
P: Oh boy. [Laughing in background]

Unknown voice: Go back!

A: Do you mind reviewing just a couple of things?

P: No, go ahead.

A: I’m sorry. Okay, uh, all right. I’ll go through it very quickly. When and where were you born?

P: In Lowell, April 12, 1919.

A: Okay, and you went to school at?

P: The Pine Street School, the Morey School, Lowell High School, St. John’s Prep, [few names unclear] Poly Tech in Troy, New York.

A: And you got your Degrees over there?

P: Yeah, in Mechanical Engineering.

A: Okay. Um, uh, how did you come to be appointed to the Housing Authority Board?
P: Uh, through my acquaintance with Frank Barrett. I was not politically connected or anything, (A: yeah) just as a, as an interested citizen.

A: Okay. And um, let’s see. What were the Housing Authorities major goals during this time?

P: Housing and renewal. Clean out areas and housing for the uh, for the low income family.

A: Okay. Okay.

P: And then also we started something, we did do elderly too.

A: Okay. Talking about the Bishop Markham Housing, (P: yeah) how did that get started?

P: That was to clean out that area between St. Peter’s Church and down to the Post Office. What do they call that building now? Gray building, that was the Post Office. (A: Yeah, yeah) To clean that area out. It was a, frankly I think also to build, try to build up St. Peter’s Parish so the truth is known.

A: Okay.

P: Monsignor Twist. (A: He was uh?) Kind of the driving force.

A: Now how would he (--) I mean you say he was a driving force, did he come and talk to you?

P: He was encouraging us at all, at all the time. (A: I see) After we had selected the area he was a supporter. He was also, to digress he was also, he had some pretty strong connections. He was also National Chaplain of the American Legion. (A: Really?) So that you know, he was at a nationwide, had some political clout.

A: Hm, interesting. Um, okay. I’m going to go back to some more stuff here. How did the Housing Authority become involved in Urban Renewal?

P: Because we, we had all of the power such as eminent domain, we had the staff, we had the connections in New York and Washington with the, where the funds were coming from. We were established. We had performed already in all of the housings. I mean we, it was a natural.

A: Okay. What did you say about the city manager? That he was uh, he had the votes.

P: Well he had the votes and he knew that he could kind of direct us in the direction that he would like to see the thing run, and give us all his support.
A: Yup. Um, how was site selected for renewal?

P: For renewal was to clean up an area. That was a pretty tough area, in that there was a lot of, I think there was some old rooming houses in there. As I said, John Brady had a cinder pile in there. John Y. Myers, where you bought the pants was in there.

A: And the slogan was?

P: Huh?

A: The slogan for that market was?

P: Oh, for the pant store, where you bought the pants, John Y. Myers.

Unknown voice: I don’t remember that.

P: Don’t you remember? He’s a great big brute of a man, John Y. Myers. He looked like uh, do you ever remember (--) You probably wouldn’t remember, there used to be a character around many many years ago, the “Angel”. He was a wrestler. This John Y. Myers looked just like that. [Chuckling].

A: Who owned the stores downtown at that period? Was it certain ethnic groups?

P: Well let me see. No, I don’t think so. Bon Marche was owned by [Winigman?]. Allied ran it, but Winigman owned it. Uh, Bartlett uh, the Pollards, well Clarence Bartlett, who was married to her, and William Trull Shepard, they controlled Pollards. Gagnon’s was dying at that time. (A: Yeah) McQuades was Ike McQuade, and Lull and Hartford was owned by Elmer Rynne.


P: Yeah, Phil McGowan.

Unknown voice: Talbots, Harry Bass’.

P: Oh Talbots, that was a big store. That was a tremendous store, Talbots. Harry Bass, uh, the Lincoln Stores.


P: Wood Abbot, yeah. We’re spread across the whole ethnic uh (--)

Unknown voice: There were a lot of little shops too. Page’s.

A: Page’s, yeah, by the clock.
Unknown voice: By the clock.

P: That old guy you know, used to, fought in the civil war. We used to all go down and see him ride up (--) 

A: Did you ever see him?


A: How long did he live till?

P: God, he lived to be a hundred I think. He used to give away (--) He was born on St. Patrick’s Day, and he used to give away green lollipops.

A: Was he Irish?

P: No, (A: no) no, no. God, good God. [Laughing]

A: Yeah, but that was a big kick with the kids, huh?

P: He just turned over in his grave. [Laughing]

A: No, that’s ancient history, okay.

Unknown voice: He could give you all the information. He could be on the Historic Board.

A: Yeah, well we’re looking for members. Come on down! Um, how were Urban Renewal sites funded?

P: Federal Government 100%.

A: 100%

P: 100% Federal money.

A: Now who did you see as one of the people that really came up with great ideas along these lines?

P: For the Urban Renewal?

A: Yeah.

P: Charlie Zettek is the key. (A: Okay) Charlie Zettek. He had support from Frank Barrett, uh, the Housing Board. Homer Bourgeois who was the leading banker in Lowell at that time, he supported it.
A: Okay. And how did uh, how did Homer Bourgeois support it?

P: He gave them his support, and I, well he bought a piece of the Urban Renewal property.

A: Okay.

P: Which was to his advantage, but also to ours too. (A: Yeah) He put up money. (A: Yup) Yeah.

A: Did you see the bank as a real strong focal point in the community?

P: Yeah.

A: The Union National?

P: Oh yeah, Union National was the power house, (A: yeah) yup, under Homer. (A: Yeah) Yeah.

A: And why do you think Homer was so active in those, in that regard?

