

Oral History of Sidney D. Moase - 1989

436 Randolph Street

Q: Mr. Moase, tell me where were you born?

A: I was born in the city of Detroit and only lived there two and a half years before my family moved to Northville.

Q: Okay, and then you have been out here pretty much continuously since then?

A: Yes, I was away for two years shortly after my mother died and then returned with my father. He set up his third business, a meat market, on Center Street here in Northville.

Q: Mr. Moase, you indicated that you moved out here with your family when you were two and a half years old, and how many different houses have you lived in out here in Northville?

A: Let's see, when we were first married we lived in a furnished apartment right off of Main Street behind the Presbyterian Church. Then secondly, we moved to a home on Ann Arbor Road just outside of Plymouth for about a year and then back to Northville and rented property on Wing Street, opposite Wing Court. From there we bought our first house on Fairbrook and lived there for six years. In 1950, we moved into our present residence here on Randolph Street and have lived here then since 1950.

Q: Now you said your father had a meat market in three different locations. Where were they located?

A: Yes, in 1920 when my father first located here in the city of Northville, of course it was a village at that time, he moved into what was called the old catamow (?) building on Center Street, which is currently where the bike shop is now. After that, he moved to the old opera house, and there was two retail stores located in that opera house. I think at the time there was a CF Smith store on the corner, and then my father had a butcher shop next door to that. He left the city in about 1926 that is when my mother died, and returned and set up his third business in another store close to the present bicycle shop there. I think it was just south on the same side of the street where the bicycle shop is located now and so he retained that business until about 1934 or 1935.

Q: Living in Northville then you went through Northville schools?

A: Yes, that is true. I completed my schooling there. I graduated in the Class of 1936. We already had our fiftieth class reunion not too long ago.

Q: Do you recall how large your graduating class was in '36?

A: In 1936, it seems like there was about 130 some students that graduated.

Q: How many did you have at your most recent reunion?

A: As I recall, there was about thirty-five at the reunion.

Q: What a difference in the size of the graduating class of 1989 from Northville High School.

A: Yes, over the years, of course, my three daughters graduated from Northville, and each year it seemed like the class grew in size that graduated.

Q: Okay. Obviously when you were in high school you were not in the new building. You were in one of the older buildings. Did you ever go to school in the building that burned?

A: Yes. I was in grade school at that time, and that was behind what is currently known as the old high school now, and that building burned and then later, of course, I did attend the old high school building that is what we call it now, on Main Street. That is where I graduated.

Q: Okay. That is now used as an administration building.

A: That's correct.

Q: What did you think of your education as part of the Northville Public School system?

A: Well, when I graduated, it seemed like I was not spending as much time as I should on my current studies. I was working for my father at the time, and it seemed like it did probably take away from some of my academic needs. But, no I feel like I had a very adequate education there and later on I was glad that I at least put forth partial effort.

Q: Okay, now, you worked for your dad in the meat market?

A: It became a necessity because during the depression years, we had to struggle a little bit to keep the business going.

Q: I am assuming you learned to cut meat?

A: Oh yes, and I had a very good person to learn from. My father had a rather good business head, and he had many years training because he had worked in the city of Detroit prior to our coming out here as a butcher and also owned a market in the city of Detroit. I got some early training which worked out great because during the depression years I was able to work when I was in high school at a part time job in the local markets here, and I made out real well compared to some of the men who struggled without employment for many years.

Q: After graduation from high school, what then?

A: Well, I then continued to work in the food business and I worked for Kroger, a local food chain here in Northville, which was a service market at that time.

Q: Okay now, explain what you mean by the term "service market".

A: The service market was set up to be for the customers to be served individually by clerks, and you did not go and help yourself. You piled stuff on the counter, and they would total it up

for you and bag it there in lieu of what you see now in the supermarkets where you do your own selection, and you don't have the aid or the assistance of a clerk probably to answer some of your questions. Where was that Kroger market located? The Kroger market originally was next to the bank. I was only there a short time after I started to work in the market before they moved to where the old Black Hardware was. They just recently moved out of there – it is now a camera shop.

Q: Right, okay, and then at one time that was a Kroger market?

A: Yes.

Q: I recall as a young boy going into some of these service markets, wooden floors probably what we would consider to be kind of fashioned, but the important thing is that you were taken care of and I am sure that it was a very personal relationship between those that worked in the market and their customers. I mean you knew them by their first names. Would you agree with that assessment?

A: Oh yes. In fact, that was one of the pluses that I found in working in the service markets was that you did get to know a lot of people in the community, and they looked to you to help them to make the proper selection of meats and even helped them decide how to cook the meats because that was even more important. So, those were the days with sawdust on the floor, you know, and you came into the markets, even in the early markets, they didn't have refrigeration as we know it today. They had to haul the ice up into the old compartments above the icebox and into the counters they had crushed ice there, and so that is a little bit different than what we know today.

