

## **Chester Peters**

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Interviewer: Phyllis Boeddinghaus  
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Abstract: Chester John Peters (1917-2001), often referred to as “Chet,” was one of eleven children born to Polish immigrants Ignacy Pydyszski and Cecelia Sherry Wisniewski. His father, a chemical worker, settled in Metuchen at 60 Jonesdale Avenue during the 1910s. Mr. Peters attended the Metuchen schools and his surname was anglicized by Thomas G. Van Kirk, the Metuchen High School principal, during the 1920s. He graduated from Metuchen High School in 1936 and worked in New York for a brief time. Mr. Peters became a substitute clerk-carrier for the Metuchen Post Office in September 1937 and was promoted to regular carrier four years later. His main route was through the main business section of Metuchen. Mr. Peters also served as a sergeant in the US Army Air Forces during World War II.

He married Irene G. Peters (1923-2012) and they had two daughters: Claire Sennett and Susanbeth Peters. Mr. Peters was an active member in the St. Francis Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), the Fugle Hummer Post 65 of the American Legion, the Holy Name Society, and the Knights of Columbus. He also designed postal cachets for many events including the Metuchen Country Fair and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rutgers University. Nicknamed the “Post Office’s Goodwill Ambassador” and “Mr. Metuchen,” he retired from the postal position after thirty-seven years. In 1969, Mr. Peters became the first borough postman to receive the superior accomplishment award, the highest recognition given to an employee of the US Post Office Department. He is buried at Hillside Cemetery in Metuchen.

In this interview, Mr. Peters discusses his recollections of Metuchen including stories about Thomas Edison, the Brainy Borough, various Main Street businesses, the Edgar and Costa families, the Loyal T. Ives Company, the Trojan Club, the Franklin School fire, and the Prickitt and McGuinness murders. He also mentions snow plows, motor-grocers, icemen, the junk man, skating along Metuchen ponds, the trolley, the Grove Avenue crossing, the Kornblatt elephant, the Methodist Church pastors, as well as notable train wrecks and robberies. He also talks extensively about his work as a Metuchen postman and his thoughts on Metuchen.

Interview note: Mr. Peters is joined by his wife, Irene Peters, and his high school classmate James Johnson for the interview. Overly redundant questions and answers have been omitted from this transcription for the sake of readability.

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**C. Peters:** And years and years ago, before this [St. Francis of Assisi] Cathedral was built, the St. Francis Church was on fire<sup>1</sup>. Now you wonder about that, sometimes every once in a while you hear those things. And talking about services, might I mention about the people wanting to move to Metuchen because of excellent school system, very good school system. And the [Metuchen] Borough Fire Department and the [Metuchen] Police [Department] have always been there when you needed them. And we should not complain about the Department of Public Works because they have such a hard job on a bad snow day. But we should be thankful that we have—whatever the Brainy Borough [unclear] built Main Street gave us a very wide Main Street. If you go to a lot of towns around, you'll see they [the streets] are very narrow. We can have parades and we can have our great fair [Metuchen Country Fair], and we can do things like anything that we want to. I was just telling Jimmy [James Johnson], I remember the store that was down on Main Street by B. D. Ford [Benjamin D. Ford], the hardware store [at 468 Main Street]. That went from a little store on Main Street where they used to get [unclear] sell penny candy, we got such a kick out of—we going in, we get the candy and Mr. [Jesse] Perry (Mr. and Mrs. Perry) and give them a penny [at 405 Main Street]. They're only supposed to be a penny each. They'd give you three or four. That's the kind of guy he was.

P. Boeddinghaus: He's mentioned lots of times by other people that I've talked to, Mr. and Mrs. Perry.

**C. Peters:** Is that right? Isn't that nice? And then right next to his place was the Commonwealth Bank [at 407 Main Street] and then after that, that's where that hardware was that nobody seems to remember: the B. D. Ford Hardware. He was a relation to Henry Ford. And get this now, he even said to me one day, "I bet you if I ever see my brother, he won't even know me." And would you know it, Henry was walking down the street with Thomas Edison and about fifty, sixty other people and Benjamin Ford said, "I'm going up to see him." And he went up to see him, and would you know that Henry put his arms around him, he says, "Oh Benjamin, you old [unclear], I want you to stay in Dearborn with me. We're going to open some kind of big automart." Dearborn, Michigan is where they moved all the Menlo Park laboratory [buildings] and all, everything over there. And I regret that—I sure would like to see—although I have seen it in the—where is it? Fort Myers, Florida? Yeah, that's where [unclear] is now.

