

Marvin Bursch

Narrator

Rebecca A. Mavencamp

Greenfield Historical Society

Interviewer

August 2, 2013

At the home of Marvin and Delyte Bursch

Greenfield, Minnesota

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RM: I'm sitting here today with Marvin Bursch, it's August 2, 2013. Could you spell your name for me?

MB: M-A-R-V-I-N B-U-R-S-C-H.

RM: You said you're married?

MB: Yes.

RM: To whom?

MB: Delyte D-E-L-Y-T-E.

RM: What was her maiden name?

MB: Dixon.

RM: That's D-I-X-O-N?

MB: D-I-X-O-N.

RM: When did you say you got married?

MB: Two years ago in June.

RM: I didn't realize it was so recent. Congratulations!

MB: Yes, my first wife passed away in 2004.

RM: I'm sorry to hear that. It's nice when you can find another partner. You've lived on this property for how many years?

MB: Since 1968.

RM: What's the address of the property?

MB: 10607 Greenfield Road, Loretto.

RM: Officially Loretto? [chuckles]

MB: Yes. Or Greenfield.

RM: You said you were born just a couple miles down the road?

MB: Yes.

RM: What's that address, do you remember?

MB: It's Harff Road. I'm not sure what the address is. Back when I lived there it was route numbers, you know, but I don't know what it is today. It's two miles east of here.

RM: You said your Dad farmed?

MB: Yes.

RM: What was the farm like?

MB: We had eighty acres and then he bought another eighty acres in Hassen. We rented some land...farmed a couple hundred acres. A lot of it was pasture, so we had dairy cattle, pigs, chickens, like most other people had back then. Pretty standard.

RM: Any horses?

MB: We had horses. My Dad had a team of horses when I was really young. Back when I was probably seven, eight years old we sold the horses and bought another tractor. Then we didn't need them, we had two tractors...didn't need the horses anymore. Most people had bought in the mid '40s to the early '50s and were replacing their horses with tractors.

RM: What kind of tractor did you have?

MB: We had a Farmall F-20 and a VAC Case, smaller tractor for cultivating corn.

RM: It was a lot more efficient?

MB: what do you mean by efficient?

RM: Did you get more done? You covered more ground?

MB: No, the farmers nowadays cover a lot more ground because they have a lot bigger equipment. It's just no comparison. I think the pace was slower back then. People were more content. It was hard work being a farmer, still is today, but people were content with what they had. They worked hard. My Dad, he was raised on a farm. Most people around here were raised on farms. It was just kind of generation to generation where now that doesn't happen anymore. If you look at the City of Greenfield here, there are really not that many active farmers. If they are, they're big, big farmers. The small farmer is a thing of the past.

RM: When you say a small farm, it was the eighty acre farm?

MB: Most farms were eighty acres at that time, yes.

RM: The big farms today? How many acres would you say they are?

MB: Well, they probably don't own it all, but some of them area farming two thousand acres. I know Kohnen's, they...and my brother, and Jeff...I'm not sure how many acres they farm, but quite a few. They rent most of it.

RM: You said your brother took over the family farm?

MB: Yes.

RM: You said growing up you helped out at the farm an awful lot?

MB: Yes, I liked it. I liked farming. I liked the work. Sometimes I didn't want to do the work, the heavy work. Fencing, picking rocks was the worst job on the farm, I thought, but feeding the cattle, I liked that, and all the other stuff that went with it. Working the land, you know...I still kind of miss that.

RM: What was your favorite season?

MB: I don't know. I'd say it was summer.

RM: How come?

MB: I didn't have to go to school then. Yes, I liked summer. Winter's were pretty harsh, you know, like they are today, they didn't get any worse I don't think. People talk about their winter's years ago. It was cold. It gets cold today, too.

RM: How far through school did you go?

MB: I graduated from Buffalo high school in 1957.

RM: Somewhat unique to the area

MB: Yes.

RM: Many people had to stop in eighth grade.

MB: Yes. I really didn't care for school.

RM: You said after you graduated from school, you went on and purchased a business?

MB: I went in the service right away after graduation from high school and came out. I worked various construction jobs. There was not enough work to do, or income to allow me to stay home anymore? So I did that and I worked quite a few different jobs. When I was 23 we bought the Corner Bar in Hanover, which is now the River Inn? And we were there for three and a half years.

RM: Can you describe the building when you bought it?

MB: The building went into Bankruptcy because the former owner couldn't make it and it was a little in disarray; although we did fix it up a little bit. We just rented it for couple years. Then the owner of the building wanted to sell it, so I bought it and then did some more fixing on it. It looks pretty well like it is today. Inside it's got the same back bar. They serve a lot more food now, you know, full meals and such. We didn't. We just had hamburgers and pizza. It was a 3.2 bar and the other--there were three bars in town--the other two were liquor bars. You could get mixed drinks over the bar but we couldn't serve liquor. We just had 3.2 beer and we could sell off sale liquor. If you took it home with you and drank it at home, then that was off sale.

RM: So you had to run around the back and serve liquor as well, into the car trunks before you run around and serve people at the bar?

MB: They'd come in and they'd buy it, and then you had to go outside to get into the liquor part of the building. It had to be a separate door. It was kind of stupid. So when somebody wanted a case of beer, you would go outside, unlock the other door, go in there and get out a case of beer for them, come back in to conduct the 3.2 bar, they paid for it in there. It was, it was kind of dumb, but that was just the state law then. We were in there for three and half years and sold that. I got married then, when we went into the bar business. My brother and I ran it for one year, then I bought him out, he wanted to get out.

RM: This is a second brother?

MB: Second brother

RM: What are their names?

MB: My oldest brother is Alvin, my second brother is Don, Donald, and my younger brother is Harvey. Four boys, no girls.

RM: Poor mom... [chuckles]

MB: Yes.

RM: What sort of changes did you make to the bar when you first bought it?

