

Henry John Steinke

Narrator

With comments by Patricia Steinke

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Greenfield Historical Society

Interviewer

July 13, 2013

At the home of John and Patricia Steinke

Greenfield, Minnesota

This project is for the Greenfield Historical Society courtesy of a grant from the Minnesota Historical and Cultural Grants Program, made possible by the Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund through a vote of Minnesotans on November 4, 2008. The tape and its transcript will be put into an archive for use by researchers and future generations. Thank you for participating in this project.

RM: It's Friday July 13, 2013, and we're visiting with...

JS: John Steinke.

RM: Could you spell your name for me, please?

JS: S-T-E-I-N-K-E.

RM: You have a middle name, too?

JS: Henry is actually my first name, on my birth certificate, it's Henry John, but I go by John mainly. I get called a lot of different things [laughs]

RM: I can believe it! You're married?

JS: yes...married to Patricia and we have four children, six grandchildren.

RM: They all live locally?

JS: All live pretty close, yes.

RM: One runs the farm?

JS: Right. The youngest son is on the dairy farm, he's milking. The others...one lives in Plymouth, one lives in Independence, and Kurt's in Greenfield. Our daughter is down in Lakeville.

RM: You still help out around the farm?

JS: Sure..why, I do what I can.

RM: How long were you farming?

JS: Over 60 years in this area. I was born in 1938, so as soon as I was old enough to help, why, I tried to do my share. Put a lot of years in.

RM: You went to Rockford high school?

JS: Graduated in 1956. I was in service for six months and after that I came back to the farm. Then I was in Active Reserves for seven and a half years.

RM: Where did you train?

JS: I was in Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri for basic training. Then we went to the post office in Minneapolis for the meetings, you know, when we went down to the meetings.

RM: What was it about the Rockford-Greenfield area that kept you here?

JS: I guess mainly the farm. I like the farm. It never appealed to me too much to drive to town and get a job and work straight hours...eight straight hours and then, you know, put up with the traffic. The farm always appealed to me and I enjoyed it. I did quite well with it. It was always rewarding to me.

RM: Where did you meet Patricia?

JS: In St. Louis Park.

RM: What year was that?

JS: What year was that, Patty? [laughs]

PS: [from living room] Married in '63 and went together for five years.

JS: Figure it out...married in '63 and went together she said five years, so '57, '58 I imagine I met her?

RM: So not long after high school?

JS: No, came back from service and I started looking for a good gal and I found one.

PS: [speaks from living room]

JS: You come in here, you can help with this interview.

PS: [speaks from living room]

JS: She's not interested [laughs].

RM: She'll be the mystery voice from the other room [laughs]

JS: Yes [laughs].

RM: At the time that you graduated from high school, there was a lot of entertainment in the Greenfield-Rockford area.

JS: Oh, sure.

RM: What were some of the places that you remember?

JS: For entertainment? Well, we had the Lake Sarah Ballroom, for one, and there was the Transformer Inn in Greenfield, here...I think it was called Greenwood back then, I'm not sure. After they incorporated they called it Greenfield Delano had a bowling alley, that's not in Greenfield, but they had a lot of entertainment in there. Not as much as today, maybe. Medina Ballroom wasn't there until later years, maybe you've heard when they come in, I can't remember exactly when they started. It wasn't too many years after Medina Ballroom started that Lake Sarah closed down. I think they were pretty keen competition, you know, to Lake Sarah Ballroom. And what else did we have? We had resorts, people would go there along Lake Sarah and they would fish. I guess many years ago the train would stop in the area here by the resorts and let the people off. Some would come for the weekend, you know, and they would bring the families out and enjoy themselves and go back to town.

RM: That had stopped by the time you were in high school?

JS: Oh, sure. That was many years ago when the train used to stop...that's what I heard the people tell. Many years ago they would come out this way and people would get off the train. Resorts were pretty busy back then, there were quite a few along Lake Sarah here.

RM: Did you ever go fishing out there?

JS: Back in the '50s we'd go spearing on Lake Sarah. Once in awhile go angling.

RM: Any ice fishing?

JS: Well, with the spear house. Spear for Northern.

RM: Did you bring your own boat or did you rent one?

JS: The guy that used to work for my father had a boat and I'd go with him sometimes, in the evening, after milking. The neighbors had a boat by the lake and they would let me use theirs, so I didn't have to rent one too often.

RM: So you had a truck and trailer that you took it down with?

JS: The boat was down by the lake. The neighbors boat was right by Sarah here, on the north side of the lake.

RM: You'd catch sunfish?

