

CHARLES LUTE

Interviewer (I):

Charles Lute (C):

Unidentified Voice (UV)

I: You were...you were born in Livonia.

C: Yep, that's right. Same house where I live right now. That's the same place.

I: You mentioned your grandfather?

C: It was my grandfather's farm. He moved there...I forget. My dad was six years old when he moved in there. And they... they a...my grandfather moved to Plymouth and then my dad bought the farm.

I: How many acres?

C: There was seventy. They once had one-forty, but he sold half of it. Exactly seventy was all they had left.

I: This was on Newburgh?

C: Newburgh, yes.

I: Between Seven and Eight Mile?

C: Seven and Eight Mile, yes. There was seventy acres there. Except that he owned the whole corner except five acres...Seven Mile and Newburgh that belonged to another man. The rest of the, oh, one-half mile to the east, oh I guess maybe a one-quarter mile in the other direction. A little bit better than one-quarter mile the other way. Anyway, it amounted to seventy acres that part.

I: I see. What kind of crops, or what would he do?

C: Corn, oats, wheat, peas.

I: Did he have animals?

C: We had an old apple orchard, but ah, it was when my dad finally got the farm, the orchard was so old, the trees were kind of deteriorating and everything. But I remember we had two pear trees and two cherry trees, one sour and one sweet. Boy, that thing had cherries on it like that big, big ox heart, they call it ox heart, and I guess they call them just sweet cherries. They called them ox heart. They were really great. And the one, we had one Bartlett pear tree, and the other one, I don't know what it was, but the other one tasted a lot better than the Bartlett.

I: We'll stop it to see... okay, set to go again.

C: So go ahead.

I: Well, we were talking about pear trees.

C: Well, on my father's side we had milk cows, and they had pigs, chickens, and eventually, later on they started raising turkeys and geese. First my mother started raising geese. She'd have pretty near a hundred of them by Thanksgiving. That was a big job to dress those things.

I: Did she sell them?

C: Oh yeah, we took them to Eastern Market, all dressed, and ah, they brought pretty good money down there. That was the biggest job dressing those things, so many of them fine feathers. If you ever plucked a goose, you know what it is. They got that down. That stuff is just as hard to get off it. We used to take and singe the thing a little to take off some of real fine stuff. Hold them over a fire, and just burn the stuff off; otherwise they'd look kind of fuzzy sometimes.

I: There was no market for the down, at that time?

C: My grandmother used to sort that stuff. We used to pick them and all the west feathers would fall in a tub and my grandmother used to go through after a while and sort, used to take them out and sort them. She'd take the fine feathers out and throw like the wings and the heavy feather, stuff like that, and throw it all away, they'd make pillows out of them.

I: Just for your own use, or would she see...?

C: No, just for ours. And then they had them feather ticks you cover up with. That was the warmest thing there was. It was like down almost. Down-filled like they had down-filled pillows. They're so expensive. Back then they didn't cost so much. We had the free feathers.

I: Now, you mentioned dairy. Would you sell the milk?

C: Oh yeah, the milk went to a dairy.

I: Close by here?

C: Yeah, it went to Farmington for a long time. The Warner Dairy in Farmington bought the milk for a long time. And there were several other places that they sold to later on. Warner Dairy used to have to haul it down to Seven Mile and Newburgh. They had a little stand there. Used to take one horse and a little wagon and carry and take the milk down there...like a little shed like, set there and a truck would come along and pick it up from four or five different farmers. They'd pick the milk up there. They didn't come to individual farms. They'd just haul it down there.

I: In a wagon or a car?

C: A wagon. Horse and wagon. They had what they called a milk wagon, a little small wagon with narrow wheels on kind of high so you wouldn't have to raise and lift the milk up so high cause the shed was level with the truck. In them days the old trucks were pretty high. They were rubber-tired ones for one thing.

I: How many cows would you be milking?

C: Anywheres from twelve, fifteen, something like that.

I: And all by hand?

C: All by hand, yeah. I remember one time my dad, somebody talked him into milking three times a day. They'd get a lot more milk. Boy that was terrible. Three times a day you had to milk them cows. We finally got sick of that. We went back to twice a day, and that was a lot better. Not so much work anyway. Yeah, that's morning, noon and night. I remember that real

well. Then we finally got milking machines. That was a lot better. Then you always had some of them cows that didn't hold still for them milkers either. They'd kick those things off.

I: Now, is the barn still there?

C: No, it burned down in 19... you see, he sold the farm in 1926 or 1927, to a group of men here in Northville. Some of the businessmen here in Northville, I think Lapham was one, and, I forget, Langfield I think. Anyway, they go bought the farm. There was nine of them. They kept it 'til the crash came, in '29, and I guess for a year later, after that they came back and said we don't want the farm no more. We can't pay for it. In the meantime, they rented to him, in the middle of the summer, all the buildings caught on fire. And everything burnt down, nine buildings.

I: Nine?

C: The barn, forty by eighty, silo, there was a big wagon shed, there was a pig pen, there was a corn crib, a two car garage, and a chicken coop, and a couple of other little buildings. The whole business went, all at once. And that house I live in, it even, the... got so hot on the east side, it blew the glass right out of the windows, and the trim inside there caught on fire, but they managed to save the house. They kept pouring water on it, and it had a wood shingle roof on it. That stuff you know, wood shingles burn very good. Anyway, in the meantime, after he sold it, he reserved five acres, or three acres of the farm, and build a house, next door. So now, when we got the farm back, didn't have no money. It all went into the house. Expecting these payments coming in like a lot of people do now a days, they sell something, they expect the payments keep coming up, well they just quit, so then he had to go back to farming again. And we started farming, you talk about starting on a shoestring, we did. But, ah, eventually after a few years he got back on his feet and things went along pretty good. He was a good farmer.