P: He loved Lowell, and that was his fun, being in the powering role. (A: Yeah) He loved it.

A: Um, okay, now we’re going to talk about some specific sites. The Church Street site. You said, (P: well yeah) now you said that was one of the first completed?

P: First, that’s the first industrial commercial redevelopment in the country. (A: Um) Completed. (A: Umhm) First done, first started and first completed.

A: How do you think Lowell was so active to achieve that goal compared to other places?

P: Same thing, Zettek. (A: Yeah?) He was the key. He’d breathe up the ideas, and we had the, we had the group in place to make it work. (A: Okay) We had the, we had the organization. The Lowell Housing Authority had the organization. Jack Sayers is the Director of that Redevelopment. (A: Yeah) John McPadden is the Director of the Lowell Housing, and the Board. We had the power.

A: Now um, were there public hearings for the Church Street?

P: Yup. Yup.

A: And who spoke in favor of the Urban Renewal Program?
P: We had quite a diverse group came out in favor. The banks as I said, some of the, even the Baptist church there on the property came out in favor of it. (A: Umhm) And uh, some merchants, some of the smaller merchants were smart enough to realize it was to their advantage. (A: Yeah) The big ones were against it.

A: And why was that?

P: They were born against. They were born against.

A: Now you told a little story about after the war?

P: Well right after the war all the young fellows in the Chamber got together. The stores used to open Monday nights. And they went to all the mills downtown, like the Merrimack Manufacturing, Mass Mohair, all of these places. Payday was either going to be Friday, or Sat (--) Thursday or Friday, mostly Thursday. The banks were going to stay open Thursday. Why won’t the stores open Thursday? (Unknown voice: night) Thursday night. Everything was done so that you got your paycheck, now you had all of the stores to go to and everything. You weren’t going to tell those merchants when they were going to open. They were going to open Monday nights. They were going to wait four days for you to spend your money, then come to their stores.

A: And so that was the secret (--) 

P: That’s their thinking.

A: That was the secret to their success.

P: That’s it. That’s why you can’t find them anymore. They’re all gone. [Both chuckle] That’s like, Charlie Zettek had an idea to make Merrimack Street a mall.

A: Oh yeah!

P: Oh, close it off, (A: to traffic) yup. And the big competition at that time was the North Shore Shopping Center. And if he’d made that mall, and the parking around it, you would have been nearer the stores by 80% of the parking spots on the North Shore. The merchants almost had a fit. They almost died.

A: Yeah.

P: They couldn’t see. Well.

A: No, they couldn’t think of starting it, huh?

P: They couldn’t, no. No.
A: Um, let’s talk about another site which the Housing Authority worked on. That was Northern Canal, or Little Canada as it was called before.

P: Now that’s the first, you mean the first one, where we first built the first housing?

A: Well uh, no. Um, Northern Canal, not Northern Common.

P: Oh okay, over by, behind City Hall and around there. [Unknown voice asks a question, speaks too softly to transcribe] Yeah, I was just the end of it, yeah.

A: So tell me your recollection of that site.

P: Same thing. Trying to clean out, clean out all three-decker cold-water flats and what have you.

A: Now was there community opposition to that?

P: Not too bad! (A: Yeah) Not too bad. People, well people were starting to see what could come, what could happen.

A: Um, I see. All right, I’d like to ask you some, just about some personalities. (P: Yeah) And just, you can tell a story about them, you can just say how you felt with them, if you had any dealings with them. Uh, Frank Barrett?

P: Fine fellow. Easy to get along, you could talk to him. If you disagreed with him, no problem. You could go up and he would listen. (A: Yeah) That was the big thing with Frank. You go argue your point all you want and that was it. (A: Umhm) There was, he was a very very easy man to work with.

A: And what was his background?

P: What, Holy Cross, he was a reporter for the Lowell Sun for years. A political reporter for the Lowell Sun in City Hall, and he got the votes and became City Manager.

A: Yeah. Did he know a lot of the councilors? Is that how he got elected?

P: Oh sure. Yeah, I assume, yeah.

A: Yeah. How about John McPadden?

P: John McPadden. Mr. Housing. He knew everybody in the, in New York and Washington, and everybody in Housing or Urban Renewal, he knew everyone and could personally pick up the phone and call and talk to them. By name he knew them.

A: Um. And how did he build up all that knowledge?
P: I think from way back when they first started the very first project. It was so early in the game, that they were all knew, he was knew. That’s where it came from.

A: He had been there a number of years, right?

P: Yup. Yup. Yup.

A: Yeah. How about John Sayers?

P: Jack? I knew Jack all my life. (A: Did you?) We grew up together, yeah. Yeah, 100%. Knew his stuff. Serious, hard working.

A: Yeah. (P: Yeah) Um, how about uh, you’ve already mentioned Charlie Zettek.

P: Yup, number one.

A: Leo McCarthy?

P: Leo, managed (--) Good old Leo, managed Roarke Coal Company

A: What was it, Roarke?

P: Roarke Coal Company. (A: Okay) Yup, that was his uh, he did. Had a couple of boys I think. One of the boys was a school teacher, and the other boy was a developer (A: Yeah) for Stop & Shop. John, as I remember.

A: Really?

P: Yeah, afterwards in later life. But Leo was a great guy, and same thing, you could talk to him. Take a shot at anything. Willing to work.

A: Hm. Now um, the Stop & Shop went into Church Street (P: yeah) right? That was after?

P: Oh yeah, a long time. John had no connection then, or Leo at the time.

A: How about George Nichols?