JS: Sunfish, crappies...in the evening we'd catch a few bullheads and then we'd spear northern. It was fun. Then I got busy farming in the later years and I didn't do as much fishing. Got too much involved in farming and didn't do enough fishing there [laughs].

RM: Life takes over, doesn't it?

JS: Yes...you get your priorities mixed up! [laughs]

RM: Says any good fisherman...

JS: Yes...yes.

RM: Was there ever hunting around the Lake Sarah area?

JS: Oh, sure, yes...deer hunting and whatever...coon.

RM: I've heard about coon roasts.

JS: People would go coon hunting in the fall, you know, and then...coon roasts! [laughs] Yes, they did quite a bit of hunting, the local farmers. They'd go deer hunting right up on their own property or the neighboring property, you know. There were usually quite a few deer in the area. They had good cover, lot of trees and crops to nibble on.

RM: More than there are now?

JS: I'd say they're about the same, maybe a few less deer with the expansion of the homes, you know. There's a lot more homes than there used to be, so it's not quite as rural, not near as rural as it used to be. But the deer...they find shelter, they're still out there. See them laying along the road when they get hit every once in a while.

RM: You said you went to the Transformer Inn?

JS: Yes, yes, I went there different times. We'd go there and have a beer and some peanuts...I could almost walk home if I had too many beers, it was only about a mile from home! Just up the hill here a ways. Yes. Man by the name of Bill Leuck. Bill and Selma...don't know if you've ever heard that name?

RM: how do you spell Leuck?

JS: I think it was L-E-U-C-K, I'm not sure. Either "*Look*" or "*Leek*", I'm not sure how he pronounced it, but they owned it. They had it for quite awhile when I used to go up there and Selma, she'd make hamburgers as big as any hamburger in Greenfield, I think! Just humongous hamburgers! That was a good spot to get a good hamburger and a beer. And I think they were only about twenty-five cents, you know, for a hamburger back then, and beer was probably ten cents or a quarter. Back in the '50s it was a good place to stop and enjoy yourself for awhile [laughs].

RM: But you weren't making twenty-five dollars an hour though, either.

JS: Oh, heavens, no! A dollar or two if I made that! At home sometimes, I didn't make *that* an hour when I worked for Dad. You had plenty to eat and a place to sleep and spending money and gas money, which wasn't a whole lot back then, didn't take much. Gas was twenty-five, thirty cents a gallon, back in the late '40s? '50s, I suppose?

RM: You had a car?

JS: I had one before we got married. I had a '59 Ford. Otherwise I drove Dad's car for a long time. He had a better car than I could afford. He had a '50 Chevy that was fairly new, you know, so I drove that quite a bit. Then I got a '59 Ford. That was a nice car...I drove that for quite awhile.

RM: So did you usually drive up to the bars when you went or did you walk?

JS: I'd drive or ride with somebody. I can remember coming from Postal Reserve meetings once in a while in the city and we'd stop there after we'd have our meetings.

RM: There were several guys with you that went down to the cities?

JS: There'd usually be a carload when we'd go to the Reserve meetings. And we'd alternate driving to the post office, yes, take turns driving down there.

RM: Do you remember any of their names?

JS: Oh, sure, yes...there was Art Mielke, Glenard Leider, Bob Muckenhern, Duane Beise, Dennis Beise...who else? I suppose I missed a couple, but that was some of the local guys that went down.

RM: What did you talk about at the bar?

JS: I suppose about the girls and maybe about the crops and all the fun things, you know [laughs].

RM: Did they all farm out here as well?

JS: Good share of them did, yes, they grew up on the farm.

RM: Can you describe how the Transformer Inn looked for me?

JS: Oh...not the greatest [laughs]. It wasn't a very large building, it was just a small bar. You came in and the bar was to the right. I can't remember if they had living quarters...no, they didn't have living quarters there. Bill and Selma lived right north of us here. It was just a small building right by the transformer there. I suppose they had a couple tables in there to sit down and eat lunch. I don't think they had much of a menu, I think they mainly served hamburgers and maybe fries. Stuff like that.

RM: What type of material were the tables made from?

JS: I can't remember that anymore...it's been too long ago.

RM: What kind of an atmosphere was it in the Transformer?

JS: Oh, it depended a lot on who was there, you know...who could tell the best stories [laughs]

RM: What were the stories?

JS: That's too long ago, can't remember those either! But sometimes, you know, if some of them had quite a beers, why, they were pretty lively. They could tell some pretty good stories back then, but I can't remember them. I wish I could remember some of the stories [laughs].

RM: So where else did you go?