I: Now, where would you have gone to school?

C: Grade school, in fact I just...we were down to visit some people the other day, and she showed me a picture of that grade school.

I: Now, where was that located?

C: Newburgh and Six Mile. That was the old grade school. The red brick school house. I walked to school there for eight years. Started the first grade and ended up in the eighth grade. Never missed a grade for some reason or another.

I: Did they have kindergarten in those days?

C: No, no. You started in the first grade. And we had one teacher. That's all. She taught all eight grades.

I: About how many students were there?

C: Oh, I'd say between thirty-five and forty-five, something like that. It depends, you know.

I: Big school.

C: We had some... When I first started there were some older boys, some of them fifteen, sixteen years old. Them days, school wasn't important. If they needed you home, like my cousin digging potatoes in the fall, they'd stay home for two or three weeks. Stay home and pick

up potatoes, the kids. 'Ya know it didn't seem to bother the kids a bit. They liked to stay home. In fact, I think I did too. But we stayed at home and helped around the farm. When I finished the eighth grade, I started the first year at Northville, but I went about I guess two thirds of the way through it, and that's when he got the farm back, and they needed me home so I quit. I quit school, stayed at home and worked on the farm. I stayed there until I was about twenty years old I guess.

I: How would you get into school, when you were in the ninth grade?

C: There was a bus. I don't remember if that was Biddle's Bus Line then or not. But that bus line... I think there was a bus.

I: It just ran on Seven Mile?

C: It went from Seven Mile Road, a route from Grand River and Seven to Northville and back.

I: I know I used to take it to school.

C: Yeah, a fellow by the name of Biddle owned that. He had that bus station at the corner of... I can't think what that street is. It's where Charlie's restaurant is now. That's where his bus station was. And then he expanded little bit more. He started going to Plymouth and Walled Lake I think too. But eventually it just kind of deteriorated. The buses fell apart and he just kinda quit.

I: What do you remember about coming into school in Northville when you were in high school?

C: Well, not really a lot. I know I never brought my lunch. I had one of these cards for a restaurant; go down to the restaurant for lunch...punch the card out for whatever you eat on that thing. I think it cost \$10 for the card. It lasted for, I don't know, three or four weeks.

I: I used to go down to the drugstore and get a hot sandwich. It was delicious, and I think of the calories that were in that.

C: The earliest way I got to Northville was on the streetcar, when they had the old streetcar running on Eight Mile Road.

I: On Eight Mile?

C: Yep. There was a place on the corner of Eight Mile and Newburgh that they called Power Station. It was named after, I think, after one of the big farmers in there. In fact, at one time, Newburgh was called Powers Road. That was... that's a long, long time ago.

I: It was named after some family?

C: Yes, some family there that owned a farm up there. I don't remember where the farm was. Anyway, we'd have to walk three quarters of a mile up to Power Station, get on the streetcar, and take it to Northville, and if you only need an item or two, you could run quick in the store, and get back out before... he sat around for about ten minutes. He'd come right up town to Center Street, and right in the middle of Center Street they had that old bandstand there. You've probably seen picture of it.

I: Yes.

C: The streetcar would come right up to that bandstand, and he'd stop there and everybody would get out and you'd go to the store and if you got back quick enough you could ride back.

Unidentified voice: In fact before he was born his dad used to come and get some ice cream and bring it back for his mother.

C: I can remember we went... My grandmother, she was, I don't know how old she was then, but I was about maybe six years old, we went to the Northville Fair. And on the way back she forgot to tell the conductor where we wanted to get off at. We went sailing past Power Station. I think we got down about one-half mile before she came to and told him where we wanted to get off at. Yeah, my grandmother, yeah. We had to walk all the way back down Eight Mile Road to Newburgh, and then down Newburgh, because we didn't tell the conductor where we wanted to get off.

I: Northville then was your closest town?

C: That was the only town. We very seldom went to Farmington. And Plymouth was too far. When we first came to Northville, we used to come with the horse and wagon, out to the old grist mill where the Historical Society is right now, that old mill there. Well then a few years later, Yerkes built that new modern mill over there. Boy that was really something, that one there. Had electric grinders, all that in there. You could get through there in, oh, a quarter of the time you did when the old mill was there.

I: You'd bring grain in to be ground?

C: Yep. Ground up for the cattle and the pigs.

I: Would it take very long? Tell me about that.

C: It took quite a while the old grist mill was, yeah... they had the stones they ground it with, yet, and I think, the water wheel. It was too far back for me to really remember, but I do know that we came up there with a team and wagon, and used to set these sacks off on the platform, and they'd take them inside and grind them. It'd take a while but when they got over in the new one over there, why they'd just set them off and he just pour them down on that thing and fifteen minutes later you were on your way. Yeah, it was a lot different. It was a modern mill at that time.

I: Did you come into town for like church or other activities – you mentioned the fair?

C: Yeah, the Fair – that was a real deal, boy.

I: Tell me about that.