MB: Basically, it was cosmetic. Just cleaning it up little bit, you know. Did some painting. There was also a beauty shop in there at the time and I moved that from the front of the building to the back of the building and she had her business back there. There used to be living quarters back there, added to a beauty shop, and then expanded the off sale up in front. That's what I did there. Had more room in the bar then.

RM: You expanded the bar that's there now?

MB: It actually looks just about the same, outside of the off sale that is not there anymore. So yes if you walked in there I could...the ceiling is the same, all that nice fancy tin work, or whatever you want to call it, and the walls...I say the bar in the back? Bar is the same? Probably from before the 19...probably the late 1800s that was probably built, so, sometime in there. I'm not really sure.

RM: Who owned it before you did?

MB: Some people by the name of Kramers...Jack and Mildred Kramer.

RM: With a "K"?

MB: With a "K". They lost it to Hub Taylor, the previous owner. Hub Taylor at that time lived in Buffalo and he knew my older brother, Don. He called Don one day and said, "Do you guys...would you want to go and take that bar over?" He said, "I'll give you cheap rent and...got to have somebody in there, you know?" That's how we got into it. So Donny came and saw me. We formed a partnership and went in there. Then a year later, after I bought my brother out, Hub came and said, "I want to sell the building." Well, I had no other choice but to buy the building because the business was getting pretty good and I kind of liked it. So I went on to buy the building. I didn't want to, but if he sold it to somebody else, they might not let me be in there anymore.

RM: What did you like about renting?

MB: It was cheaper. I mean, he put a roof on there and stuff like this. I didn't have to do that. The inside, after I bought it, that's when I did quite a bit of this work.

RM: You didn't do the improvements while you were renting it?

MB: We did some. Some of the little... painting and all that came after I bought it. At first when we went in there, we just kind of cleaned it up, or maybe did a little painting, light duty stuff.

RM: What kind of wood is it inside?

MB: It's a lot of tin on the walls, I'm not sure what the back bar is made out of. Oak was pretty popular, so I'm really not sure what wood it is. I'm still fascinated by bars. I don't drink anymore; I haven't drunk for twenty-six years...that's beside the point. But I still like going places and looking at the bars. A lot of these older places have been around forever. Every bar is unique, they're all different. They've all got something different about them. They're not just...you went in the bar and you see the bars are the same in every liquor establishment you go into, but they're all a little different if you look at them, the older ones.

RM: What sort of differences do you see?

MB: Well, there's fancy woodwork on the bar part, the front part. There'd be some, like this one down here has some kind of wood made into like diamond shapes, you know? Stuff like this is in there. If you ever happen to go in there, you just look at their back bar. Every one is different. It's interesting. I like to go in old bars, like up north. They have some old places and you just look at those back bars and their other bar...the craftsmanship was so good back then.

RM: They did take their time. Do you remember any other bars in the Rockford-Greenfield area that had some really nice craftsmanship?

MB: The Hilltop had a real nice bar. That was the one in Hennepin County in Hanover. Another one burnt down over there, in 1984. That had a nice bar, too. I can't describe it anymore, but I remember...the three bars always had real nice...bars! They just did...I just like them. Most people probably don't, you know? But I just like to look at them. See the craftsmanship that was in there [laughs]

RM: Did they have a brass rail on the front?

MB: They did. We took that out, most of them, these people would have brass foot things, you know, that you put your feet on? Then they have spittoons where people could chew snuff. They could spit in there and we didn't have them. They had one out already before. I remember them though, when they still had them, these spittoons. I'd go in a bar with my Dad to get an ice cream cone or something and you'd see these, I think they were brass, little spittoons. Men would go over there and spit their snooze.

RM: Just in between the seats at the bar?

MB: Yes! I think they'd be at the end of the bars there, I'm not sure how many they had, but there were spittoons, they called them.

RM: What did you think of that as a kid?

MB: I think in that Hanover history book talked about... somebody used to live there years ago and they were in the bar business. When he was a kid, he had to clean the spittoons. Not the best job in the world. But we didn't have them, and the old brass rail that used to go along there was replaced with a wooden kind of a step. That's the difference there.

RM: Did that wear down easier from the feet?

MB: Not really. There was some pretty good linoleum on there. It was linoleum and paint on the sides of it. It was all in pretty good shape. I never replaced it.

RM: You had stools?

MB: Bar stools, yes.

RM: They were covered with vinyl still?

MB: Yes. Years ago, the beer companies were great for coming out and advertising their beer. Take for instance, Grain Belt. They'd come out with your bar stool covers, and they'd give them to you. If you'd put a Grain Belt bar stool on them, then when they wore out, maybe they'd replace them again, or some other company come in you know. We had a nice looking cover. Years ago, like Hamm's beer, Grain Belt, they were locals... Hamm's, Grain Belt, Schmidt's, and there was Glicks. They would give our owners a lot of freebie stuff, so a lot of our barstools were covered with these... they were kind of like an elastic thing that just fit over there. They always looked pretty good. And they would give you... I really shouldn't say this, because they weren't supposed to do this, but they'd give you free stuff because they wanted their beer on tap. If you put say, Grain Belt on tap, well then we'll give you... this... free beer glasses, you know, and all that kind of stuff.

RM: You'd sell more beer if it was on tap than if it was in the bottle?

MB: We did then. In the '60s, tap beer was more popular. A lot of people drank tap beer and not... now... I'm not sure what tap beer is, but when we went to the Hilltop five, six years later, a lot more bottle beer was sold for some reason. So the tap beer... I think it's kind of come back now. You see a lot of places have all kinds of different types of tap. We used to just have one kind. It was Grain Belt, or it was Schlitz, or whatever you put on.

RM: How big were the kegs?

MB: They were sixteen gallons. There wasn't full barrel. Full barrel was thirty-two. Years ago, they did that. This is way back. I'd never seen a thirty-two gallon keg. I saw a lot of sixteen's and they were aluminum. They weren't wood anymore.