JS: Oh, we went different places. Once in awhile we'd go down to the dance hall here and watch. Never did learn how to dance. I wish I did. We'd stop at the Rockford House once in awhile, and we'd go over to Bud Eppels once in awhile and get a six pack or a beer...on south Lake Sarah. We'd go roller skating to Cokato quite a bit.

RM: They had a rink?

JS: They had a rink in Cokato there, that was quite a drive. Second cousin of mine, Marv Shaar, he had a car and I'd ride up there with him. We'd go roller skating, I enjoyed that. And I'd go to movies and go fishing. That was the extent mainly of our entertainment. We'd take vacations, go out and travel. My mother and Dad, my sister, every year after the oats was combined, well then we'd usually go for a few days, a short week. We'd head up north or different places. Didn't have all the video games to play with, so we had other good things to do back then. Didn't even watch TV as much as we do now, which was ok.

RM: Did any of the bars have a TV when they started coming into fashion?

JS: I'm sure they did in the '50s. They had the small, black and white TV, I suppose, yes.

RM: Were there any sports that you played where the teams would come in and tell stories?

JS: I played basketball at Rockford, so we had teams all round that would come from different towns...Howard Lake, Delano, Dassel, Cokato...we'd compete with them. There was always the High school tournament, which we enjoyed going to down in William's Arena. Had a good time doing that.

RM: I'd heard there was some friendly competition at the bars and the dance halls between towns and between family groups.

JS: Yes, I'm sure there was.

RM: Some fighting?

JS: Oh, yes, yes, they'd have quite a bit of fighting at the Lake Sarah Ballroom. I've heard stories where they'd open a keg of beer and they wouldn't hardly shut it off until it was empty. It would just keep running! That was a lot of beer consumed at the ballroom. Lot of beer and a lot of popcorn. I think they served hamburgers, too, at one time. It's amazing there weren't more people injured or killed there. I don't think anybody ever got injured or killed. They had a highway to contend with, and then when they'd drive in there, they'd have to cross the railroad track to get down to the ballroom by the lake there [laughs].

RM: Tthere was no stop arm on the railroad?

JS: No! No... heavens, no, they just had to look. Look and cross, it was clear.

RM: How much land was out there for the ballroom?

JS: It was included in Mitchell's farmstead, I believe. I don't think it had a separate parcel number, it was just built on the Mitchell's farm, south of the track. You'd go down through their farm yard and get down by the lake. There was a knoll there, higher land, and that's where the ballroom was. I suppose that took up maybe an acre or so of land there.

RM: I'd heard it was pretty crowded and they were parking in the pasture?

JS: Yes, they'd park wherever they could park. I think when the ballroom was shut down then the cows would maybe roam that same area, you know, right close up to the ballroom there [laughs].

RM: So you'd have to be careful where you stepped?

JS: You maybe had to be a little careful, yes...if the cow pies weren't dry, why, you could get messed up [laughs].

RM: That's not the way to impress the girls?

JS: No...there was pasture there, come to think of it, around the ballroom. I'm pretty sure the cattle grazed there. When the wind was right and the bands were playing, you could hear the music here at home. Oh, it wasn't hardly a mile away, you know. If the windows were open, you could hear the band play once in awhile. They had some good bands...Whoopie John, the Dutchmen, Wally Pickle...they had others, all dancing all round, they'd come play there.

RM: What did you like about the music?

JS: I love any kind of music. It cheers me up. In fact, one guy that played at the ballroom, his name is Wally Pickle, he's in his 80s now. Hes still playing. He still has a band. He comes up to Jackpot Junction, the casino up in Morton? He plays once in awhile up there, and I got to know him on the bus. He rides out of Hutchinson to the casino so I got to know him and he's interesting to talk to because he had played all over a good share of the state. He's gone into other states, too. He could play two...well, he can still play two horns at once. When he was a little younger, he'd jump over the pogo stick [laughs]

RM: You'll have to explain that a little more to me.

JS: You've seen a pogo stick, haven't you? Well, Wally would jump over it, I don't know how, I never seem him do it but they claimed he would, he would jump on his pogo stick.

PS: He played his horn while he was jumping.

JS: He probably played his horn while he was jumping, that's probably it, that's the way I would envision it.

RM: When you say "horn", do you mean a trumpet?

JS: Yes. He plays a variety. When I watch him up there, he goes from one horn to another He'll pick up one and play it, then he'll put it down and play another one. It's very, very enjoyable to watch those people. The last Wednesday of the month they have entertainment at the casino, and there's usually a band there. Polka music. People come from miles around and it doesn't cost anything unless you gamble, you know. Then it'll probably cost you. That's what they're hoping for. You spend plenty on the machines or on blackjack or on the tables. But they have good entertainment there. I've been there different times and enjoy watching that.