C: Well, it was like the Fair they have now a days. They had a midway. They had a lot of cattle and animals of every kind. And they always had the horse races – the old grandstand was there. I guess they had horse races there as long as I can remember, but, ah, DeHoCo had a big herd of Holsteins. They used to bring their prize cattle down there. And the Wayne County Training School had their Holsteins. They had, you know, all them retarded boys out there. They each one had--or two of them--would have one cow. They'd brush that cow, boy, until that

thing just shined. They'd really look after those things. You know the kids, they just loved those animals.

I: I didn't realize they had a farm there.

C: Oh yeah, yeah they did. Yeah, it was a big farm. Yeah, it was. And then, of course, the Grennan farm, they had the Jerseys.

I: And where would be the Grennan Farm?

C: That was where Farm Crest was. That was when Phil Grennan owned the place, and he had horses – riding horses, and he had the Jersey cattle. In fact, our Chief of Police, Joe Denton, he looked after that farm a long time. They started out with a farm there just west of our place. The Booth farm was there, where the expressway goes through there now. It was their farm there at one time. He run that farm there for a long time. Then he went along with Grennan, and he was there quite a long time with him. I can still see him leading that big Jersey bull. The last day of the Fair we always had a parade, and I can still see him with that big Jersey bull. He had a staff and a ring in his nose, and he'd lead him down through the parade. He was mean, that bull was mean. In fact, he almost killed Joe once. I don't know if it was the same one or not, but he got him down and almost killed him.

But there was a lot of things at that Fair. Some years it would rain, and I can remember one year it rained so hard, everybody wore hip boots practically in that place, it was so muddy. It was terrible.

I: Did they put up tents, or did they ... where did they have the cattle?

C: Oh yeah, they put tents up. They had tents up. And the cattle were in – they had cattle barns, and the side—remember--the sides were wood, and they'd just drape this tent over the top, then they had the Fair. Otherwise, they took the canvas down so it wouldn't rot over the, you know, period of a year. And they had the midway; they had rides there; and bingo, they always had bingo. That was a going concern. My mother used to play that all the time. I remember that. She used to win quite a few of those blankets. Her and a lady friend of hers, they used to go up there and play all the time. They'd sit there two or three hours sometimes and they could play.

I: Well, that was probably one of the big events of the year.

C: Oh, it was, yeah, it was you know. And some of the dealers brought in farm machinery; this, that and the other. It was really just an old country fair, that's what it was. And they used to have some acts in front of the grandstand too. They had trapeze artists, tumblers, all kind of stuff like that. Always had some things like that. It was great; kids really thought it was really great to go there.

UV: There wasn't much excitement in their lives.

C: They always had cotton candy, and apples dipped in caramel.

I: I know you worked at Miller's?

C: Yeah, for about five years I think I was there.

I: What do you remember about the agency?

C: Well, I started working for him a little bit, part-time, when he was up on Randolph Street yet. Then he built this garage down there on Hutton Street. And first he had, well; it was only half as big. And then for – I forgot when it was – he got the Dodge agency. Then he put this big addition on there, and a showroom. I worked mostly on motors, and then I worked on the frame machine for a long time, straightening frames of these cars that were in wrecks, things like that. And line up the front ends on them, things like that.

I: Were you always interested in machinery?

C: Always. Always. In fact, I now have about 55 old gasoline engines – the flywheel engines – what they used to call the “hit and miss”. In fact, did you see them at the Fourth of July up there?

I: Oh, I wasn't in town.

C: Oh, wasn't you?

I: But one of the ladies was saying about that...

C: It was the second year I was up there. I forgot what the man was who called me. What was his name now? I can't say it right now. He was in charge of everything. Oh, I can't say the man's name. I know it too.

I: Engine Club you're into, or ...?

C: Early Engine Club. They're located in Greenfield Village. In fact, Greenfield Village is pretty nice, you know. They gave them a place to meet down there, Lovett Hall, year round, and then, once a year – they got the train down there, you know, the steam train – and everybody that comes in that day, or that night, can ride the train down there about three or four times around and get to ride the carousel all you want too. They have a beautiful carousel down there. Just the members, you know, or you can bring a friend with you. And they used to take us in the museum, in the machinery part, and all those old steam engines are hooked up with compressed air, and they used to run them for us. But when that man got killed here this summer, I understand that's the end of the showing of the engines running anymore. That was just before our engine show down there too, because they stopped for a minute at noon twice two days in a row as a tribute to him.

I: Now, in your engine club, you share – what do you do?

C: Well, we just – we take the engines - - we have a meeting down there and they usually have – oh, they bring in some models and things like that for the fellows to look at, and they usually have some type of film, or some interesting thing – old time, back when the early engines, when they were made – the steam engines, early caterpillar tractors, things like that. Always something different they show. It's quite interesting. Last time we was down there we had a food expert telling us – all these guys my age – a lot like this here, a lot of them. Anyway, this lady came in there – she was a dietician – and she was telling us what we should eat and what we shouldn't eat. When we got all through, these guys said I can't pay much attention to her. I'd starve to death on what she'd tell us to eat. It wouldn't be too great.

I: Well, you probably saw the old steam engine with the thrashers and things.

C: Oh yeah.

I: You ran them?