Q: I interviewed Chuck Ely two or three weeks ago, I am sure you know Chuck. Where would Kroger purchase their ice? Would by chance they purchase it from the Ely Ice and Fuel Company?

A: Well actually, Kroger did have refrigeration at the time I worked there. Then my dad had his market (Moase Market) on Center Street. I do remember Ely Ice and Fuel pulling up in front of the market carrying a big-looking like 200 pound slabs of ice up a ladder into the top of the icebox. So that was quite a thing. A lot of change took place after that.

Q: And that's what they had to use to keep the meats cool. Okay, that's interesting. Well, okay, so then you stayed in the meat business; you worked there as a student, and worked for your father. Then after you left high school you went to work for Kroger, and how long did you stay with Kroger?

A: I was with Kroger, including the training, I went to the training school they had when I first became a manager, and in all it was ten years that I worked for Kroger on a full-time basis.

Q: Was all of this right here in Northville?

A: No, this was throughout the southeastern Lower Michigan area, because I got some of my early training in some of the other markets.

Q: But you continued to live right here in Northville?

A: Oh yes, yeah.

Q: Alright now, after ten years with Kroger, you indicated that you left to go to work for the Ford Motor Company and ended up in Ford Motor Finance. Can you tell us something about that? How you happened to leave Kroger?

A: Well, first at the time that I decided to leave Kroger, there was nobody around to hire to do the work at the store, and so I was putting in a lot of hours. I even employed by wife a while because we just couldn't get any help, and there was just too many hours involved, and I just decided I had to make a change.

Q: Okay, now when you said at the time, you are referring to the Second World War?

A: The Second World War, we are talking about 1942, in particular.

Q: Okay, so the fellows were off in the service having been drafted or enlisted, women worked in war plants, and you just couldn't get the help?

A: That's right and of course what did attract me is that the Ford Motor Company was doing war work at the time and that is where they needed people. That is why I decided to move into finance there. My background sort of lent itself to the financial end of the business.

Q: Okay, so then you went to work for Ford and remained at Ford for 28 years. I asked you prior to turning the tape on whether you had any connection with the old Ford valve plant here in town, and you said no. What different plants did you work at during your period at Ford?

A: Well, in the early years that I worked for Ford, it was kind of a transition period. I first went to work for Ford in the old administration building, where old Henry had his office, and shortly after that there was quite a change that took part at Ford Motor Company, and they started to decentralize the operations, and, of course I was part of that decentralization and managed to move to different locations. They had a plant in the old Lincoln plant on Warren Avenue. I was there a while. Also, I was relocated out at the Wixom plant for a short time. After that I moved around from the Rouge Plant to other offices that I finally retired from. That was the engineering offices behind the Dearborn Inn in Dearborn.

Q: Okay, now you stayed at Ford for 28 years and qualified to retire from Ford and retired from Ford in what year?

A: On September 1, 1970 I left Ford Motor, and I did so after strongly considering setting up a tax business of my own. I got some additional tax training in the late 60's and then, of course, decided to set up my own office in my home here at 436 Randolph.

Q: How old were you when you retired from Ford?

A: I was 53 years old at the time.

Q: So in effect, you took an early retirement.

A: That's correct.

Q: But you had enough time so that you qualified for a pension. Okay, and then you indicated here on your biography that you had been self-employed or were self-employed for thirteen years in the tax business.

A: That's correct.

Q: Now, one thing we talked about, and it kind of brings it to mind since you had been in the tax business is where a good number of your clients Northville residents?

A: Well yes I would say so maybe half of the clients were Northville residents. The remaining clients were in the area though, and of course I really relied on one big client that I had that I spent many hours working for them personally. That is what encouraged me to stay in the tax business was the fact that I had obtained this one particular customer, which had a large business office.

Q: Okay, it wasn't here in Northville?

A: No, the business wasn't in Northville. It was in Dearborn.

Q: You mentioned some of your neighbors here through the years, some rather prominent people in Northville. Who else lived on Randolph Street over the years that you can recall?

A: One person that comes to mind quickly is the former chief of police here Joe Denton, and Joe lived right across kitty-corner to my present home up here on the hill. Joe and his wife knew my father and mother real well. When they first came to town, they became acquainted and so that went back quite a ways. Also, across the street from us was a former local banker here, Charles Strauss, who decided after many years in the banking business to move to Stanton, Michigan, and is still there. Chuck also was the mayor up there at Stanton for a while, but he is in full retirement now also. The only other person I can think of off-hand was Robert Reed, who I think has already been interviewed, and he just lived down the street from us a little ways. Most all of the other people who lived here when we acquired this property in 1950 have moved to other areas.