RM: Did you get a chance to get to know any of the other musicians at Lake Sarah?

JS: Not yet, no. Wally's the only one that I, that I got to know quite well.

RM: Did you ever see him play down at Lake Sarah?

JS: I think I did, many years ago. He looked a lot different that he does now, I'm sure! He was probably taller back then than he is now. He shrunk a little bit [laughs].

RM: I've heard Whoopee John was the favorite.

JS: Whoopee John! Yes...and then...

RM: Wally had a much smaller band than Whoopee John?

JS: I suppose...I don't think he had quite as many in the band as Whoopee John did. Been so many years that I really don't know how many Whoopee John had. Did you ever hear those guys play?

RM: No.

JS: You're too young...yes. That'd be good fun to listen to those. They might be a little hard to come by but it'd be fun to listen to some of that music from back then.

RM: Most of the bands played polka and shodish?

JS: Yes, they mixed it up.

RM: I heard it was quite warm in the building as well.

JS: Oh, yes...get a good hot, warm summer night and there was no air in there. If there was no breeze...I think it got pretty close in there. but after so many beers, you know, most of them didn't notice it. Usually had a good time anyway! Then after the sun went down in the evening, why they'd have intermission and oh, my, they'd come out the door, just like a herd a cattle coming out the barn door. They'd come out and get a little fresh air. I don't know how long of an intermission they'd have, but they'd usually have one or two intermissions, I think. Then people would sit down and visit and the band would play again. We had a lot of good times [laughs].

Years later, my uncle tore the building down and hauled the lumber up north and he built a home out of it. There's a lot of lumber in that building. He and his sons took it down. They took the lumber up by Backus [Minnesota] where we have his cabin now. Where he built his home and lived up there. His son built a cabin up there by the lake, my aunt built a house, they framed that. It was all out of the Lake Sarah Ballroom and the hall in Rockford, where we played basketball. He tore that down, too and recycled the lumber. Took it all apart, cleaned it up, reused it.

RM: What was your uncle's name?

JS: Norman Faust, is my uncle. He lived just west of Rockford, on the left, on the south side of the road.

PS: You'd think we'd hear the music when we're up north from all the wood!

RM: The wood absorbed that much music [laughs]

PS: Yes! In it's lifetime. Buildings have a life.

JS: Yes...yes, if they could only talk, they'd have a lot of stories to tell. Some of them stood a lot of years.

RM: So they took the dance hall floor wood as well as the—

JS: Everything that was usable he took down. Yes, I don't know about the flooring, if he used any of that or not, but there was a lot of good lumber in that building.

RM: What type of wood was it?

JS: Oh, golly, I'm not sure. I think it was a mix. I suppose they had ash, maybe some oak in there. Maple. I'm not sure what it all is. But he framed quite a few buildings up north from that building and the hall in Rockford.

RM: Where was the hall in Rockford located?

JS: I don't know what street it was on. You came across the bridge heading west in Rockford there? You take a right and you go past Ken's barber shop and I think you'd be heading north. You go about a block and you take a right and the Hall was right in that area.

PS: Is that where the library is now?

JS: Yes, right near the library. We'd run from the high school down to the Hall to eat lunch when I was in high school. They had hot lunch down at the Hall and boy we could make that in a short time because the first ones down there would get to be the first one in line, and have more time to eat! [laughs] That was quite a run. we didn't all get excused at the same time, but we'd run from the old high school, that's where the middle school is now, right Patty? I believe...yes. Where the middle school is now, the same area.

RM: By the big hill?

JS: Tes. We had all we could eat at the Village Hall there for twenty cents a meal, five meals for a dollar, which is a pretty good deal.

RM: That was not too far from the Rockford House, then?

JS: Rockford House was just up the hill, just east out of town. You get up the hill, cross the bridge and the Rockford House was on the left.

RM: Did you ever go up there?

JS: Once in awhile, yes.

RM: I heard they served some pretty good food?

JS: Yes, they had a good reputation. They had a bowling alley you could order off the menu and get a good drink...or drinks...yes, that was there for many years. Until it burnt down.

RM: What caused the fire?

JS: I'm not sure...not sure.

RM: Do you know what year that was?

JS: Not really, no, I couldn't tell you. It's been a lot of years...I don't even know what's built up there now in that area. It was right...there's that mobile home park, you know? Right up the hill there? It's just before you get to that, on the left side of the road.

PS: They built the Maverick...I can remember the Maverick.