C: No, I ran a thrashing rig for a while, but we had a gasoline tractor on it. I never had nothing to do with steam. I never like steam. It's dangerous – dangerous – if you don't know what you're doing. You got to be very, very careful with those things. They can blow up or blow out or anything. In fact, that one time – one time we were thrashing up there at Ronny Ash's up there, at the corner of Haggerty an Seven Mild Road, and these two boys were standing on the draw bar of this engine – of course, kids were always interested in what men were doing – they'd hang around there, and somehow or another, the water got low in it and I don't know if the soft plug blew out or what, but it blew hot water, steam and all these red-hot coals right out of the fire door, it blew it right in these kids' faces. It really burned them pretty bad. I never did care too much for those things. And then, not only that you have those things, you've got to have the boiler inspected, every couple of years because they can blow up if they've got a weak spot in them. They are really dangerous unless you know exactly what you're doing.

I: Sure. With the gas then, you'd run a belt off to run the ...

C: All belt-driven, everything. The separators, and the huskers, and the silo fillers, were all belt-driven.

I: Now, did you mainly help with your own farm, or did you go around and help others?

C: I ran a thrashing rig for a while myself.

I: That was in the area around...?

C: That covered about, oh, maybe five miles around, like that. We'd go from place to place.

I: How did you set up, or how did you know when you were needed?

C: Well, they'd come and see you and talk to you. You'd kind of figure out your schedule. You know, you'd figure it would take half a day here, maybe only a couple of hours here.

UV: When no one could fix it, they'd have men come from here and there. No one could fix it. He was about sixteen years old. He stood there and they asked him, "Why don't you try that?" Well, they were so desperate, they'd listen to him, and he was always right.

C: Stones underneath the valves. The valves wouldn't close. Any nobody knew how to get those – out of there. I knew how to get them out and I took the stones out and everything worked perfect.

I: So from then on you just ...?

C: Well, I always played with the machinery anyway. I just had a love for it, that's all.

UV: He has a love, he feels machinery, he feels iron.

C: I still like to play with it.

UV: Every chance he gets. We have a four-car garage full of engines and what-have-you, and junk besides, and other out-buildings...

C: About two or three years ago I found out that people were interested in these old well pumps for decoration out in their yard. Well, I started collecting those things and refinishing them. And I bet I've sold ...

I: The handle ...?

C: The big-handle pumps, yeah, the well pumps, yeah. I bought about...a week ago...I bought about ten of them.

I: Where would you find them?

C: At auctions, sales. Every Saturday I go to an auction sale.

I: Around here?

C: Oh yeah. Anywheres within a fifty mile radius. My brother and I go together, and if I find any pumps I buy them. It's a hobby, you know, it's something to do.

UV: Fix them up.

I: How would you refinish?

C: I just clean them up with a wire brush. Take off as much rust off as I can, and give them a coat of primer, and I give them a coat of Rustoleum paint.

UV: A lot of them you make pieces for them.

C: Oh yeah. When they are broken I would repair them. But I must have twenty five or thirty different pieces of different stuff around there that I patch on this and patch on that. One way or another I keep them fixed up. One lady came in last week and bought two of them, one for her daughter and one for herself.

C: Did anybody as long as you've been talking ever mention the old colored man that used to be here in Northville?

I: I don't know. Tell me about him.

C: I never met the man or anything, but I've seen him. He had an old, little old house, just about where the A & W Root Beer place was there in the curve in the road there, like that, on Northville-Plymouth Road. And he used to have an old horse and wagon, and he used to come up north, he'd go behind the stores, and what he picked up, I don't know. You used to see a lot of old cardboard boxes, junk like that on there. He had a real hump in his back. I remember that from seeing that man. It looked like he was all crippled up. And his name was Johnny Sithio. And I can still see him with that old horse and that buggy, that wagon, going down the road down there with a bunch of junk in the back of it.

UV: What was he, some kind of machine man?

C: I guess he was. I don't know what he did with that stuff, but he used to pick behind the stores. He's the only – he's probably the first colored man I ever saw, and I think he was about the only one that ever lived in Northville, other than the Lewis's out there by Salem. I never did see any other ones. But that old man lived there for years and years and years. He always had that old horse and wagon, and you'd see him go down through there with a bunch of old paper boxes and stuff on the back of it, go down through the alley behind the stores, pick up that stuff. Now, what else he picked up, I don't know. He used to haul that stuff down to his house and maybe he sold it, the cardboard and stuff, I don't know. I remember that real well, that old wagon. That old horse always looked like he just about had it too. Head would be down like that, and he'd be walking along like he just didn't care if he got there or not.

I: About what year would this be?

C: Oh, probably in the 20's, in the 20's. My dad used to bring his car up there – you've probably heard of them mention Fred Wendt's garage, didn't you? The old stone building that

used to be where – actually it used to be just about where the farmer’s market have their – that parking lot there, next to the Saw Mill. There was a low, long stone building there, and I don’t know how – I think the man worked outside most of the time, because the thing didn’t have no windows in it to speak of. It was dark in there like a dungeon and my dad used to take his car to have him fix it all day. He had an old Studebaker touring car with curtains on the window. He used to take that thing up there to Fred Wendt’s garage. It looked just like a hole in the wall, really, in a way. I saw a picture of it down there at, in the museum down there. This old stone building. In fact, I asked somebody down there if they got the stone for the blacksmith’s shop down there, if they tore that old building down. They said no, it come from another place.

I: Would come in on the interurban by yourself?