P: George Nichols, he represented the Teamsters as I remember. (A: Okay) Yeah, George, nice fellow George. He was a Labor appointment I think. We use to have them play one Labor appointee, and he represented the Teamsters at that time.

A: Now why did the Board have Labor appointments?

P: I don’t know whether it was written in the rules. I don’t think so. I think it was just the idea to get a diverse group. And I think from day one, I think like that’s why they put
Frank McGurn on with the Building Department, way at the beginning. (A: Yeah) And then afterwards came Jackie Emerson, who represented the laborers. (A: Okay) And then when he, time came up then they put George Nichols. Spread the thing around so that they had all sections of the community in Lowell.

A: Yeah, yeah. Um, I had asked you a little bit about John Dwyer and Frank McGurn.

P: John Dwyer, I knew John just slightly. He was older than I was. I had nothing to do with John. Frank McGurn was a city Building Inspector, Wire Inspector. Worked with him on projects in Lowell that had nothing to do with the Housing.

A: How about Ray, Raymond Bourgeois?

P: Raymond Bourgeois, he was Homer’s brother? (A: Yup) Nice man. Sat next to me on the Board meetings. Knew Ray for years and years. He was the Clerk of Courts in Lowell.

A: How long did he serve on the Housing Authority, do you know?

P: No, but he left (--). He was there when I first went on as I remember when. And then he left and I think Arthur Turcotte took his place.

A: I see. (P: Yeah) Now was it the idea to have a French person on the Board, like they would have a Labor person?

P: I don’t know, but it used to work that way. (A: Yeah?) Yes! Arthur Turcotte, and then what was it, Monsignor Julian.

A: Oh he was French, Julian? (P: Yeah) Yeah?


A: Now Raymond Bourgeois was on the Board, now did he, do you think he had a hand in helping to convince Homer to invest in (--)

P: No, I don’t think so. It might have gone the other way around. It might have convinced Ray to go on there and do it.

A: What, to go on the Housing Board?

P: Sure.

A: Why, to (--)

P: To keep the thing going, and keep the drive going.
A: Yeah. Was Homer that uh, (P: Yes) driven?

P: Yup. Yeah, he was a 100% for Lowell.

A: Yeah. Uh, what was the background of Arthur Turcotte?

P: Arthur Turcotte was a strong French Republican, (A: Yeah) very strong Republican. He ran a package store in town, (A: umhm) very successful. I think at one point he might have even been head of the Republican Party in Lowell. (A: Really?) I’m not sure.

A: So, I mean did that strike anybody odd that Frank Barrett would nominate a Republican onto a Board?

P: I don’t think so. No.

A: Why is that?

P: No, I don’t think so. I don’t know.

A: Were the party lines not that divisive?

P: No. No. No, they weren’t uh, it all depends who you talk to. Of course some of the [rather] Democrats, or [rather] Republicans, you know, basically the lines weren’t that uh, (--) 

A: Um, did you have any dealings with Maurice Palefsky?

P: Sure. Did a lot of work with Maurice. (A: Yeah) Knew Maurice very well. In fact I went to school with, but he was after me in school, his son Irving. (A: Oh yeah?) Maurice, I worked for Maurice, did jobs for Maurice. 100%. You could fight with him till you were blue in the face, but when you finally made a deal it stuck.

A: Yeah. Now he built a fair number of the projects?

P: Yup, he built all the little ones.

A: Oh he did?

P: Yes.

A: Now who built Bishop Markham?

P: What was the fellow’s name? If you didn’t ask me, I’d tell you. It was a contract, little fellow.
A: A local guy?

P: No, no, no. (A: Boston or something?) Out of Boston or down there, yeah. Oh isn’t that awful. Spinelli? Was that him? I think Spinelli.

Unknown voice: What’s the guy’s name from Framingham?

P: Who, Volpe?

Unknown voice: No, not Volpe.

P: Was it Spinelli? I’ve forgotten now.

A: Okay. Well I can find out.

P: He was an out-of-town contractor anyway.

A: Now John Volpe built a number of buildings in town, didn’t he?

P: Yup. Yeah, he did a lot of stuff at Lowell General.


P: Yes.

A: Did he do some things for one of the hospitals too?

P: Well that would be Lowell General.

A: No, I mean one of the Catholic hospitals?

P: Yes, I think he did. He did one of the buildings (A: like St. John’s or St. Joe’s) at St. John’s. Yeah, I think he did one building at St. John’s, yeah, I’ve forgotten that. That’s right.

A: Did he do anything for the university, or any city projects?

P: Could have. I don’t remember. Leander Marion did some, that would be a local contractor. The architect for a lot of this stuff at Lowell Housing, and at University of Lowell was Cochran and Brown. And they were the architects.

A: Okay, and where were they at?

P: Out of Boston. (A: Uh huh) They were the architects for the ULowell, for the University, well it was Lowell Textile then. (A: Lowell, yeah) And uh, they did, they
did Bishop Markham, they were the architects. They were the architects for Chelmsford Street. (A: Yeah) They were the architects for the little housings we did, yeah. Yeah.

A: Yeah, interesting.

P: Cochran and Brown.

A: Um, oh boy, I just forgot what I wanted to ask you. Oh, the design of Bishop Markham, did that have any significance? I mean it looks like crosses from above.

P: No. (A: No.) No.

A: I wasn’t sure, because of the uh (--) 

P: No. Although it was an interesting thing, we started getting ready to put the buildings up, and they drive, took soundings to see, and it was bottomless in one point there. So we had to drive a bunch of piles and then float a mat on top of a (--) We tried to figure out why is it, why and what the trouble is. And there was an old timer that came by and said, “go up and look some day. Don’t you realize a river ran through there down through the common?”