RM: The company would come and collect the kegs after they were empty?

MB: Yes, the distributors. Say you went through ten half barrels a week on your tap there; they'd just take the empties along and give you ten more full ones. They delivered. They called them distributors. They'd bring your bottle beer in, your keg beer, and then we also sold a lot of eight gallon kegs for people who would have parties in their house or something like this. Had a graduation party or something. We'd sell a lot of eight gallon kegs for parties.

RM: How much were they?

MB: Why, I don't remember the price. A lot cheaper than they are today, but I don't remember that. I know when we were in the Corner Bar, tap beer was ten cents a glass.

RM: How big were the glasses?

MB: They were eight or nine ounces. Then what they'd do is as the price increased, they would...if you started with a nine ounce they went to an eight, and then to a seven, and finally what you did was you went from a ten to fifteen cents. See what I mean? You went back to the bigger glasses. You had to kind of compensate there. Yes, all the time we were at the Corner Bar there in Hanover we had ten cent beers and ten cent pop. Candy bars were a nickel and a dime.

RM: What was the difference between the nickel and the dime?

MB: They were a little bigger. Hershey's at that time made a ten center and a nickel one, and like Nut Goodies? That was the good thing at the time. There were a few bars of candy that sold for ten cents; most of them were a nickel. The price increase really started coming in the '70s and we had the Hilltop. That's when we saw quite a few price increases because of inflation, you know. From '72 to '77, we saw quite a bit of price increase on liquor and also on beer. And everything else.

RM: How come?

MB: I don't know, if it was just the times, or what, I don't know why. It was inflationary, in those years. Cigarettes went up, all that stuff escalated and there was quite a few different price increases and the old timers especially...like Copenhagen, you know, we sold quite a bit of Copenhagen to the old timers. Oh they'd scream bloody murder that, "I'm gonna quit chewing if you keep raising the price!" and I said, "Oh, they're raising the price to us! We have to, you know..." [laughs]

RM: You sold Copenhagen at the bar, too?

MB: Yes, sold it by the roll or by the can. Cigarettes, I can't remember what they were, were they thirty cents a pack? And now they're seven dollars and some cents? They were thirty cents a pack. I remember going thirty-five cents a pack and then two for sixty-five [chuckles]

RM: Sneaky.

MB: Yes...that was...

RM: When did bars stop being able to sell cigarettes then?

MB: They still sell them. A lot of bars now, I've noticed...I don't smoke anymore, but they have vending machines in there. We always sold them behind the bar.

RM: You said you had food at both the Hilltop and the River Inn?

MB: We had a little more food at the Hilltop, the food a little more heavier there.

RM: What kind did you serve?

MB: At the Hilltop we served pizzas, frozen pizza. The Tombstone. Hamburgers. Hilltop was known for its big hamburger. We had just about a half pound hamburger there.

RM: Where did you get your beef?

MB: We bought our beef from Dehmer's up in St. Michael. We fried a lot of hamburgers there. We would probably go through a couple hundred pounds of hamburger a week. Then we bought a roaster type chicken cooker and we served a lot of chicken. I would buy chicken by the case. They were all cut up, probably forty chickens in a case. It was easy to make a dinner. It was so easy. You had pre breaded them all and you just opened up the refrigerator and for a three piece dark dinner, you just took three dark pieces out, and took some jojo potatoes and put it in there with your three pieces, close the lid and ten minutes later, here's your dinner, you know? It was quick. It was actually easier to make than it was the hamburger because the hamburger you had to always run back there. It was in the next room, behind the bar, and you had to go back...can't quite turn it over yet...so you go back out. You come back, turn it over, and then you go back out and tend bar, you know? [chuckles]

RM: You did the cooking as well as the bartending?

MB: Except on some nights, then our wives would come and help us, so business got better. A lot of a lot of nights, Monday through Sunday night, through Thursday night, we'd do our own cooking--the bartenders would. Sometimes you run pretty ragged.

RM: Was it just you and your brother working the bar, then? Or did you have other people help out?

MB: At the Hilltop we had some other people hired because we both had...my brother-in-law worked and I worked on the job and we had a lady that would come in and do the day shift, Monday through Friday. We would rotate the nights and on a Saturday night, we'd hire somebody to come in. We'd rotate the weekends, too. One weekend I would work Saturday and Sundays and the next weekend my brother-in-law would work.

RM: So getting the family together was a little tricky.

MB: It was...it was. I liked the bar business. I liked people, but it was not a good family life. My kids were small then. My youngest boy, Bob, was born when we owned the Hilltop; the other two were a little older. So it was not a good family life.

RM: Is that why you decided to get out of the business?

MB: I did, yes. It was on account of the relationship between the sisters. We were in there five years and I had started the sand and gravel business out here. I was devoting more time to it and just didn't have the time to run the bar business any more. It was do one or the other and my brother-in-law, said too, we were just sick of the rat race.

RM: Did you have a lot of people from Greenfield and Rockford and Delano come in, or were they all Hanover?

MB: Most of our business was local. I'd say, most of my business was probably from Hennepin County, though there was some Wright county, but, because I was born over here, a lot of people [who came] were from Hennepin County. But I knew everybody in town back then. Now I hardly know a soul down there in Hanover. Used to know all the people, where they lived and stuff, you know? There was less then, I think there were about four hundred people then. So you just knew them if they come in the bar. If not, you knew them from church or different activities. You just knew everybody around, now you don't know your next door neighbor.

RM: You prefer the idea of knowing everybody?

MB: Yes, I like that.

RM: What do you like about it? What makes you comfortable?

MB: I think people help people, you know? It isn't that people are more selfish today; it's just the way it is. Everybody's more independent.

RM: Do you think that the bars served as community gathering place?