C: No. Most of the time my mother would go with us. Well then later on we got a car, well then we drove over in the car all the time. I remember her taking – we had quite a few chickens and she would take a basket of eggs up there to Kohler’s store – that’s where the bar is now. What do they call it now? That Wagon Wheel? There was a general store there run by the Kohler people. I think there was two sisters and a brother, and she used to take her eggs in there and trade for her groceries. And from there we’d go uptown to Butch Baldwin’s meat market.

I: Now where was that?

C: What I remember about that place is that in the ceiling you had one of those big old meat hooks, and he had one of these paper nests in the corner. About as big around as this lamp shade, used to hang from the ceiling. I can still see that thing hanging up there. That old wasps’ nest, hung on the ceiling in there. You’d tell him what kind of meat you wanted, he’d go in the back, come out with a quarter, throw it up on the block, and he’d cut off whatever you wanted. There was no meat in the counter to speak of at all. He’d cut off whatever you wanted, wrap it up and that was yours. She never went to the other meat market. The Hills brothers had one too there, right across from the old – where the bar used to be there, the Greek’s bar, right across the street from there. There used to be a meat market there too. She never went to Hill’s Market.

UV: Which one was it that was across from the Methodist’s Church? You know I used to stand in line.

C: Oh, that was Sam Pickering. That was a long time later. That was later. That was in the old – you had that in the old – old part of the old Opera House.

I: Do you remember going to anything at the Opera House?

C: No, no. I knew it was there, but there was a C.F. Smith’s store, right on the corner, and then there was another store right in that same building. But that was the old Opera House there. But I would guess that it hadn’t been used in a long, long time. I remember when they tore it down. I think the one store I remember the most was the dry goods store next to Freydl’s. A fellow by the name of Harold Light had a dry goods store. We used to go in there and buy bolts of cloth. She’d buy cloth and make dresses and ---- stuff like that. I think the two drug stores on both corners were like they are yet. That one down there across from the little clock there. Tyne Murdock, I remember my dad used to go in there all the time and bring everything he needed for medicine or anything, he always went to Tyne Murdock’s. That was the drug store he’d go to.

I: One side should be just about done.

C: Are there any other questions?

I: Let's see.

C: Did you ever see the picture of the Ambler Hotel there? Right on the corner of Main and Center. It's where that hole is down there. There was a big hotel there, and an ice cream parlor in there. And these old big fans you see now days, the modern ones. I always remember those things; they had about four or five of them in there in that place. We used to go in there and get ice cream, boy! My neighbor, when I was I guess about six years old, he took me north with my mother, he said I should get a haircut. He took me. He said, "I'll take him up there and get him a haircut." So he took me to the barber, and I got a haircut all right. Then he said "Now I'm going to treat you." So we went into Ambler's. He said, "What do you want?" And I said, "A double banana split." I guess he likely fell over. Those – the white tops on the tables – I forget what you call them now – they had the ice cream parlor chairs. There must have been twenty of them in there I guess. It was a hotel too. It all burned down one time, I forget what year it was, but it burned down. But after that they never did nothing with it, except make a parking lot of it I guess.

I: Well, what barber would you go to?

C: I don't remember what the name of the barber was. There was the last one I went to was – I didn't go to Northville to get my hair cut very often. My dad used to cut our hair. One of those old clippers, they would pull and you'd holler and he'd say, "Hold still, will yah?"

I: Did you have brothers and sisters?

C: Yes, I had four and four. In the summertime we used to get one of them brush-cuts. It was actually a scalp, boy! He'd take the clippers and go around one side and the other. And just like that, it would all fall. Then by school time in the fall you'd be pretty well grown out, you had hair again. In the summer you didn't have much. Not enough to bother combing anyway. I don't remember what barber we went to. I know for years I went to a fellow by the name of Al Heatly there, but that's been, oh, twenty or thirty years ago. He sold out the barber shop and started cutting hair in his house. You could call and make an appointment, or you could just walk right in sometimes and sit down and get a haircut just like that quick. Otherwise, you set there in the barbershop, set there three-quarters of an hour waiting for the chance to get your hair cut.

I: There were quite a few dairies around this area when you think of it, weren't there?

C: Yeah, there was. In fact, where Northville Charlie's was, that was a dairy at one time. I don't know, you've probably heard the Benton's name mentioned. They owned that farm – the old man owned that farm where the Northville Hospital is, part of it. You still see that old barn there with the little low roof on it. That was his farm in there. And his son, Seth, he had a dairy down there at the – everybody is asking me the name of that thing and I still think it was Grandview. And I think that's the name of the street there, I believe. Is it Grandview Street? Anyway, he had a dairy there, and I used to pick up milk – we had a Model-A pickup – used to pick up milk and haul it up there to him.

I: You just think, there was one on Six Mile.

C: Yep.

I: Seven Mile, yours.

C: Farm Crest, they named it Farm Crest. They had a dairy there. They used to sell milk. That was really good milk, that cream used to be down in the bottle about this far. That was good. That was four percent.

UV: That was before it was homogenized.

C: Everybody used to buy it though for the cream line in it. The cream line would be way down the bottle. It was actually four percent most of the time. Now you buy half percent and two percent. It's better for you.

UV: I don't know. We survived on it. I have trouble with the chemicals more than anything else.

C: At Benton's there, we'd mix half and half and chocolate together, make a pint of that and drink it. You think that ain't good for you?

I: Tasted good.

C: Boy, I'll tell you it was great. It was great. It sure was. That was from Benton. Seth Benton.

I: What do you remember about your first job, besides farming?