A: Because the common is like a bowl, right?

P: Exactly! (A: Yeah) He said, “what’s the matter with you, can’t you see that?” [Laughs] It was a river bottom. Of course how many million years ago? (A: Yeah) Who’s to know, but he knew. And [unclear], yeah jeese, if you stand and look there, that’s right, you could see it’s got to be something there.

A: Did you ask him, “did you ever fish in it?” [Both laugh]

Unknown voice: How about the color of the brick [unclear]?

A: Oh yeah, yeah. We have to get that back.

P: Bishop Markham, as always, all that stuff was to be red brick. And we decided there’s enough red brick in the city of Lowell, let’s try and change the color. That was quite an argument, but they finally gave us extra money to be a yellow brick.

A: Yeah. Now who did you argue with?

P: New York, uh, Washington. We had to go to, I think the fellow’s name was Casey Ireland. (A: Oh, okay) He was the head, head bureaucrat under whoever was head. Like at one point head of Housing and Home Finance in Washington was a fellow there name Norman Mason from Lowell. (A: Really?) Under, he was under Eisenhower’s Cabinet. (A: Really?) Yeah. Where his appointment came from I don’t’ know. I got an idea it might be through Sherman Adams.
A: Who was that?

P: He was uh, he was Eisenhower’s right hand, left hand man, I don’t know. (A: Yeah) He’s the one that they got in a big rev over. He accepted raccoon coat from somebody, you know, there was a big hoorah over that.

A: Now this guy Norman Mason?

P: Norman Mason.

A: Now was he active in politics?

P: No, not (--) I wouldn’t know that, but I didn’t think so, but he must have been in the Republican politics. (A: Yeah, yeah) He ran a lumber company in North Chelmsford, Proctor Lumber.

A: I see.


A: Now what were (--) Did the Federal Agencies changed over time that you guys dealt with? Because wasn’t it orginally Federal Housing Authority?

P: Yeah, we came under Housing and Home Finance (A: okay) with the Cabinet Office. (A: All right) The head guy probably changed, but the bureaucrats are all of the same. They never change.

A: And how about with the Urban Renewal Programs?

P: It was a division of that.

A: Division of Home Finance?

P: Housing and Home Finance, yeah. In fact there’s a great story. We had a conference, we, I say we, the Housing Authority east of the Mississippi had a conference in Boston. (A: Yeah) And each Housing Authority from all over the country gathered in Lowell. We were there and our table probably was as far away from Fenway Park as you could get, you know? And I never forgot, Mr. Mason was the Director, Cabinet member, and he came in and he stopped at the head table and he said, “where’s Phil Scannell”, because he and I lived on the same street. Came all the way down, and you could see all of the big shots trying to figure out who the hell is that guy in the back row? (A: Yeah, yeah) We had a nice talk. And after that John would call Washington, or Boston, one of, or New York, wanted to speak to somebody. Oh no. Well I’m going to call Phil Scannell if you don’t. [Laughing] It got to be a joke. You know, I had no connection at all (A:
yeah, yeah), but it got to be a joke. Of course these people are very very conscious of any movement. (A: Yeah)

A: Now was Norman Mason down there? Do you think that helped Lowell a lot to achieve some of these things early?

P: Either way, I don’t think he interfered either way. (A: No.) I don’t remember ever going to him, or asking for anything. We fought it out and we didn’t have to. We had our own little fight and it worked.

A: Yeah. (P: Yeah) That’s good. Obviously a success to uh (P: that’s right), to get the stuff completed so quickly.

P: That’s right.

A: All right, uh, now when did you end your term on the Housing Authority?

Unknown voice: When Mrs. Sampson was the Mayor.

P: She was the Mayor, and uh, what’s the name, P. Harold Ready was the City Manager.

A: Okay, so around ’63.

P: Yeah, it was about nine and a half years I served there, see. ’62, ’60, say ’63 probably.

A: Yeah, I think that’s when she was the Mayor. (P: Yeah) And why did you get off the Board?

P: They had changed some laws, and I called a fellow and I’m trying to think, it was either Medford, or Malden who was a Legislature and had fought against the changing of the laws the way it read, to ask him what his opinion was. And he said, I could, I didn’t own any part of the company, Scannell Boiler, or anything, I was not a stockholder, or anything, but he said it could be construe that I was part of the thing. (A: Yeah) And he said the way the law was written at that time, I would have been liable. And I said, because he was against it. I’m trying to think of his name. I think his name was Lloyd. He was either Mayor, and a Rep. from either Malden, or Medford. And I said, what should I do?

A: Okay. Now what was the law about?

P: About a conflict of interest.

A: Okay. (P: Okay?) Did uh, did the company sell the boilers for the Housing Authority?
P: We had sold some in years past, yup. And so I said, what do you think? Ah, he said, not worth fighting about. (A: Yeah) I said, okay, so should I resign? And he said, I would if I were you, because he said, he was, he was a Mayor, also a Rep. and he was also either on the Malden and Medford. And he said, I’m going to. He said, I’m a lawyer and that’s what I’m going to do. I said, okay.

A: He was on the Housing Authority, or something like that?

P: In one of those towns. And I said, if it’s good enough for you it’s good enough for me.

A: Yeah. Yeah. Um, who was named to take over your place? Do you remember?

P: No I don’t.

A: Now when Frank Barrett got kicked out, (P: yeah) was there a change in the government as far as you guys were concerned for the Housing Authority?