MB: Yes, I think they did. I think it was a social...how am I going to say this? Take the farmers, ok? We're just going to talk about them. Years before my time, they used to haul their milk to a local creamery, before milk trucks would come. Every farmer would take their milk--Hanover had a creamery, Burschville had a creamery, Loretto had one, Rockford had one, Delano...Delano had a couple creameries. So the farmers would bring their milk to town and Hanover had two grocery stores at the time, a filling gas station that fix tires, and a fix it shop. They would come into town with their feed, had a feed mill, too, to grind feed. They'd bring their milk in and they would probably stop and pick something up, they might stop and have a couple of beers or something like this, and they might see their neighbors in there. For a lot of people, maybe it was planned that I take my milk in at eight o'clock in the morning, so they'd come in and they would maybe play

a couple games of euchre, or cards. There was a lot of card playing back then, but it was a social thing, you didn't have televisions or all the telephones. You didn't have that, so it was a way to find out what was going on in the area. And also, I think churches years ago were more...it was a social event of the week. That's where the women got together. The men, they went there, and they would have more potluck dinners and stuff like this, because that's how they got to know the neighborhood. So I think that's missing today, the social network with the people that live around you. A lot of my neighbors...I know some of them back here that I've sold these lots to, but they'd sooner be by themselves. If you stop and talk to them, they'll talk to you, you know, but I really haven't made any close friendships from anybody who lives back here. I know them, they're friendly like that, but that's just the way society is today.

RM: Do you think it has something to do with farming being a fairly solitary lifestyle so that you look for the social?

MB: You mean my upbringing?

RM: Farming in general. You're on a tractor by yourself, so you seek out social—

MB: I think yes...see, when you were farming, you had your eighty acres and you milked your cows, you took your own milk to the creamery, you were by yourself. You and your wife and your family there. Years ago, we would celebrate a lot of birthdays with my cousins and the neighbors, get together, you know. We'd have a little lunch at night, if it was a birthday party, they'd have a birthday cake for the little kid that had a birthday or something. We did a lot of that in the neighborhood, you know, so they socialized quite a bit. Also, on Sunday afternoons, we were just talking about that this week with my mother-in-law. She's ninety-four years old day and we were up there painting her bedroom and she said people would go visiting unannounced. They would just go someplace, especially on Sundays, to visit somebody. Here we are! That's how it was. We'd do the same thing; we'd go visiting a lot. Now, when you do something, you call first, "Are you going to be home, we're going to come over." Or you wait for an invite. It's a little different. I think that part was better years ago. They worked harder. There are more modern conveniences now. Farmers really worked hard. Lot of hand work. Where now, it's still a hard occupation, it's still a lot of work, but a lot of it's made easier.

RM: When you say "hand work" what do you mean by that?

MB: They had to milk the cows by hand before electricity came, you know, and now they've got milking machines. They've got milking parlors. The farmers are bigger now. They used to... say you went out to cut the grain and they have to shock it. That was all by hand. Well, now they go in with a combine and it goes into the wagon and goes into your storage facility, a granary. Before they had to pitch the bundles with the horses and take them up to the thrashing machine. It was just a lot more work.

RM: When they had down time, they would go down to the bars. What else did they do for entertainment?

MB: I don't think they just...when they had down time, I don't think they went to the bars. I think they went to town for something else and then they maybe stopped at the bar. Some people might have abused their stay at the bar, you know, there was always that factor there too [laughs]

RM: How about the dances and things?

MB: Lake Sarah had a dance hall, you probably heard about that one. That was in Greenfield, here. They just had dances in the summertime. They would open on Easter Sunday, regardless of how early Easter was, that was their opener. They would close sometime in the fall, I don't remember. But I remember Easter Sunday was first dance of the season, Sunday nights. There were a lot of wedding dances there, just about every Saturday night it seemed there was a wedding dance there. Wedding dances. Lot of people had their wedding dances there. I went to a lot dances there. I never was into dancing, but it was just a place to go and hang out with people. Talk, BS, whatever. Might do a little dancing, but I never cared that much for dancing myself. Went there a lot. There were a lot of big name bands—Whoopie John and Six Fat Dutchmen were big back then. There were a lot of smaller bands, which I like to listen to just as much as those popular bands. They charge a little more admission, the Whoopie Johns and Six Fat...they weren't worth anymore as far as I was concerned.

RM: [laughs] What were the other band names?

MB: There was Wally Pickle, Elmer Scheid, oh, gosh...Ivan Kahle...Ivan Kahle. Haven't thought about that for quite a few years, but, yes! They were polka bands, you know. Waltzes, polkas, stuff like that. I don't remember what it cost to get in, it wasn't too much, and if you waited until 10:30 then the wheel went off then you get in for nothing. There were some people who would always do that; they would get in for nothing. Lake Sarah was very popular. And then sometime in the '50s...I'd say the mid '50s, is when Medina built their complex and they had a dance hall. But Medina was open year round. They had a bowling alley. It wasn't as big as it is today, but they had that, so. Lake Sarah, I'm not sure when they closed. I want to say in the late '50s, maybe early '60s, some place in there, I don't know. I remember in the late '50s we'd go down there quite a bit, so it had to be in the early '60s when they closed.

RM: How old were you in the late '50s?

MB: I was born in 1940, so I'd be a teenager until 1960.

RM: They didn't have any age restrictions on getting into the dance hall?

MB: no...nope. One thing that was kind of interesting is they had what they called the bullpen. That was kind of like...Lake Sarah was just a Quonset type building. Uninsulated. The windows were like doors that swung open like this with a rope? So to get some air movement in there, you just went and pulled the rope and the door...so if it was raining outside and the wind was blowing, you closed your...yes, there were no

windows in there. But the bullpen was kind of fenced off. That's where you went in and bought your beer. The teenagers were not allowed in there. They always had a cop there. Had to have a cop there. He was there to watch that there were no fights. They really watched it pretty close. You had to be twenty-one to get in there. The Mitchell's owned it at the time, Sid and Ben Mitchell. It was on their farm, just a building on their farm, just a hole in the wall. A couple small little bathrooms out in back. I mean, very unsanitary, but it was a place to go, you know? There was no other place if you wanted a wedding dance, you know? That's where you went.