C: Let's see. I worked on a golf course digging trenches for pipelines for thirty cents an hour. That man who owned that – in fact, he owned that Northville golf course there.

UV: The one at Seven Mile and Newburgh?

C: There was actually three courses there. There was one on that side of Newburgh Road; there was one on this side of Newburgh, that one is still there. They tore And one was on the northwest corner. There was a few houses in there but they built the golf course right around them houses. They started another one in there, but that thing never got off the ground. And then where the expressway goes through there now, that was a golf course at one time too. A fellow that owned that farm by the name of Booth started to build that thing, and I don't know, it just kind of – golf just kind of faded out or what. It never seemed to get off the ground. That's the same thing that happened to the golf course there on Newburgh and Seven, that big club house they built there. They built that in '24, '25, somewhere in there like that. And then the crash came in '29 and it never did amount to anything. There was going to be a private golf course there. Actually that was a beautiful building at the time. It was really furnished nice and everything.

I: Was it local people who built it, or ...?

C: The man who owned it, he was – I think – he was from California. He moved here to Detroit or something like that. Anyway, he ended up back in California. They built the thing and it never did amount to anything. They had a ballroom in there, the most beautiful thing you ever seen, with all that beautiful hardwood floors, and there wasn't a post in the middle of it all. The whole thing was all open with a fireplace on the end of it that took about a seven foot log.

UV: Beautiful chandeliers.

C: It was really nice in there. They held a few dances in there, things like that, but it seemed like it never did catch on.

I: But, you helped with the irrigation pipe?

C: Yes. And I moved fairways for a while too. That was a thirty cent an hour job. It didn't amount to much. Then I ended up going to work for Thomas E. Currie in a construction job, and

that paid better. That was sixty cents an hour. That was top of the money, boy. But it was hard work. Sure was. I worked on the cement dock, dumping sacks of cement in these batch trucks they haul to the mixers.

I: Now, that would be locally here?

C: It was on – actually we worked on Merriman Road, from Ford Road to Michigan Avenue. That was the first time I came close to Eloise down there. Boy, in the morning them people would be screaming and hollering in there, and by nine o'clock everything was quiet. These guys come down and try and sell us shirts and pants they'd steal from inside there. For twenty five cents a shirt, fifty cents for a pair of pants. And if they'd sell them, there was a little bar on the corner. They'd head right for the bar, that's where they'd go to, right there.

I: These would be workers?

C: No, they were inmates of that place, but they were – I guess you'd call them trustees or something, they could go wherever they wanted because they always went back. Well it was all iron bars on the windows up there. They'd be screaming and hollering there in the morning, and then by nine o'clock they'd all be quieted down. And we used to ask those guys – 'We give them a shot and quiet them down,' and that's what they'd do. I spent, oh, about half a summer there, that road. Paved three miles on it. We went from there to west of Northville, and we paved that from Napier to right in town.

I: Which road?

C: Eight Mile Road. That was all gravel then too. Paved that I think that was the same summer. And I ended up on the cement dock every time. Dumping sacks of cement.

UV: It's a wonder he has the health he does today.

I: Maybe that's the reason he does.

C: That was hard work. You had to handle 75 ton a day. One man. That's a lot of weight. Yeah, that is what they call the good old days, I guess.

I: Well, you've seen a lot of change then around Northville, haven't you?

C: You can't believe what it's like. 'Cause when you went into Northville, there was a little iron bridge you'd have to go across on Seven Mile there when you made the corner, go around there where the Ford factory is now, there was a little iron bridge there. You went around across there and right next to that was Globe Furniture where they made a lot of church furniture there a long time. And later on they closed that down, and then Stinson Aircraft Company went in there. They started making airplanes in there. I can see them outside there yet. They used to paint the fuselage – all that tubing that they had welded together like that. They used to bring them outside and paint them out there.

I: What color would they paint them?

C: The tubing from what I can remember was red. But then they covered it with canvas afterwards – plastic – not plastic – some kind of canvas I think they used at that time. And he used to – this fellow that owned the place, this Stinson, used to take those planes out there, and he used to right out near our place you'd see him loop the loops with that thing, that old biplane, two wings.

I: He'd test them out?

C: He'd test them out, he'd take them out there and try them out. And then right behind that there was a bell foundry, and you know, I've bought a lot of bells already and sold them, and I've only found one bell that had Northville Bell Foundry on it. I don't know what happened to all those things. And they made a lot of them there.

I: Did you find it locally?

C: It was near Fowlerville. It was off the school up there. Right across – you know the big bridge that goes across the top, like that? Was cast right in it “Northville Bell Foundry”. That's the only one I ever saw.

I: Do you have it at home?

C: No, I couldn't buy it. It sold for \$575.

I: Really? This would be quite – about what size?

C: Oh..

I: Twenty four inches?

C: Oh, probably bigger than that. Probably about thirty inches across. I don't know if the one in our church came from that foundry or not. We got a big bell at our church yet. I think that might have come from there. But I've looked at all these bells around, I never could find one that...

UV: The one we have over...

C: I don't know where that's from.

I: Well, you like all kinds of machinery and equipment.

C: Oh yeah, anything out of iron. I have nothing to do with wood, or glass. People – I got a sign out front. It says “Antiques”, and people come in there and ask for furniture and glass. None of that stuff. You can't keep it. Glass breaks and furniture just falls apart. So I stuck to the old iron. It might rust but it don't fall apart.

I: Well, I don't always see the ads for the auctions.