P: Well the whole idea was, of course you had the naysayers like in every, that finally win. There were again, the aginers are in, you know what I mean, who is Mrs. Sampson, Ray Lord, I’m trying to think of others, but they’re you know, they’re aginers. (A: Yeah) They always were aginers.

A: Yeah. The “pick six”.

Unknown voice: Oh yeah, they used to [unclear].

P: Yeah, that’s right! Yeah, they were the aginers.

A: What did you think about those guys?

P: They’re against (--) I mean if you think back, everything they were against that Barrett did, like going into the river for water. (A: yeah) We’d be dying of a thirst here in Lowell now if he hadn’t. You wouldn’t have any water. You never heard such screeching in your life. Lord and uh, was it John Carney.

Unknown voice: Was he on the Council, Carney?

P: Yeah, John Carney, [Conversation in background] Mrs. Sampson. Oh, you never heard (--)  

A: Do you remember John Carney’s famous radio announcements?

P: Sure! I have some tapes. (A: No.) I still, yeah, I’ve got a couple of tapes.

A: I’d love to listen to those tapes you know.
P: I’ll have to find them. I’ve got them.

A: Okay, I’d really like to.

P: Yeah. They’re the old reel types.

A: Really?

P: Yeah.

A: Oh jeese, that would be fun.

P: Remember when he was putting the wack on Cooney and those guys.

A: Why, what did he say about Cooney?

P: Oh oh! This would be the father, not young Carney. (A: Yeah) I’ve forgotten whether they were stealing or something, you know, he was attacking him. Twenty-one Blossom Street.

A: It says, “John F. Carney, 21 Blossom Street.”

P: 21 Blossom Street, yeah.

A: Yeah, I’ve heard. Some people have told me a thing, but they can’t remember too much of what he said. I’d love to, I’d love to get like a quote and see, you know, what other things he was saying.

P: Oh yeah, oh they belt the hell out (--) 

Unknown voice: He only was on for five minutes.

P: Yeah, I know.

A: Oh really? That’s it?

P: Of course the gimmick was you could give him fifty bucks, you could sneak down and give him a knock and give him fifty bucks. Jesus, he’d come out, so you son, whoever he was. Wack, he’d give him a wack.

A: He’d give him a wack? Oh, you mean a vocal wack, right?

P: Verbally! [Laughing]
A: I see. I see. Really? That’s funny. How was um, (--) So when Frank Barrett was out, did you have many dealings with Connie Desmond?

P: No. Who was (--) No, P. Harold Ready was the City Manager.

A: Well, and before P. Harold Ready, was Connie Desmond for like a year and a half.

P: No. I have nothing. I don’t ever remember speaking to the man. (A: Yeah) No, I don’t think we ever saw him, or heard of him!

A: You think he was a low profile manager?

P: Yeah, he just came for the ride. As they used to say, build up his pension.

A: Yeah, yeah. Um, why was the Urban Renewal Program transferred from the Housing Authority to the Redevelopment Authority?

P: I don’t know why that happened. I think the naysayers got in there and uh (--) A: Did it? Did it? I can’t remember why he took it away from us. (A: Yeah) I don’t remember. Well maybe it was the decision that uh, who knows, maybe it came from Washington for all we know. (A: Yeah) It should be in a different venue. (A: Yeah) I don’t know. (A: Um) Actually I suppose because we were having too damn much to do. The number of units we had at that time, which they probably got double that now.

A: Yeah. Yeah. (P: Yeah)

P: Um, let’s see. Did you ever feel any political pressure on the decisions that you made?

A: No, I don’t think so. You get (--) No, very rarely you got a phone call, or a squawk or anything. Some of the merchants.

Unknown voice: Sometimes people used to call you to get them in, to try to get them in, wasn’t that it?

P: Yeah.

A: To get a job or something?

P: Yeah, but there’s no, there wasn’t much political. Accept that some of the merchants, they uh, like I said, they were so far out of step that uh, that’s why they’re gone.

A: How about City Councilors, did you ever get any complaints, or?
P: Uh, yeah, a couple of times. Ray Lord always wanted to be a power. (A: Yeah?) He was always pulling strings. He had a, what did he have, a brother-in-law I guess, and he was always wanting to get him a raise.

A: Oh, his brother-in-law was on the, worked for the Housing Authority?

P: Yeah, yeah. He was always looking for a raise. And we’d say to him, Ray, it’s all or nothing. It’s all or nothing. And he was always trying to pull a string. It doesn’t work that way Ray, it’s all or nothing.

A: Any other guys?

P: No, no. Other than they’d take a shot at you, but like if somebody takes a shot at you, so what.

A: Yeah. Um, any final thoughts on the Housing Authority, or the nature of the city during that period?

P: No, I can’t think of any. In fact, every time I read now on the Housing they’re still doing a great job, and it looks like they’re finally getting together and getting rid of that thing up there, and getting a decent Housing [unclear].

A: What do you think about the Shaughnessy Terrace? Do you think it should be ripped down?

P: 100%. 100%. There was a dead horse the day we built it.

A: And why do you say that?

P: Because it was junk. It was half, they like cheated on everything. The State would cut this, cut that, cut this, cut that.

A: You mean like the materials?

P: Yeah, the don’t do this, don’t do that. It was a headache from day one.

A: Was that built as temporary housing?

P: No, it wasn’t suppose to be. (A: Umhm) But it ended up almost as temporary housing. It really was suppose to be good, but just wouldn’t spend the money. Something go wrong, don’t let, don’t fix it.

A: Did they ever try to get federal funding to uh, (--)
P: There’s more money been poured in. If you could trace all of the money that’s been poured into that rat hole you could have a Tash Mahal out there.