RM: If there had been another dance hall, do you think it would have done as well?

MB: I don't know. St. Michael had one, it was smaller one, Lake Sarah was pretty good size—at least I thought it was, and had a bigger dance floor. And St. Michael was a smaller type dance...probably would hold half the people that Lake Sarah did.

RM: How many people would Lake Sarah hold?

MB: That's a good question. I'm going to just guess three hundred, but you know, there were booths all the way around it. I...two hundred maybe? I don't know. There were some pretty good wedding dances there and they did a good business.

RM: A lot of your friends had dances there?

MB: Yes, some of them did. About the time a lot of my friends were getting married is when they were closed already, so you had to find something else, but...excuse me, I've got to run again.

[Walks away, silence]

MB: That's one thing I don't like about these interviews. When I say how many people Lake Sarah held, it's...somebody might say, "Oh, it didn't hold near that much," or "Maybe a lot more." That's quite a few years ago, since Lake Sarah was open. And different dates. Somebody might dispute my memory of dates, or how things were. It's just how I remember things, ok? I know that book that was written on the City of Hanover? I bought that book a few years ago, and I'm reading that thing there's some things in there that I can dispute, because I happen to be living at that time. But I don't say anything. It's just that's how that person perceived it, or remembers it, thirty, forty years later.

RM: How many booths were around the outside of the dance floor, then?

MB: That's another question...! Maybe twenty-five or thirty?

RM: They were wood?

MB: Yes. Just plain old wood, yes. It was just a shell of a building. One night, I wasn't there, but somebody down the hill of the Lake Sarah ballroom, down here was the lake?

There was a parking lot down here a little bit, the lake was here, and somebody floated a boat out there with a bunch of dynamite in it and went off. Of course it shot water up, up, it came through the windows, you know. We had the doors open, nice night, you know, that thing just...and I never heard too much about it, but that was probably before I started going down there, you know? But that story was going on for years, how that water came from the lake, and they must have had quite a bit of dynamite.

RM: that was in the '50s?

MB: It could have been. I'm pretty sure it's true, you know. Some people that are older than me might have been there or something like that.

RM: What other stories do you remember?

MB: There were a lot of fights...yes. Especially...some of it would be between towns.

RM: Which towns?

MB: Loretto had your group there, and maybe Corcoran or Loretto and Rockford or something. It was just kind of little cliques. It didn't happen all the time, but if you're from Hanover, you stayed with the Hanover group, you know? There were fights like that, but then I think most of the fights came when people come out from Robbinsdale. Of course they come out here and thought they were tough, but the farm kids out here were pretty tough, too. I've seen a lot of fights. It was like you go down to Lake Sarah for the fights, so there was a lot of that. You go outside and half the dance hall would pour out and watch the people fighting out there.

RM: The cop that was there allowed the fight to happen?

MB: They would, he was probably inside and the fight started inside, but got outside. Finally he would go out there and break it up once he knew something was going on out there. My uncle was a bouncer down there in the '50s.

RM: What was his name?

MB: Eddie Bursch. He was a good sized man, about six-one. He kind of liked that, I think.

RM: What do you think he liked about it?

MB: I don't know...I just think he liked the people and tried to keep these different towns more friendly, you know, to prevent them. If they did get in a fight, well he was big enough to break it up, you know? But anyway, he did that. There were a couple other bouncers, I don't remember their names.

RM: How did they get chosen?

MB: The local city had a couple of people that were constables. He happened to be one of them? And then townships, and then the Mitchell's, they'd be responsible for this guy and paying for the bouncer. The owners of the ballroom? But they'd have to be okayed by the city, I think. You just couldn't put a badge on somebody. Somebody had to say, "Yes, he's ok, he can bouncer." The bouncers did wear a badge, so they did have some authority. I wouldn't have wanted that job [laughs] but they had to break up some fights. Of course, the people who were fighting didn't always listen to him, you know.

RM: Were people arrested then, if it got out of control?

MB: I don't remember of anybody getting arrested, I don't. That I don't remember. Could have been, but I don't remember them. Usually somebody had a bloody nose so you stop fighting and then the fight was over and it was just...boys will be boys type thing.

RM: Were the town relationships based on an ethnic background, or—

MB: I don't think it was that, that part I don't think so. Every town had a baseball team. Corcoran had a baseball team, Rockford, Delano, Hanover, St. Michael, they all had baseball teams and I think maybe the friction started a little bit there. A lot of local people would go on a Sunday afternoon and they played baseball and they watched the games. They were pretty well attended, you know? My grandfather used to live in Rockford and we would go over there on Sunday afternoons if Rockford played at home that Sunday we'd go to the ball games a lot of times.

RM: That was just local guys on the team?

MB: Local guys, yes. All local guys.

RM: Did you ever play?

MB: Nope. Hanover, their team dropped out in the mid '50s, they couldn't get enough people to field a team anymore. Rockford continued into the '60s, Loretto always was a big baseball town, and Hamel. They've been around forever. Rockford, Hanover, St. Michael is back in it again. I think they dropped out too. I don't think it was ethnic at all, I think some people actually just liked to fight, you know? I really think that was it, so then they would go and just antagonize somebody. I really don't know what started all the fights, I really don't. These guys from Robbinsdale would come out and they...some of them were pretty tough.

RM: Would they come out as tourists or would they just—

MB: No, they just come out there. "Well, let's go out to the hick town of Greenwood Township and see what trouble we can get into out there." I think that was kind of thing.

RM: There were a lot of tourists that came out for the resorts.