Q: I can't remember what graduating class Bob Reed was from. You didn't happen to be in the same class did you?

A: No. He is about 75 I think.

Q: This other fellow, he graduated in an earlier class and he did work for Ford? He was an artist.

A: Yes, that's right.

Q: Ah now, going back to when you were in school. Were you involved in activities or sports while you were in school?

A: Well, the only activity I took part in, I did sing in the choir. I also played some basketball, which my height helped me there, but I never did acquire a lot of talent in that area.

Q: Okay. You indicated you were 6 feet 1 and you were the tallest on the team?

A: That's right. That's what got me on the team more than anything else.

Q: Okay. What about local activities, as you were growing up in Northville?

A: Well, in the early days, of course, I did play on the local legion baseball team and was active in the Methodist Church, the old church on Dunlap, when our children – our three girls, were growing up, and I was active in that church in the youth movement there.

Q: Let's talk about that church. Was that church there at the time you moved to Northville? Was that the original Methodist Church?

A: Oh yes, yes.

Q: So it was there. It's undergone quite a transition over the years. Had that church been enlarged or was that the original building as you recall?

A: Well, the original building there has an addition put on that – the church hall or whatever you want to call it, a fellowship hall, was added to the old church. When I first came here, when I was in my early days, I remember Reverend Richards as being the pastor of that church and I remember talking recently with Bill Richards, his son. I actually joined the church the same time Bill did, and we had some fond memories that we recalled and we sat down and talked together not too long ago. But the old church I had a lot of great and pleasant memories of that church.

Q: Okay, now the church currently, while it has had a transition, I recall a number of years ago coming out to the church which at that time was a restaurant called the Drawbridge, and I had never been there before and hadn't been there since. I thought it kind of unusual that a church would be sold and converted into a restaurant and then, of course, the reason this was done was that they built a new Methodist Church which is off of Eight Mile west of town. What brought about, to your knowledge, the decision to close and sell the church and rebuilding west of town?

A: Well there appeared to be two reasons for that. An increase in church membership; the church became crowded and they would have to make the decision to either build a new church or spend money and refurbish the old church, and I think the majority of the membership decided that they would go the route of building a new church rather than spend the money on the old church.

Q: Was there a problem? Did they have adequate parking?

A: Well at the time they had adequate parking here. Some of it was street parking, some of it was behind the church, but that was another reason I guess, maybe that they decided to move was because parking they could see down the road would be a problem.

Q: You mentioned the name of Richards earlier. I interviewed the minister's daughter, and one of the things of concern to her was the time they decided to tear the parsonage down. I said why they tore the parsonage down; well they did it to put parking in here. One of the old traditions that I know of with that Methodist Church is the tower and the clock, which was quite a landmark and you indicated to me earlier that you really didn't agree with the decision to relocate the church, although you can understand why they did. But there was a lot of tradition in that Methodist Church there.

A: Yeah, why I had a lot of fond memories there and, of course, maybe I was a little bit sentimental about moving the church. Maybe when it came right down to the dollars and cents analysis, maybe they did the right thing.

Q: I do know that at one time there was a furniture company called Globe Furniture here in town, and they manufactured church pews. Do you recall the location of that? I know it burned down.

A: Yes. That was down on the curve going out of town, and I just barely remember the old building at one time. It seems like in that same general area Stinson had an airplane manufacturing company.

Q: Stinson Aircraft, right.

A: They were located there too. I think going back further they had a company that manufactured furnaces in that same general area.

Q: Okay, a foundry?

A: Yes, a foundry.

Q: Okay, in fact, I heard from some sources that they also made church bells.

A: That's correct.

Q: So, I wonder whether any of the furniture or the pews in the Methodist church may have come from Globe Furniture.

A: That is entirely possible.

Q: Okay, let's see. What about hobbies? As you were growing up in Northville, of course, it was depression time, your mother had died, you worked to help your father out, to make ends meet. Did you have any time for hobbies?

A: Well, I first said as I mentioned earlier, that I played a little baseball for an American Legion team and managed to squeeze a few hours out to play basketball, other than that bowling.

I bowled for a number of years. Sports have been, of course you might consider it a hobby, but now in my later years it is not the active part of the sports.

Q: You follow the sports?

A: Right. Other than that, we currently use our travel trailer extensively and have traveled throughout the 48 continental United States. We do some other traveling periodically, short trips like to England, France and Central Europe. We have been to Spain. We have been to California a few times, down to New Mexico a few times. One experience we did have was when I worked for Ford I lived in Mexico for a year. In this we gained a lot of knowledge about Mexican people, a few others really realize, I guess.

Q: What part of Mexico were you in?

A: We lived in Mexico City for 11 months, nearly twelve months and it was a one-year assignment for me from Ford.

Q: That would be a nice experience.