C: I get a paper, what they call the Farmer's Advance. There's two of them here in Michigan, the Farmer's Advance and also what they call the Auction Exchange. The Auction Exchange only covers Michigan. The Farmer's Advance covers Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois. There's a lot of sales. Lot of sales.

UV: The good ones are all too far.

C: Well, we try to pick up the local ones. Last week we was out by Chelsea. No, last we was out by South Lyon. Where we go next week I don't know. We'll find one.

I: You go every week?

C: Oh yeah. The paper comes on Thursday. You get a chance Thursday, Friday to look at them to see what's there, go from there.

(Side Two)

I: yes.

C: There used to be that old house that sets up on the hill like that, where Schoolcraft College is?

I: Okay, yeah.

C: Now they just built two mammoth office buildings in there, and all this college and then this big insurance building on the corner there. You can see how I could drop over, dead I guess. That's such a change, you can't believe it.

UV: You were more surprised when you woke up with a buggy on top of his car.

C: They did that for Halloween.

I: You didn't play tricks, did you?

C: Oh, not much. Tipped over a few outhouses too, I guess. But we never did tip over those at Greg (?) school. But somebody managed to do it.

I: Really?

C: Oh yeah. They got tipped over, more than once. Remember that school was just – in the wintertime the teacher, she was supposed to get there early and start – the fire went out at night – all you had was that big furnace in the middle. The fire would go out at night and in the morning, we'd get up, she'd open up that school and get that furnace up, and we'd march around it, stomping our feet, around and around like that until the thing started to get warm in there. School didn't start until nine o'clock. Probably would be ten o'clock sometimes before we'd sit down at our desks. That old building got cold, especially when it'd be, you know, zero at night.

I: That was a brick schoolhouse?

C: That was a brick school, yeah. It got pretty cold in there because there was no insulation; they had no insulation then. Just three rows of brick, the wall was like that. That's

all there was to it. And the doors and windows didn't fit too great either. There was no storm doors, no storm windows, plenty of windows. And I remember, you'd set to the outside of it, get next to the windows in the wintertime, it was cold there.

I: How was it lighted before the electricity came in?

C: We had these lamps on hangers, the old-fashioned hangers, you know, the kerosene lamp that hung on the wall, like that. The lamp set in there like that. But the only time that they had that is when they had a doing in the evening or something like that. Used to have what were called box socials.

I: Yeah? Tell me about that.

C: Well, the girls would pack a lunch, you know, and the guys would bid on them. And everybody knew who was the best lunch maker and everything too. That one went the highest. There were some they didn't think too much of, and they didn't get too much for that lunch either.

I: Did they have Christmas programs?

C: Oh yeah, we had Christmas \programs. And they had Santa Claus; he'd come in there. One of the old trustees, I don't know, I guess they called them trustees then. We had these men that was members of the school board. I guess they were trustees, but it was three farmers on there. There was a fellow by the name of Charlie Wagonshoes, and Ed Schroeter, I think it was, and Claude Simmons. They were the school board members.

UV: Was that the Charles Wagonshoes that was treasurer of Livonia?

C: No, no. That was his son. It was his father. They live over on Five Mile over there. They had a big farm, too. In fact, there was all farmers. There was nothing around there but farms. And the lady that lived there, I don't know if she's still alive or not, by the name of Carrie Reynolds, she was a school teacher. I don't think she ever taught there. Our first teacher we had there, the teacher was Miss Diamond. And boy, she was about as tough as a diamond, too. We had a family of red-haired boys there, and they was bad ones, and they were rough kids. And I'll tell you, she straightened them out. The first I remember the first day I went to school there, she hit one and knocked him right out of his seat.

UG: What would happen today?

C: He threw an eraser – we had those big blackboards. The whole front of the school was all blackboards, these big blackboards. Big slate blackboards. He threw this eraser. It hit right along the side of here; right against that blackboard. She knew what it was, boy. She come on down there, boy, I'm telling you, he didn't throw no more erasers for a while. They was rough kids though. Always in fights, all the time. Of course, I was a good little boy. I didn't get in all that stuff. I was all alone. There was four or five of them. They lived down there just below St. Mary's Hospital on Levan Road.

UV: Well, all nine of you went to that school, didn't you?

C: Yeah. I don't know if they ever finished that school or not, but I guess they did at that. I know I spent eight years there.

We used to walk a mile and a quarter in the morning, and we didn't get taken in the car very often either. Mostly we had to walk in the morning. Lots of time that snow – well that road used to drift in 'cause that golf course was there. And the wind would come across that golf course and blow that snow right into the road. Sometimes it would be two feet deep, sometimes two and one-half, sometimes three foot deep, the drifts there. So we'd walk – lots of time it was so hard you'd walk on top. Occasionally you'd fall through, too, 'cause they didn't clear no roads out to speak of then, except, you know, if they had to get through with something they'd shovel it out. We didn't have any snow equipment. As far as snowblowers, that was unheard of. Nothing like that around then.

UV: My mother said when lived in our house, a lot of times a horse and buggy went by, all you could see was the top of the horse's ears, the snow was so deep.

C: It drifted up real deep. Now, if we got six inches of snow, we think we got it terrible.

I: With the school, did you take part in the Christmas programs?