A: So why on say, like North Common that’s been there for over sixty years or so, you know, right around that, is a success.

P: They maintained it.

A: Okay.

P: They keep your money, kept it up. State would cheat you, they’d steal the money. You wouldn’t get any money to do anything. Then they’d pour some money in to half-ass do something. Maybe do the ceilings, not the floor. You know, always chiseling, chiseling. Too bad. And as a perfect, go to Chelmsford Street, any of the housing.

A: Oh the Chelmsford Street is wood, isn’t it? Most of it?

P: Yeah, but it’s been maintained. And the little ones that you’d see around town, they’re maintained.

A: Interesting. Well anything, any final thoughts?

P: No, I have uh, I can’t think of anything to complain about. I’m the last one left, so.

Unknown voice: I think you are.

A: Is there any, anybody else that you served with during that period that’s still around that I could talk to?

P: I don’t think there’s anybody left.

A: Yeah.

P: I could say anything I want and they can’t refute it. [All laugh] Jack Sayers is the only one.

A: Yeah, I’ve interviewed him, and he was, he was good.

P: And Charlie Zettek.

A: And Charlie Zettek is around. But uh, (--)

P: I’m trying to think anybody in City Hall.

A: I was trying to find Frank Barrett’s secretary who was Manny Bettencourt.
P: I remember Manny [unclear].

Unknown voice: Oh, I do, yeah.

P: I don’t know if Manny is still around.

A: I don’t know if he’s still around. And I look in the phonebook, and of course with all of the Portuguese immigrants from Azores, there’s a, I think there’s about sixty Manny Bettencourt.

P: Manny, he was a nice man Manny was.

Unknown voice: Where did he live?

P: I don’t remember.

Unknown voice: Is he in the directory?

A: Yeah, I looked in there and I think I tried to trace him. You know I have some, like a 1960 directory and I tried to locate them then, and then try to find them now, but. Yeah, it’s, it’s difficult. The best way I’ve found people is actually by word of mouth, you know.

Unknown voice: Yeah, I’m trying to think who else [unclear].

P: Manny Bettencourt. Now I haven’t thought of him in years. I haven’t seen him in years.

Unknown voice: That guy that lives over on School, [unclear] School Street?

P: I don’t remember where he lived. I don’t know whether Manny is still alive.

A: Who took over for John McPadden? Was it George Flanagan?

P: George Flanagan.

A: And he’s gone?

Unknown voice: Yeah, he’s gone.

P: Yeah, George died a number of years ago. (A: Yeah) There’s another fellow that came in there now, Walter Samuels.

A: He’s still around.

P: Yes, I saw Walter within a couple of months.
A: Yeah, now when do you think he took over though?

P: He was after Flanagan.

A: Yeah. But most of, most of the buildings had already been put out by that time?

P: You know, he was working in the Authority though.

A: Oh was he?

P: Now he wasn’t, I don’t know what his title was. He was below Flanagan. Flanagan was the Assistant Director, but (A: okay) Walter was uh, I think Walter was working there in that time frame. (A: okay) Yes.

A: Well I’ll try to go talk to him.

P: And he’s a good, good harding working, good guy.

Unknown voice: How about that Emerson fellow? Is he dead?

P: Jackie Emerson? Yeah, I think Jackie’s passed away. Be his son is the Chelmsford Water Department.

Unknown voice: Oh is that, that’s his son?

A: Brad Emerson?

P: No, no, no. John Emerson that you read about. Runs the sewers, or something out there.

A: Okay. Are they related to that guy Brad Emerson from Chelmsford?

P: No, no relation. (A: No) They’re all Chelmsford people. Jackie was from Lowell.

A: Yeah.

P: There was Jimmy Scanlon who was head of the carpenters. I forgot Jimmy.

A: He was on the Housing Authority?

P: He was on the Housing, he represented the carpenters. (A: Okay) Let me see, it would have been Jackie Emerson, George Nichols, and Jimmy Scanlon. Those are the (- -) I can’t think of anybody, I think those are the three labor people in my time they had. Nice fellow. I know Jimmy Scanlon has passed away.
Unknown voice: Oh he’s the guy that lived over here.

P: No, lived on, Jimmy Scanlon, he lived up on Wilder Street. He was head of the Carpenters Union. Nice fellow.

Unknown voice: Now when you talk about all of the, you know, the renewal and stuff, did you ever talk to people about the row houses downtown?

A: Yeah, I’ve talked to a couple of people.

Unknown voice: I remember that. Now was that, that wasn’t their, that wasn’t (--) 

A: No, that was under the Redevelopment Authority.

Unknown voice: But Mrs. Lydia Howard (--) 

A: Lydia Howard and Brendan Fleming fought to save those. 

Unknown voice: They put up a big big fight.

A: Yeah. Yeah. It would have been nice to save some of those things, you know. I don’t know how, I don’t know (--) 

P: My brother and I tried to buy them one time.

A: Did you? Before all of that stuff happened?

P: No, while the fight was on, just for the fun of it. They told us to go to hell, and they tore them down. (A: Who? Whoever it was at the time, they didn’t want, they didn’t want them there. They wanted them out of there. 

Unknown voice: They were pretty. That was a wonderful, it was so pretty.

P: That was the idea of being historic, but they didn’t want that.

A: The Redevelopment Authority? (P: Yeah) Did you know any of those guys that served on there?

P: No. Who was on that?

A: Originally it was started was John Egan, (Unknown voice: Oh yeah!) (P: Yeah) do you remember him? (P: Sure!) He just recently passed.

P: Yup, he passed away.