MB: That's way before my time, yes. Getting into the resorts, I remember there were quite a few resorts on Lake Sarah. What I'm talking about as resorts is a little hole in the wall type building, say it's as big as this kitchen, you know? You'd go in there and rent a boat. A lot of them didn't have a bartender there full time. You went there, they came out of their house and you rented a boat from them. If you needed a beer or a pop, you could buy stuff there. That's what I'm talking about as a resort. I can remember, there was one, two, there had to be, three...I'm going to say seven, eight resorts on Lake Sarah, just little. Some of them were a little bigger; some of them had some cabins or something.

RM: What are the names that you remember?

MB: One was Dorn's, one was Meilke's, and one was Bud Epple, on the south side. That was actually in Greenwood yet. Then there was Shady Beach. That was on Independence side. Then Wally's resort was over toward Loretto there, on that end of the lake. Wally's resort. That was more of a resort type. He'd get music in there on Saturday nights, you know. He'd have coon feeds and stuff, raccoon's you know.

RM: Raccoon feeds?

MB: Yes, yes. You ever eat raccoon?

RM: Nope.

MB: It's pretty good. When we had the Hilltop, we used to have coon feeds. There's a lady, lives down by Leffler. She would come in and her husband, Clarence, would hunt coon. They'd probably get fifty coons. They'd keep cleaning them, put them in the freezer. Then she'd make this all up at home and she'd bring it down there on a Saturday. She would run out every year. Fifty, sixty coon...coons are pretty big.

RM: They would just roast it?

MB: They'd roast it. She'd have some other stuff with it, like coleslaw, you know...dinner. There are places in Rockford, too, that had coon feeds every year. Was popular. Isn't anymore.

RM: No, couldn't say that it would be.

MB: Doc Theilen, he delivered me, he used to come in there when we had the Hilltop. He lived and he retired many years ago. He lived in New Brighton, and he told me, "You let me know when that coon feed is next year." He'd come out there every year we had the bar. Liz, she put the big coon feed on. We'd start about 2 o'clock in the afternoon with the coon and the place would just be swamped. People just waiting in line to eat the coon...yes! It was...it was good.

RM: What did it taste like?

MB: Like everything else...tastes like chicken [both laugh]

RM: I thought you might say that.

MB: I've eaten squirrel too. It was...it's...something like pork, maybe a chicken, crossed a little...you know...something to that...it's was...it was just good! And there was a way to fix it. I went to a couple other coon feeds, too, and Liz was very good cook. She used to do a lot of catering, a lot of weddings. But you had to take the fat off the coon, make sure all the fat is off, that was important. If she baked it with all that fat on it, it got too greasy. The preparation had a lot to do with how good...and when you shot the coon; you had to skin them within a reasonable time. You can't let them lay in the garage for two days. How you took care of the meat once you killed it was important, too. Clarence took good care of his. He had the coon hounds. They'd go out in the woods, you hunted them at night, the coon hounds would go and they'd tree them. You'd flash lights up there and you shoot the coon out of the tree.

RM: Was there a season for them?

MB: Yes, it was in the fall of the year. I don't know much about the hunting part of it, but I know coon was good.

RM: The city folks would come out to the resort and have a coon feed?

MB: I think some people. Most of it was local when Wally had his down there. I think most of it was Loretto people around Hamel, Rockford, some people from Hanover might go, from Delano might. I'm not sure if anybody from Delano ever had coon or not. I never heard about it, but I know Rockford had them; Wally had them over there on Lake Sarah. Years ago, Bill Dodds used to own what was the Hilltop today, he'd have coon feeds. So it was pretty popular. And I think it died out in the '70s. I don't think anybody has coon feeds anymore. If you ever hear of one, I would suggest going.

RM: I'll have to keep my ears open.

MB: It's quite an experience [laughs]

RM: Are there still hunting seasons for them now?

MB: I'm not sure about that, I don't know. One day we played cards over here, about seven, eight years ago, and this guy said, "Don't make nuthin' for lunch!" he said. "I'm bringing over lunch." He came over in the morning, he had started it at home, roasting it, you know--was a coon. I said, "Oh, we're eating coon today." He said, "Yep" That's when my first wife was living yet, and she said, "I'm not eating coon!" She tried it and she thought it was pretty good, too, but...it's just the idea of eating a raccoon, you know. It's mind over matter. It's pretty good [laughs]

RM: What else was served at the resorts?

MB: It depends on...I'm looking at resorts like...Wally's was more of a place you might go Saturday night for a little dance and a...it was more of a...I don't know how you

would describe it. Shady Beach had a little dance floor, too. That one was open, it's closed you know. I remember going over there for some little things, too, as a late teenager. It's been closed a long time. But Bud Epple's there...he had a nice little bar. People could come in. But Mielke's...they just had a room of the house there where they had some candy bars, pop and stuff like that. He sold ice. He would harvest ice in the winter time and put it in a shack with sawdust over it. Mielke's had that. Every resort around Lake Sarah was a little different. Some were just getting older and they just didn't care to do too much. But I remember we used to go to Mielke's and rent a boat, the old flat-bottomed boats, and go out there and go fishing. Most of the places, like on Beebe Lake, there was at least four places... maybe more...that would rent boats. You want to go out there and most people didn't have a boat back then, so you went and rented one, so you could go fishing.

RM: Were they just farmers that had an extra boat?

MB: This resort probably owned the boats. He probably had six or seven boats, these old flat-bottoms? And then if you wanted a motor, you brought your own motor. Otherwise you oared. You rowed.

RM: This was out at Mielke's?

MB: Mielke's had boats, I'm not sure about, well you never went to any other resorts to go fishing. We just always went to Mielke's if we rented a boat. I'm just talking about some of the resorts that I was at.

RM: That was for sunfish?