JS: Where was the Maverick, Pat?

PS: It was built just—

JS: In the same area as the...

PS: Yes, just west—

JS: The Rockford House?

PS: West of the Rockford House. That was kind of a restaurant. Your folks had one of their anniversary parties there.

JS: Yes...yes. See? I kind of forgot about that.

PS: It wasn't there very long. Kind of a western style. I don't know what happened to that.

RM: S that was a similar restaurant?

JS: Yes, they served food. They had kind of a dining area and a ballroom there, too? Where they had dancing maybe?

PS: I don't know, I just remember that your folk's anniversary party was there.

JS: Probably had they're 40th anniversary party there.

PS: Yes...[unclear]

RM: So there's a few hidden gems that we haven't thought of. How about Sipe's bar? I've heard of that one.

JS: Sipe's bar...

RM: Or tavern?

JS: Bill owned the Rockford House over the years, might be the one you're referring to.

PS: Didn't he have a bar in that little strip there?

JS: Oh! He had the...after then Rockford House—

PS: Closed—

JS: He had a bottle shop there...you know? Where they carry the liquor out? What do you call that? Off sale? It's still there yet today, on the left side of the road.

RM: It's the same building?

JS: No, not the same building as the Rockford [House]...it must be in the same area as the Maverick used to be, I think. There's still a liquor store in there. Then up the road, there was the Holiday gas station, maybe you've heard of that? The Francis family had that and they built that up, I believe. Either that or Leo Munsenteiger built it up. Then the Francis family ran that. Just east of the Holiday Station, there was another little place where they sold liquor and carried it out. John Dolder owned that in the later years.

RM: What was his last name?

JS: Dolder. John. And now there's a thrift store there. You'll see that when you go to Rockford. They sold liquor there, in that establishment.

RM: So there was plenty of liquor to be purchased?

JS: Oh, yes...yes. They were never short of liquor in Greenfield, I don't think.

RM: Did it ever get to be a problem with people?

JS: I'm sure with some, it was. Some got kind of carried away with it but most of them just enjoyed it in moderation. They didn't over do it.

RM: How do you think that time with fewer laws compares to our time now with more regulations?

JS: I don't think there was near as many regulations, you know. Government wasn't as involved back then as it is now. Things were a bit more lax, I'm sure. Now you need permits for this, permits of that [laughs].

To that respect, why, the government has become a lot more involved. Even your local government. They have more restrictions, which is good in some ways, but then again, you can overdo it.

RM: What do you as the benefits?

JS: Well, the benefits would be keep things in order so you don't have...you're building codes are enforced and they keep things the way they should be...hopefully the way they should be. But this changed tremendously. We would have few residential areas, so out here where they were congregated, you know, it was all farms back in the '40s and '50s. Then people moved out in the later years and they built up new homes. A lot of them wanted black top roads, they want good schools, you know, so there was a lot of terrific change.

RM: Can you tell me more about the change?

JS: Not a lot more. You didn't have to worry about your dog running to the neighbors, back years ago. Now you're supposed to have your dog on a leash. If you haul manure, you're not supposed to let the neighbors smell it to any degree. You should plow it down or knife it in. That's another thing that's a concern the for ah—

PS: People could get on the highway a lot easier back then.

JS: Yes, the traffic was not a bit issue years ago. Now if I get out there on the driveway and get on the other side and head east...[laughs]

RM: You have a real tricky spot to pull out here.

JS: Yes. During rush hour, you can wait for maybe two, three, four minutes for the light to change up to the east to cross the road. And then sometimes it'll be clear from the east, but won't be clear from the west, so then you sit there and you're ready to chew your fingernails because you're getting kind of impatient, you know? Lot of times I'd like to call the highway patrol just so I could cross the road, but I can't do that either [laughs].

R: You need the school crossing guard out there [all laugh]

JS: Yes! So that's part of your change--people and more people--every year, there's more, you know? They build out here to the west. A lot of mornings when I'm in the barn, why, they'll come to a standstill out here on the Highway [Highway 55]. If there's an accident, or if the weather isn't the way it could be or should be, why then, they'll back up, you know? It'll be almost like a parking lot out there. They'll go five miles an hour, ten miles an hour, then they'll stop. After rush hour, it usually opens up and they go and drive a normal speed...forty, fifty miles an hour or better. It gets pretty congested. We're out eleven miles from the freeway [I-494], so that's a terrific change...the traffic.

RM: Do you remember the freeway being built?