A: Getting back to trailering. We are currently secretary treasurer of the Michigan Unit of the Avion Travel Club. This is a little bit more than a hobby right now. It is all part of the organization and someone has to do it. We do enjoy the fellowship in the club, and it is an international and they have rendezvous in different parts of the country. We, of course, have two local state rallies here that we go to. We will attend one next month in fact.

Q: Are there other residents of Northville that are members of the club?

A: Not currently that I know of. There are others around us here. I know there is one in Plymouth, two or three in Farmington Hills, and there is probably oh about sixty families in Southeastern Michigan area.

Q: Okay now, you mentioned you had a brother. Do you have other brothers or sisters?

A: No. I just have a brother Alan who is not residing in this area now. He is located in Greenbush in the summer months and in New Seana Beach, Florida in the winter months.

Q: Greenbush up in Northern Michigan?

A: Right.

Q: He is a younger brother?

A: Yes. He is five years my junior.

Q: Okay, and three girls (daughters); Sandra, Christine and Patricia. What about their whereabouts?

A: Well, each one has families, 27 grandchildren total and Sandra my oldest daughter lives in Westland, and Christine live in Plymouth and Pat just recently relocated to Livonia. So they all live close by and we can see a lot of our family for birthdays, anniversaries and holidays.

Q: You also mentioned a very special date coming up shortly here?

A: Oh yes, my wife say “ah no, that is nothing, we have had 49 years and we have celebrated our marriage together”, but yes that will be 50 years on September 1st.

Q: Very good, that’s great. We’re sitting here in what I guess you would call a family room and addition to the house, looking out a picture window here, and you got quite a picturesque piece of property here. How large is the property you own?

A: Well actually it is not too wide, but it is quite deep and the end of the property line is pretty much in the center of the little stream that comes down through the back of the property. So we are sitting up kind of high here and can see a little hip bridge located across the stream behind us and we’ve been able to retain some big trees. We have a big old elm tree sitting right here next to us and we have hung onto that one over the years and I see another big walnut out to the one side, east side of the house. Yes we enjoy the solitude back here. It is quite a difference from the much traveled street in front of us.

Q: Randolph, I’m assuming was not always that way but it seems to be kind of a short cut to get over to 8 Mile now.

A: Yes, it is used by many people now – to get into town and to get to the post office, of course.

Q: Okay, are there other things that come to mind that might be appropriate to mention while we are talking? We talked about your moving to Northville, going to school in Northville, you stayed in Northville, and you worked here in Northville for a period of time. Well let’s just spend a moment. You said that one of your hobbies is you are into genealogy and indicated that your background; with the name Moase an English name and your wife’s maiden name Beauchamp a French name.

A: Yes, that’s correct. In fact, we are both into this rather strongly at this time, although we just don’t seem to have the time to put into it. That is a hobby that requires a lot of time, a lot of research and a lot of travel actually. We went to New York State not too long ago and spent some time in the libraries and the archives in New York because my wife’s folks were located there at one time. But we’ve traveled to England and to France using genealogy as an excuse, although we had other reasons. It is a fun hobby and there is more and more people getting into it today. People are curious, more curious of where their ancestors came from and as you get into it you find some very interesting facts. We enjoy it very much and now that research and references are becoming much more extensive on the part of other relatives where you can call on them to help fill out your family tree. So the local library now has acquired a section which they are trying to build to aid the people in research of their own genealogy.

Q: To a certain degree maybe these oral histories can tie into that a little bit because we are talking to, or I have talked to a 92 year-old woman who lives right up here in Allen Terrace just

above you and I talk to a lot of people about their recollections about Northville, about their families, about growing up in Northville and it is important to know a little bit about your roots and it is interesting too. You have seen a lot of changes occur here in Northville now through the years and you have stayed here in Northville. How do you feel about Northville today as opposed to what Northville was like when you were growing up?

A: Well it is true there has been a tremendous change in the city, although within the city limits it hasn't changed that much. If you ride down the streets of Dunlap and many of the streets here in town you see the big old trees and they are still shading the streets and it really hasn't changed. You see the old Victorian homes that have been kept up very well and I think that the people that live in Northville ought to be real proud of their city. We are at an age where a lot of people our age think about Florida and they want to relocate, but we have no idea of doing that. Even though we have a fairly large home here, we are going to plan on staying around here and living here through the twelve months for the most part.

Q: You figure Northville is a good place to live and you are going to stay here?

A: Very definitely.

Q: That's great. Anything else that you care to mention or recall?

A: Well, there's many things if I really stopped to think about I could add, but I guess at the moment I just can't add anything that you probably would want to put on this tape.

Q: Well, I think your closing statement here that Northville is a good place to live is a good way to say thank you very much and enjoyed the interview.

A: Thank you.