MB: Yes, it was a good sunfish lake. Was. It's real good right now, too. I don't fish much anymore, but my buddy does, Bill Rich. He brings me fish. So I don't have to go fishing! They've been getting some nice sunfish like this [holds up hands] on Lake. Yes, real nice. Just had some last week. Real nice sized sunfish.

RM: Were they always that big?

MB: Years ago they were, then Lake Sarah was not a good fishing lake for quite a few years, it seemed. You didn't hear too many people say, "Oh, they're biting in Lake Sarah!" Where now, it's good again. Don't know why. Beebe Lake used to be the best lake around here. For some reason the fish out of there really tasted good. Some of these lakes, they're like a little muddy, you know? There was a little Shendal Lake; we used to call it Showers. It was just a little lake. You know where Hafften's Lake is?

RM: Yes

MB: You know where Shendal is?

RM: How about you explain it.

MB: It's right north. There's no access to it, but off Hafften's. There's a little crick that connects them. Well Doc Winter, I think he still lives in there, he bought that place. He closed all accesses off and nobody can get in that lake and fish in the winter time anymore.

RM: What was his name?

MB: Doctor Winter.

MB: You can't get in there to that lake anymore to fish. We used to go over there and rent a boat, you know. It's a deep lake, it's a mud lake.

RM: How deep?

MB: They say it's really deep, forty, fifty...maybe sixty feet, you know? Not sure. It was good northern. You could get some sunfish out of there, too, but there's no access to it anymore. I'm sure there isn't. Where at Hafften's, you have a public access. I think you could walk up the crick a little bit and you could get on there. I don't think he could stop you, but you know...I don't want to...I don't fish, so I'm not sure. But that was about the only thing in Greenfield, Greenwood.

RM: How about Wally's? Did they have boats for rent as well?

MB: Yes, yes, he had boats down there...boats, coon feeds. Wally was a...his name was Wally Georges. He was a promoter.

RM: What do you mean?

MB: He'd promote it. I mean, he was a guy that was friendly, outgoing, and just a...during the week he was a cement guy. He laid cement blocks, him and his three brothers. They laid the blocks for this basement. They laid the blocks for just about all the building that went on around this area. Four brothers. But Wally was an outgoing promoter, yes. He had a lot of ducks around there, just all kinds of stuff.

RM: The resort was a weekend business for him?

MB: I'm not sure if his wife ran the thing. If you wanted to rent a boat, I'm really not sure about that. I know it was open on weekends. He'd have maybe one or two piece bands come in there. A little live music, but as far as people coming out from town, I think that happened years and years ago? They probably came out. I've heard stories of getting on the train and getting off in Rockford, just a short jaunt to all the resorts out there.

RM: I heard Lake Sarah had its own depot.

MB: They did? I didn't know that.

RM: Found an old picture of that.

MB: That'd be interesting, I didn't know that. I thought they went to Rockford and then...

RM: They did do that too, but they had a Lake Sarah depot as well.

MB: Well, I'll be jiggered. Yes. Hmm! Interesting. So I really didn't do too much with the resorts. I remember my grandfather, Herman Zerman, used to spear out there on Lake Sarah in the wintertime. Well, one Sunday afternoon, we went over to visit him and he was out on Lake Sarah spearing. To get into Mielke's there was a long driveway. When you came down, railroad tracks were down here and then you went up into their yard like this [draws with finger] it was in a valley. We came down there, and we start going across, and my dad couldn't make it up the hill, it was too icy. We started sliding back down. And the train came right behind us, yes! And the train's going through. Short train, luckily. And I'm sitting in there and I'm thinking, "We're going to die because we're going to slide back into that..." But we had a '50 Dodge and it had a fluid drive, just like an automatic, and my Dad just kept enough torque on there. He didn't spin the wheels, you know, just enough, to...? And the car just sat there. And then after the train went through, we backed down across tracks and then got a run to get up and see if Grandpa had speared any fish. I'll never forget that day, that was scary.

RM: Did they change the crossing so it was safer?

MB: No, I think it stayed like that. I think somebody else got hit out there, too. Loren'll know more about that. Ask Loren about the tracks at Mielke's. I don't know if he had an accident there? I remember some people getting hit on the tracks thought, that's...and we were close. It came down, and went right up.

RM: Was it worth going to find Grandpa after all that?

MB: I don't remember that, but I remember I was scared. That was a bad, bad crossing. There are so many things now that are so much safer. There are a lot of things that years ago...you know the trains? They built tracks and if you want to cross them, you cross them, you know? They didn't have all these lights and everything flashing. The main roads they might, but a lot of these small crossings, they had a sign with the "X" on it, "Railroad Crossing" but you're at your own risk if you're going across there.

RM: Were there a lot of accidents because of that?

MB: I think there was, I really do. And most of it wasn't the trains fault. They knew the tracks, people knew the tracks were there and the train might come through there once in awhile. You'd better look. Yes, I think some people thought they could beat the train rather than wait for it?

RM: What other things have changed as far as Lake Sarah and the entertainment and the bars? As far as safety goes?

MB: Safety in the bars, you mean?

RM: Or the lakes, the resorts, anything....

MB: I don't know Lake Sarah now. Is there any place on there where you could actually stop and buy a pop? I don't know if there is. I don't know if Wally's is open, I don't think it is... Wally's been dead quite a few years. Bet if you went all around that lake... I should ask Billy once, he fishes it, if there's any place on there that's actually what you'd call a resort. I don't know. Maybe Loren'd know that too. I don't think there is.

RM: I think you're right.

MB: The places I'm talking about are closed; I know that, unless there's something new. Like I say, there were quite a few around Lake Sarah. I think when people start owning their own boats, in the '50s... I don't... most places you can't rent a boat anymore. I think that's passed. Hmmm. Never thought of that. So, now there are no resorts there. I don't think there's a cabin... well? You know, it'd be the north side of the lake, where Al Moen lives? That side of the lake, there was a lot of cabins. They were all cabins. That's why those lots are only fifty feet wide or so. They were just weekend... people just came out there for a weekend and eventually some of them started upgrading. Insulating them so that they could use them in the wintertime. They started living there and it became what it is today. But it started out just as basically cabins. A lot of them were just cabins.