A: I’m friendly with his nephew.
P: Lived down here. (A: Yeah) Who’s his nephew?

A: Chris Ryan.

P: I don’t know Chris.

A: Now John married, and I think his wife died and he married my friend’s aunt who was a Ryan. (P: Oh, okay) And she worked at a bank.

P: Okay. Who else was on there?

A: Um, Monsignor Twist. (P: Okay) Uh, John Mullen who I’ve talked to.

P: He was a labor fellow. (A: labor guy) He’s still alive.

A: He lives over in Pawtucketville. I talked to him. He’s a nice, nice guy.

P: Very nice man.


P: Yeah, Frank Duggan?

A: Maybe. Maybe. Brendan McDermott. (P: Yeah) There was scores of them. Father Gagnon, well Father Gagnon, when it became (--) 

P: Tom, Tom O’Donnell was the lawyer for awhile.

A: Tom O’Donnell.

P: Yeah, Tom O’Donnell was the lawyer.

A: Was he a City Councilor?

P: Yes he was for a couple of, one or two terms.

A: Is he still around?

P: No, he passed away I believe.

A: How about any of those councilors from the 50’s? Anybody still around? I know George Macheras is.

Unknown voice: Yeah, George is still around. Yup.
A: Yeah, George [few words unclear].

Unknown voice: Because Howe, Howe went in in the 60’s.

A: And uh, who just died? Right.

P: Who?

Unknown voice: Howe.

P: Yeah, Dick.

A: A guy just died last year was um, Hoffmeyer.

P: Oh yeah, Vinnie Hoffmeyer.

A: I didn’t have the chance to talk with him.

P: Oh, he’s in the 40’s.

A: 40’s and 50’s.

P: Did he get to the 50’s?

A: Yeah, yeah. He was in when (--) He fought (--) He was one of the guys, there was a bunch of guys that fought against Frank Barrett in the early 50’s too. Guys like Sam Sampson, (P: yeah) and Bart Callery, (P: yeah, yeah).

P: Bart made a business of running against the Lowell Sun.

A: Did he?

P: That’s all he did. He yelled about the Lowell Sun, he kept getting elected. [Both chuckle]

A: Hey, whatever would get him elected.

P: Had nothing to do with anything, but that was (--) Then when he kind of faded, John Carney jumped in. Johnny Dukeshire.

A: John Dukeshire.

P: Johnny’s a good guy.

A: And he’s gone?
P: Yeah.

Unknown voice: Yeah.

A: See, so many people have passed and it’s only thirty, forty years ago, but it’s you know, [unclear].

Unknown voice: Now what did you say your last name is?

A: My name is Ali. My first name is Mehmed.

Unknown voice: What is it?

A: Mehmed.

Unknown voice: Mehmed? (A: Yeah) Ali?

A: Yeah, and I took my grandfather’s name. My old name was Jim Bernard, which is French, and then I’m related to uh, O’Brien is my mother’s side, my mom’s father’s side. And uh, (--)

P: What O’Brien?

A: They, my parents grew up in Pinehurst, in Billerica.

P: Oh, okay.

Unknown voice: Uh huh.

A: And my grandfather’s sister married Joe Markham. The Markham family.


A: Oh, Freddy O’Brien?

P: Sure. I think Freddy is dead though, right?

Unknown voice: Yup.

A: Yeah.

P: It’s just that you know, you’re stirring up memories. (A: yeah) Names that pop up.

A: There was a lot of people they say.
P: Georgie Leopold.

A: Well if you think of anybody that’s still around, or if you bump into somebody, you know.

P: I’m trying to think. I can’t think of (--) Let me see.

Unknown voice: You had a book.

P: I had an old book.

A: Yeah.

Unknown voice: We have loads of stuff on Lowell History. We have great books on Lowell.

A: Do you? You said what now?

P: John McPadden was the first employee. (A: Of the Housing Authority) Yeah, and Rosemary was the second.

A: Rosemary?

P: Bechard. (A: Bechard) Yeah. Good soul Rosemary. And near the end, poor girl, deaf. Oh god.

A: Oh boy.

P: Set off a bomb and wouldn’t hear.

A: I saw the picture of the original Housing crew there. Where are they? Right there.

P: Yeah, John Maguire, Dave Caddell.

A: Is that insurance?

P: Yup.

Unknown voice: Now is he still alive?

P: No, it’s been a long (--)

A: These guys are, this is 1930’s.

P: John Goyer, yeah.
A: How about this guy? What was his scene? (P: Huh?) What was his scene? How did he become so big? Homer Bourgeois?

P: He had a lot of Moxie. He, he was on the, working at the Union Bank. And who had died? Anyway we lost the president. And he went in and said, I’m going to, I want to be president. They kind of, ha, ha, ha, the holy old yanks. (A: Yup) And he said, I got St. Jean, he started the St. Jean D’Arc bank up there. (A: Yup) He said, I’ll take everybody that can go up there. And that’s how he did it. He put the hammer to them. (A: Really!) And they knocked him down. And they didn’t have the Moxie to fight them. And that’s how he became president of the Union Bank.

A: Oh! Who told you that story? Do you remember?

P: I don’t remember.

A: That’s a good story. Do you um, do you have any old reports or anything from the Housing Authority? I haven’t gone up to the place, but they said they kept a lot of files over there.

P: Oh, I wouldn’t be surprised. If it ran as with John, John had, made sure that everything was kept.

A: Yeah. In a lot of the agencies you don’t see that, but in the Housing Authority.

P: Oh John (--) Now whether they’ve been as faithful after John left, I don’t know.