JS: Oh sure, yes. We moved a freeway home in...when was it? In the '50s I believe? Late 50s? There was a home on...I think it was 35E? Yes, I believe it was 35E, the one that was being built to go to Duluth, you know? We bought a home, her Mother and Dad bought a home there to move into Rockford. The freeways were being constructed then. When I was in high school, we bought a home down by the airport commission and

moved it into Rockford. I don't think they had 494 done then. That was back in the '50s. They were maybe working on it, but I don't think it was complete back then.

RM: I would have thought all the new people and getting people out here easier would have been better for the businesses, but they seem to have all gone away.

JS: Yes...well, the people move out here but they have other interests, too, you know. A lot of them didn't dance and they didn't go to the small bars as much as some of the local people did. They went to the fancier places toward town. Then again, a lot of these businesses were so old that they...like the ah, Transformer Inn. They just kind of got crowded out by the bigger ones. Same with the Lake Sarah Ballroom. They did a good business for many, many years, but then, the Medina come in, and I think that was pretty stiff competition. They phased out, got crowded out, just like a lot of the businesses do in the towns when the big box stores come in...Wal-Mart, Target, and all those. They have a terrific impact on the small businesses. We had our grocery stores in Rockford for many, many years. In later, years, why, there was no grocery store. There were more people, you know, but Delano had one, Buffalo had one, but Rockford seemed to strive for a grocery store or a drug store.

So things change, not always for the better, but they change. A lot of beautiful farms in Greenfield were cut up and developed, kind of bothered me, you know? Our fore-fathers, they worked hard to clear the land. They had good, rich, heavy soil here. Good, productive soil and they built homes on it. On a lot of the farms the land usage didn't seem to be the best. They put two, three, four hundred thousand dollar homes or more on a three, four, five acre parcel. They'd mow the lawn around the house, and then sometimes the rest would grow to weeds. So that kind of bothered me. Where the wealthy people in that income class can come in and ...but that's the way they parceled it out...the bigger the lot, the more money they could get for it, as a rule. The bottom line would be better for the developers.

RM: Why do you think the new people coming into town didn't want to spend time at the local bars?

JS: I think they did to a certain degree. They went to the local bars. They'd come home and there was a bar just east of us here on the hill before you...by [County Road] 19 and [Highway] 55. You'd see cars there.

RM: What was that one called?

JS: Oh, golly, that one's changed hands so many times over the years. What was that bar up on the hill here, Patty, at 19...what'd they call that?

PS: When I first come out here at the Loretto crossing at 19 and 55, there were one, two...there were three bars and a drive in.

JS: Right in that intersection, there?

PS: Now there are no bars!

JS: There's one in there, but it's closed down. It's changed hands a couple different times. You take Loretto, you know, right down the road from us? They've had three bars in Loretto since I was a boy, maybe five, ten years old. And they're still there. There's Detour and there's the...what are the other ones, Patty? Three of them there.

PS: They've changed hands.

JS: In Loretto, there's three bars. There's also a bistro, where the...[mutter] feed mill used to be. There's a place there you can get something to eat, you know, malted milk or something like that.

PS: I don't know...

RM: I know there's Axels.

JS: There's a Choo Choo...Axels and the Detour. That would be the three.

RM: So a lot of Greenfield and Rockford people went down there?

JS: I'm sure they went...they'd even shop! You know, they had a hardware store in Loretto and they had a feed mill, barber shop, and a grocery store. Vanbusicums had the hardware and the grocery. Local people would go there a lot to the bars and they would spent time enjoying themselves. Now, there's a lot of people come from the cities and they go to the park, what is it? Independence...Baker Park. That goes right through Loretto, see? So they stop at the Detour, at the Choo Choo, or at Axels, and they eat and they drink and they enjoy themselves. It brings a lot of people out to the park there, the Rebecca Park. They have the trails you can ride on...bike on, horseback trails.

RM: There was never anything like that around Lake Sarah?

JS: Not in the '50s, no. You mean a park? No, no. They had a few little trails, but they were probably on private property. I think it was in the 50s, the Hennepin County Park system bought many, many acres of land. They have park property all through the area now, so that's good for the people who enjoy the parks. A lot of people thought they overdid it. They've got land that just lays there and nobody uses it. It come off the tax rolls, you know, that was all taxable property. A lot of it was farmland. In Greenfield here, well, in Independence, all around the area here...Baker and Maple Grove, where the park system...that was a huge change. But, I suppose, that's probably what they call progress [laughs].

RM: That's a tricky word.

JS: Yes! A lot of trees and a lot of fence [laughs].

RM: I know there were a lot of new homes built around Lake Sarah as well.