C: Oh yeah. I got up – they had a lot of people, lot of kids would say a little verse, to say stuff like that, about Christmas, stuff like that. Then occasionally, they'd have a little play, but it didn't really amount to a while lot. We had a big curtain draw across the front – of this – in front of the school there was a platform, raised about this high, where the teacher sat. She had her

desk up there. It was probably, about, oh, seven to eight feet wide along the platform there, and she used to bring the kids up in front there. That's where she taught you. And she'd bring you up to the front row of seats, and you sat there and she'd talk to you there, and you'd show her what you'd done, read or write or whatever it was. But this platform, we had this big curtain across there, and they'd set up the play behind that, and then they'd pull the curtains back, the kids would be out there – they had some pretty decent things sometimes. But, you know, there wasn't room enough for a while lot up there. There wasn't a lot of room.

I: I got some similar memories on that.

C: Yeah? What school did you go to?

I: Up in Gladwin County.

C: Oh, way up there, yeah. Well, it probably wasn't much different up there than it was here. Did you have recess and noon?

I: What kind of games did you like to play at recess?

C: Oh, we played baseball a lot of times. Then in the winter time – this thing was up on a kind of little hill, like that. We'd bring our sleds, and we could slide down, run, or flip on a sled going down a ways and come back up. An hour for noon, and fifteen minutes for recess twice a day.

UV: Did you carry those sleds through that deep snow?

C: Oh sure. Didn't think nothing of that. I remember some kids even had some homemade sleds. These people weren't too rich, a lot of them around there. They had homemade sleds – they had solid runners, just wood, with boards across the top like that. And they were tripped up front like that. And that's the kind of sleds we had. They had holes cut in the sides so you could get your hands in there and get a hold of the thing, and you'd flop on the think and away you'd go. Twenty-five feet, maybe fifty feet. That was fun anyway. In the summertime they played ball a lot. No football. I don't even remember football. That was unheard of. Baseball was the only thing that I really remember anything about.

I: What part of the farm home life did you like the best when you were young, growing up?

C: I don't know really. Didn't have to work too hard all the time. A lot of time to play. And we all had swings out in front. Big trees around there; a lot of swings there. I can remember they was practicing jumping at school, so I was going to practice at home, jumping over – to see how high I could jump. I got a rope and tied it between two trees. At first I had it like this, then I moved it up a little higher, and I didn't quite get over the rope. My heel caught, and it took my leg clear up behind me, behind my back like this, and I thought the leg was tore off. I was laying on the ground hollering and yelling. They took me up to Northville and that old doctor up there – I think it was Doc Turner. He lived just below the – it's where Center Street goes down the hill, he had an office down there. My mother and dad brought me up there, and he taped the leg from here to here, with big, wide adhesive tape, and told my dad now he can walk on it. I thought it was going to break off when I stepped on the thing. My dad insisted that I walk on that leg. I don't ever remember anything that hurt me so bad. I can't remember when anything hurt me like that. Apparently, it pulled all the ligaments (SP) loose in the leg. What was worse is when he took the tape off. I thought he was going to take the leg off then (???). Running around like that. Then off it came. You have to take it off fast or otherwise it hurts. It hurt when he took if off fast, too!

I: Well, other than that, you were probably pretty healthy.

C: Oh yeah.

I: You didn't have to go to the doctor too often?

C: No, no. I don't remember – I don't think I was ever sick. Not that I can remember.

UV: Now you don't. Nothing bothers you.

I: That's great.

C: I worked for twenty two years, just one job, at Taylor down there, at the concrete pipe company. I think I lost eleven days in twenty two years. That's pretty good.

UV: All you would ever do is have the flu.

C: I had the flu one time for three days. Eleven days in twenty two years. So that wasn't a bad

...

I: Right.

C: At Christmas time I always would get something for the least amount of days missed. Lots of times I wouldn't miss a day all year. And that was six days a week, a lot of times twelve or fourteen hours a day.

UV: Sometimes seven.

C: Not very often seven.

I: Anything else about your young life that we haven't covered, that you can think of?

C: I remember one thing: we never missed a Sunday going to church.

I: What church did you go to?

C: In Livonia, the one in Livonia, St. Paul's Lutheran. My grandfather – actually him and a bunch of old Germans – were founders of that thing. They started on Five Mile and Farmington Road. First they tried meeting in houses. Finally got enough money together to build them a new church there. And I can remember every Sunday we went. And the bad part was when we first went there it was mostly German people, so one Sunday they had English, the next Sunday they had German. We had to sit through that German service. Boy that was a killer. Boy, we'd just squirm around, you'd get tired of setting cause I couldn't understand. My grandmother used to talk a little German, too, but very little. But the minister would talk – I guess there's a difference between high and low. She always talked in the low German, which we could understand. It was different words, like. But he'd preach in high German, which is up here like this (?) you know. You couldn't understand none of it so it was just an hour that was wasted for the day. And the bad part was this minister taught or he preached at two different churches. He was at Wayne. They couldn't afford a full-time minister, so he preached at our church in the afternoon at 2:30, so that took up our whole Sunday afternoon.

UV: How about the one that carried a gun?

C: Yeah. My dad said he wanted to carry one.

UV: He had to travel between Wayne and ...

C: Well, he traveled a lot though. But this Sunday afternoon church would be at 2:30. Boy, that spoiled the day right there. You'd try to think of any excuse to stay home on that day, but no, no, you had to go. That was all there was to it. You had to go. And I'm still going to the same one.

I: Well, good.
C: Never quit.

I: I thank you very much for your
C: Well,

END OF INTERVIEW