somebody along the line somewhere.

M: Yeah. Well thanks for your time.

A: I hope I helped you out in some way. (M: Oh yeah! Yeah) I just don’t (--) 

M: You did very much.

Interview ends