JS: Beautiful homes...where the resorts used to be, there are some real nice homes around the lake. One man, Herman Mielke, used to make ice. He'd harvest ice out of the lake, and then he'd haul it to the resorts around the lake, you know. Every resort had an ice house, or facilities for ice. They'd keep their food and beverages cold with the ice. That all come to a standstill.

RM: Do you remember them cutting ice?

JS: Oh, sure, yes...I never watched them, I wish I would've watched them. Would have been an interesting thing to see Herman do that. His son, Art, might have pictures of when they harvested the ice. Got it up on his old dump truck and then they'd haul it, if the ice was good, they'd go right across the lake. They didn't even have to go on the road. They could go across the lake to the resort and unload it and go get another load [laughs].

RM: How often would they do that?

JS: Well, they'd do that every fall, when the ice would get thick. Once a year.

RM: Just the once a year?

JS: I think so, yes.

RM: I heard there were some ice cream stands and soda stands around the lake, too?

JS: Yes...by Lake Sarah, there was Bud and Max's resort. They had a little octagon stand there where they sold ice cream and candy bars and stuff like that. I had a friend down there that I went to school with and I'd see him. We'd go to that little stand and get our candy or ice cream, you know, stuff like that. That was fun.

RM: How old were you then?

JS: I was in high school. I suppose I was fourteen, fifteen...something like that. When I was a freshman in high school, or maybe a sophomore.

RM: You rode your bike down there? How were the roads?

JS: The roads? The roads were good. We had State Highway 55. That was a good road.

RM: and around the lake?

JS: Oh, there were pretty good roads around there. Gravel at that time. And they didn't go all the way around the lake when I was in high school. Right south of us here there was a cow pasture. There were no homes there, see. Klaer's had a resort there, then our neighbor, Lambert Bokusky sold land there. I don't know who he sold it to. They put a road in...maybe he put a road in there. He sold lots all along the lake so what used to be cow pasture turned into homes. Then the road went all the way from Townline Road up here all the way up to Lake Sarah Drive, where the pumpkin patch is. It came all the way

through. But when I was in school, that didn't go all the way through. It would dead end, so you would go down in that dead end.

RM: Did you have to ride through the pasture?

JS: Not to get to Bud and Max's resort. That was right on the highway. There was Cook's resort right next to it and beyond Bud and Max was Dorn's resort. Mrs. Dorn had a resort. Beyond Mrs. Dorn, Meilke's had a resort, so there were lots and lot of resorts. Then on the east end of the lake, Wally Georges had a resort in the late '50s. He had a nice resort there. Then there was Bud...Shady Beach on the south side of lake, maybe you've heard of that? There you could hear the music, too. It would carry so well across the lake, you know, we lived right straight north of Shady Beach. They had music there and dancing and food and drink. I never went there much. Had to cross a big body of water [laughs]. You didn't get there too often, but they were there. I don't know if there was any other resorts on the south side of the lake or not. There was a public access here on the north side, where the people could dock their boats and get on the lake. Then later years they closed that and put it on the other side of the lake. It's on the south side of the lake now. They have a nice public access there for the people to get on the lake.

RM: Is that the one that the Koehnen's...?

JS: Right. Koehnen's memorial. Hubert Koehnen memorial landing, or whatever it is. It'd be Aggie's husband's father, Hubert. Hubert Koehnen.

RM: Did you ever come into contact with the people that stayed at the resorts or did they keep to themselves?

JS: Not too often, no. They'd come out and rent a cabin, they'd go fishing. They'd come and go. I wasn't there enough to get to know them. Too many would come and go, at the resorts. I knew some of the local farmers that would come and go fishing, mainly at the public landing. Some would bring their boats down. They'd have a boat thrown in the back of the pick up and take it down to the public landing, go fishing, and then head back home.

RM: Did the resorts hire local teenagers, girls, to help out?

JS: Oh, I'm sure they did. But like the ballroom there, that was pretty much a family affair. The Mitchell's ran it. Betsy worked there, you mentioned Betsy. Margie, who's Sid Mitchell's daughter would pop corn I think, and Ben, he was pretty much the owner. Part owner. He would stand there and take the money and sell the tickets. Sid's wife, Laura, she worked in there too, you know. And I suppose they hired part time help, what they needed. They usually had a bouncer. If there was a fight, he was supposed break that up, you know, keep things in order [laughs].

RM: How did he get chosen for the job?

JS: Well, he had to be a pretty powerful man, for one thing, if he was going to break up some of these fighters, because they weren't little scrawny kids, you know. Some of them had a reputation for scrapping. That was a lively place [laughs].

RM: What would they fight over?