A: I think so. I think they’ve done a good job.

P: John was, let’s see. Most of these people are there. [Begins to read names from photo]

A: All these are members of the Housing Authority?

P: Yeah. (A: Oh!) Georgie Finn. I remember Georgie just died the other day.

Unknown voice: He just died [unclear].

A: Most of those guys gone?

P: Uh, well in my time frame, yeah. Some of the others are still left, but they came way later.

A: Yeah, yeah. Like Armand Mercier.
P: Armand Mercier and George Eliades, and McHale, Dunfey, they all came much later. Yeah. [Unclear] Then when I went on there was [unclear] McCarty, Ray Bourgeois, myself, Jackie Emerson.

A: Was Jim Cooney on there?

P: He came, no, he had gone. I took his seat.

A: Oh, you took his seat? (P: Yup) How about George Normandin?

P: George Normandin, he took Ray Bourgeois’ seat. (A: okay) Ray was there and then George came in. George was Frank Barrett’s brother-in-law.

Side I ends

Side II begins

P: Jackie Emerson.

A: That’s four.

P: Yeah. Georgie Nichols, George Normandin, Freddy O’Brien, Jimmy Scanlon. Yeah, I served with all of those fellows. Yeah, you probably saw that then?

A: No, I didn’t see this. This is nice, yeah.

P: That’s the thing for the dinner. (A: Yeah) Keep it.

A: Well I’ll make a copy and get it back to you. That’s good. I’d like to [unclear].

P: You might as well keep them in my, keep them both in the, in the historical files rather than get lost.

Unknown voice: Keep them. Just one more thing [unclear] throw away here.

A: Are you sure! (P: Sure.) Okay, well thanks a lot.

P: I’m not about to start an archive late in my life.

A: Yeah. Well next time you dig out those tapes uh (--) 

Unknown voice: …dirty housekeeper lately.

A: Well that’s what the holidays are to relax for.

Unknown voice: That’s right. There you go. Take your TV.
A: Now you said John Carney played for the?

P: For the Butlers.

A: That was the name of the team?

P: Yeah, it was a local semi-pro team.

A: Were they out of the Butler School?

P: Oh no, no, no. No connection. That was a paper, but (--) And I remember one game, and I’m trying to think who we were playing out on Alumni Field. (A: Yeah) That’s where we played football in those days. And he’s down on the ground, and his feet are jumping. And old Doc Loughran figured out what was the matter. And he jumped over and ran out. John had swallowed his tongue, and he was strangling! Old Doc Loughran sitting in the stands figured it out, went over, put his finger in and pulled John’s tongue out.

A: And he would have been dead huh?

P: He would have been dead. You know, the guys are standing around, what the hell is that matter with him?

A: Yeah, well a good thing a doctor was in the house, huh?

P: Yeah! But I mean to think that he had dawned on him for some reason, you know.

Unknown voice: [comment unclear]

A: Okay folks, there we go. Great. One second, and this camera will work one of these days. Okay, thanks. I always try to take pictures of the people I go talk to. So.

P: Yeah, I’ll never forget it. John was, John was a tough egg.

A: Yeah. (P: Physically) Yeah, he died, he died young too though I think, huh?

P: Yeah.

Unknown voice: Yeah, when you think about it he was young.

A: Yeah, I think he was in his fifties, or something.

P: Hey, as you look back you’d be surprised how many people died young as far as I’m concerned.
Unknown voice: Oh I know.

A: That’s too bad.

P: In fact we kid about it. I had an aunt that died. What was it, Kitty was 98?

Unknown voice: 96.

A: Yeah!

P: 96 when she died. So I wrote her up in the paper, “died suddenly”. The family said, what the hell is the matter with you? And I said, you go ask Kitty, she thinks it’s suddenly.

A: She thought she was going to live forever, right?

P: That’s exactly right. We all think that.

A: Well thanks a lot Mr. Scannell.

P: Hey it was a pleasure. We had a lot of fun.

Unknown voice: It sounds like an interesting job you got.

P: Had a lot of fun.

[Tape is turn off and then on again]

P: No, there has to be fire doors.

A: On the Bishop Markham you said?

P: No, on the floors. (A: Yeah) In Lowell, in Lowell, I’m trying to think who was the guy. He wanted them so that they worked immediately. (A: Okay) And Uncle Sam has a regulation that they don’t work. And what an argument that is. It sounds silly.

A: Yeah, but it turned into a big thing?

P: What a battle! If you think about it, it made sense. You shut the doors and that contains everything.

A: Yeah. I know they have those magnet things that release, right?

P: Yeah, but the Federal Government, they didn’t, and I assume it probably was going to be a change I don’t know, $5,000.
A: So peanuts compared to the rest of the project.

P: Right, exactly. But they would fight over, fight over things like that. Drive you crazy.

A: Um, I don’t know. It makes you (--). You know, I, I serve on a couple of boards. I’m on the Cultural Council.

P: Oh what?

A: Lowell Cultural Council. We hand out money for groups that do Arts, you know, the Folk Festival and all these kinds of things. And I do the Historical Society. Well it makes you wonder. Sometimes I say, why am I out here? I should be at home watching TV like everybody else, you know, relaxing.

P: Yeah, and they’ll spend $50,000 doing it, and then somebody will say, well you need a $1,000 for this. They fight over it for two hours. Then somebody will say, what the hell is this going on?

A: Yeah, can’t we just make it (--). Somebody cave in so we can go home.

P: For $1,000, but you spend $50,000 just seven seconds ago.

A: Yeah, yeah.

P: Yeah, that always fascinated me.

The end