RM: What do you think it is about the lake that people like?

MB: I really don't know if Lake Sarah is what attracts people to Lake Sarah? Maybe it was the location? It was right on [Highway] 55, you know, it wasn't that far from the cities. Round here, back in the '40s, '50s, there wasn't a lot of water skiing or anything like this, because Lake Sarah is longer. It's a long, narrow lake. I don't know what attracts people to... number one you could rent a boat there. Of course, you could on Beebe too; I say there were at least three, four places on Beebe. Charlotte there was. Most places had quite a few places you could rent... like Buffalo Lake, they just had little resorts kind of a thing that's gone now. Either it's big or it's not here, you know?

RM: I think Buffalo has boats for rent, still.

MB: They do?

RM: Yes, down by Buffalo Lake. They have some sailboats and some paddle boats.

MB: You can actually rent a boat there. I did not know that.

I think the location was for the people who maybe couldn't afford the Minnetonka route; they come out here to Lake Sarah. I think the real rich people; they went to Minnetonka. That was for the rich people. I wonder how the dance hall ever got started. That'd be another... did the Mitchell's build it? I don't know who built it.

RM: As far as you know, it's just always been there?

MB: In my lifetime it has, yes, it's always been there. I don't know if they built it or somebody else built it and then they ended up buying the farm where it was on. I don't know. Mitchell's appeared to be pretty old when I was a teenager, so I think Lake Sarah's been around a long time, the dance hall.

RM: Well, good. Is there anything else that you'd like to give me? Any more memories?

MB: At a lot of these resorts you could go in there and they'd have a little short bar. We were talking about bars before? They'd have a little...there might be four, five bar stools, so you could actually stop in there, and a lot of these places would have ice cream cones. Someone could get an ice cream cone or a pop? And if they rented a boat, when they came back from fishing they probably came in and had a beer, or pop, or bought ice cream cones for the kids...but they had a little short bar there. All these bars round there were all 3.2 bars. You know the difference between 3.2 and strong?

RM: Why don't you tell me?

MB: Well, 3.2 can't be over 3.2 volume alcohol, ok? Strong beer was always above that. So strong beer...the liquor stores, when you served liquor, you could serve the strong beer. All these places were 3.2, like I was talking about when we had the Hanover Corner Bar, there? That was 3.2. We could serve just 3.2 beer over the bar. Couldn't serve strong. But Greenwood Township at the time couldn't give a liquor license out. They weren't really big enough to have a volume of a liquor store, because they were not incorporated. Townships could issue 3.2 licenses but they couldn't issue liquor licenses. That was one of the things, that if you were incorporated, you could do. In 1958, I'm going to read this; I wrote this down [laughs]. Recently, when Greenwood Township became incorporated in 1958, they were known as Greenwood Village. That's not true. I saw a printing here recently that somebody referred to it, when we incorporated at that time, we became Greenwood Village. We didn't. We became Greenfield Village, ok? I don't know where I saw that. And I said, "Well, I know that's not true."

I was in the Army in 1958, and my Dad had been on the town board, and then they decided to incorporate. He was elected to first Mayor of Greenfield. And they couldn't call it Greenwood Village because there was another Greenwood on Minnetonka. You ever heard of Greenwood? City of Greenwood on Minnetonka? Well, they couldn't have two Greenwood Villages in Hennepin County, so out here we had to change our name. That's how Greenfield came into effect. In 1958, we went from Greenwood Township to the Village of Greenfield. It never was...next time I see the City Administrator, I want to talk to her. Chuck Elcon, too. You know Chuck? They should refer to when Greenfield became incorporated, it became Greenfield and that was the reason for it. They couldn't have two Greenwoods in Hennepin County. I know that's a fact, that's when they had to change it, and somebody came up with Greenfield. Then it would still have "Green" in it, you know? So that's how Greenfield got its name. On account of it couldn't be Greenwood. There's still some people referring to it, I'm not sure who did this, but as Greenwood Village and we when we incorporated, we became a village, ok? And then

years later they changed it to a City. There was nothing to change, it was just “We’re not having villages anymore,” the state says. We’re cities. So Greenfield became...I think there’s a sign in the Greenfield hall now that says “Greenfield Village, building permits required”. They didn’t have building permits before. They incorporated; they started having building permits, so that’s one thing that I’m just about positive on that.

RM: I agree with you on that one. That’s what I’ve read, too.

MB: That’s all I had there. Yes, it’s interesting. I say there’s one thing I don’t like to be is misquoted. It just bugs me when somebody says, “Well, you said this.” and I said, “No, I really never said that, you know?” This is what I really said, you know what I mean?

RM: Well, now we’ve got you on tape!

MB: You’ve got me on tape! [laughter] You’ve got me nailed. But you know what I mean?

RM: Yes.

MB: I just hate that when somebody says, “Well, you said this!” and I said, “No, I didn’t.” Or somebody will get up in a meeting and somebody will say, “Well, this is what he really said.” And I said, “No, I really said this.” You know? [laughs] When people want to tell me what I just got done saying...it’s like when the President or somebody gives a speech. A National TV speech like State of the Union, and then afterwards all these commentators, “This is what he said.” They’ll pick it apart. Well, we just heard it! With my own ears! I don’t have to listen to you guys, you know what I mean? Doesn’t that bug you? [laughs]

RM: Well, now we have it on tape and people can listen to you as much as they want to they can rewind it and play it again! [MB laughs]

MB: That’s one of my pet peeves.

RM: Thank you so much for doing the interview, I really appreciate it.

MB: Yes. I’d like to...I don’t go to a lot of these meetings [Greenfield Historical Society], but...retirement is not what I thought it was. It’s a lot busier.