JS: Oh, you name it...I don't know. Didn't have to be too big an issue after they'd had so many beers, they'd get to arguing maybe over a girl. You name it, they'd fight over it. I don't think anybody got hurt *real* bad, I don't know. I've heard rumors that it was pretty normal to have a fight there on Saturday night. Then they had dances on Saturday *and* Sunday night. They'd have wedding dances, too. It was a popular place for wedding dances.

RM: Did you have your wedding dance there?

JS: No, no...no we got married down in St. Louis Park, where I met my wife.

We graded the roads in Greenfield. My Grandpa, my Dad and I used to pull the low grader with the tractor. It was not a self-propelled grader. You pulled it with a tractor. We maintained the roads pretty well because there wasn't a lot of traffic in Greenfield. We'd get on that grader, my Dad and I after it rained, and ride it for a good share of the day.

RM: You were involved in a lot of things.

JS: Oh, yes...we didn't have too much time for recreation, for going to the bars. We had chickens, we had hogs, and we had dairy, then my Dad was road overseer for quite a few years. He worked on the roads, and I helped him. And in later years, I bought an old motor grader and I graded in the village with that. Then in later years, Al Lang was our, what do you call it? I can't think of the word right now...road overseer, supervisor, and he took care of the roads. I helped him. He had a Cat and did a lot of dirt work, and when Alan was on the Cat, he'd call me and I'd grade for him or plow snow. I got quite a bit of experience that way. Knocked over a few mailboxes in snow storms, plowed snow half the night and came home then try to do chores. I was half asleep so in later years I finally quit that. Thought, "that's enough of that" [laughs].

RM: You can only do just so much.

JS: Right, the body can only withstand so much torture [laughs].

RM: Especially when you have kids at home.

JS: I always had good help. My Dad was good, my wife helped, and with the three sons, you know, they were usually around. Somebody was usually around for chores, so that helped out a lot. But it still could be tough. '75? We had those blizzards, you know. Like the Halloween blizzard. You'd plow all afternoon and half the night and the next day the road would be blown shut again. You'd have to go and do it all over again. Then one night, I was out with the youngest son, Kurt. He was running the wing on the grader and I

put it in the ditch. I couldn't see. I was just lucky it was a gradual ditch. So we shoveled for about two hours. It was about one, two o'clock in the morning and I didn't want to bother anybody for tractor or anything, so we shoveled and shoveled. Then the blade...the motor patrol was a newer model, it was a John Deere, 770, and it articulated in the middle, so you could twist it, you know. I got it twisted, and by golly, got it back on the road! I said, "That's enough." We put it in the garage and went home about two, three o'clock in the morning. It was snowing and blowing.

RM: Did you do just the rural roads, or did you do the businesses as well?

JS: Just Greenfield, mainly Greenfield. It was village roads, mainly. The village roads got priority and after they were done, then I would open up the driveways. If they called. Then I had the old Cat, the old number 11. When I started out, I'd go out with that. I owned that, so it was a private machine and I could blade a driveway, or close up a tile line...I bladed the streets in Rockford with that years ago. Some of the streets up on the hill, to the right, in the new addition were gravel back in '50s. I bladed those.

RM: When did the streets start to get tarred?

JS: Shortly after that. It wasn't too many years before they blacktopped the streets. In fact, most of them *were* blacktopped at that time. Harold Schlieff would call me and want to know if I'd blade the streets. I said, "Sure, I can do that," So I did that for him, made a little spending money. I got six dollars an hour when I started out with the man and the machine and I made a little money. You could get Ziegler out to repair the machine for twenty dollars an hour, so you see how much things have changed. Now one man wants one hundred dollars--without the parts, or without the trip. Just the service call [laughs].

RM: Everything is inflated.

JS: Too much so. But they had good recreation, what little there was. We enjoyed it. It wasn't so costly, you know. A dollar went a long way. I'd take \$5 and I could go down and see Patty, go to a movie and we could eat, put a little gas in the car, and might have a few pennies left. Off a five dollar bill! [laughs]

RM: You worked all day to get that five dollar bill, though.

JS: Yes! And then some! Ah, but now...five dollars...gosh. You put five bucks worth of gas in and how far do you get? Not too far [laughs]

RM: Is there anything else that you wanted to add in while we're still here?

JS: Not really [laughs]

RM: Wore you down, huh?

JS: Heard half my life's history [laughs]

RM: Well, that's what we wanted [laughs]

JS: Yes...

RM: If I think of other questions, could I give you a call?

JS: Sure. Yes, you're welcome to.

RM: I really appreciate you taking the time to sit down and do this.

JS: Yes, you're welcome.