P. Boeddinghaus: His winter home; Edison's winter home.

**C. Peters:** Yeah, that's right. He was a great man with rubber. He had every kind of tree, and he had all rubber trees that you could think of. But what I want to tell you about Benjamin Ford meeting his brother there, and Benjamin said, "I bet you don't even know how old I am." He said, "I sure do." And he told when he was born and everything, and then Henry came up with "Birthdays come and birthdays go. Where mine went, I do not know." [laughter] That's the one I wrote myself. But he was a comic, a very nice man.

But talking about Tom Edison again, that's another reason why Metuchen did receive a little bit of—with regards to the Brainy Borough because Mr. Edison

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<sup>1</sup> The first framed St. Francis Church in Metuchen burned down on December 21, 1903 when an oil lamp accidentally overturned and flames destroyed the church. The second wooden church was dedicated in 1904. The present-day St. Francis Cathedral was built in 1961-1963.

spent half of his time in Menlo [Park] and half of his time in Metuchen. Most of the time in Metuchen, he spent in the Metuchen Diner (Main [Street] and Middlesex [Avenue]). He used to go to get his Danish coffee every day.

P. Boeddinghaus: I have never heard that before.

C. Peters: You know he used to walk all the way from his laboratory down there and he had a habit of walking in the street because the people that followed him, there wouldn't be enough room for the people to—but after a while, the police had to stop, especially Lincoln Highway was a busy road. And so he used to walk down Main Street and when you'd see him coming, one had a [unclear] on and one had a high hat. And they both had canes. And then you knew where they were heading. People would ask you where you're going, I'd say, "Watch, just watch." And they could just about fit into the diner. But they got in there. You know what he did? Because see even his wife had to tell a story about, he would never stop writing. He even had a desk in his bedroom where he slept so he could write down when he thought of something. He says, "I was deaf," and that's a deformity. I learn a lot of other things about that. And that's what he did in Metuchen Diner. He used to write, get his little three-by-five pad out, and write on it, and put—what do you call it?—formulas on it and they'd fall on the floor. So everybody would pick them up, and this one lady picked up a handful of them and says, "Mr. Edison, will you please sign them for me?" He says, "Yeah, I'll sign a couple of them." And she says, "I'll pay you." "You don't have pay me." And then she says—he put [signature] Thomas Alva Edison. She says, "I never heard that name Alva. What's that mean?" He says, "Well, you guess. See if you can see what it means." So she thought of everything, "Was your father's name Alva? Alvin?" "Nope." "Does [it] have something to do with your mother's name?" "No, ma'am, it does not." "Well, what does it have to do? It has something—or are you [unclear]." "I spent a lot of time in Alabama and Virginia." And that's what he did. He abbreviated it. I didn't know that either. Did you Jim?

J. Johnson: No.

P. Boeddinghaus: I know he was born in Ohio. He was born in Ohio. And when I visit my daughter, there's sometimes an article about his home and that they're trying to make a historic [museum]?

C. Peters: There's a story once that he came from Ohio by train. Evidently, he got on the train without buying a ticket or something. Did you know? I wanted to tell that to Jimmy before, being that he's a train man. [laughter] They had a picture like that of [actor] Mickey Rooney or somebody, that fellow that played *Skippy*<sup>2</sup>, but he [Thomas Edison] was quite an active young man and when he came through this area, he picked Menlo first because he said it was countryside and this has a nice residential area. But the only thing he missed, it didn't have a Main Street or a business area. That's what he liked about Metuchen because he used to walk down Main Street with his followers.

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<sup>2</sup> *Skippy* was a 1931 American comedy film about a scrappy boy in the popular comic strip and novel *Skippy* by Percy Crosby. The lead character was played by Jackie Cooper.

So like I was telling you about those services in Metuchen, well, after the normal regular services, you get the Police, Fire, and Department of Public Works. I don't know what you call them, but there were people who used to ice. I used to get such a kick out of them in the morning after a snowy night. You open up the window and you hear jingle bells, just like on a reindeer, but it was just a ring of bells around the horse's neck. And this was the man coming up the street with a one-horse plow, this triangular shape, and it used to be cleaning the sidewalks before everybody got up. And his name was Bert McAdams [Charles Herbert McAdams]. He was the first Department of Public Works chairman, and he loved children so much he didn't want the children to get hurt because the first car out would only make one track, right? In those days, there were no snow plows. But he didn't have to tell the horse where the sidewalk was, the horse knew. At that one time, he was the only one that did it, but it got too much for him. So they broke the town in six different sections and they had made sure that they were pretty well-covered from the children.

J. Johnson: Do you remember Soren Rasmussen?

**C. Peters: Do I remember Soren? I sure do.**

J. Johnson: He also plowed the sidewalks with his horse.

**C. Peters: Oh, he was a great mover. He lived in Metuchen [at 48 Durham Avenue] for years.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. And Mr. [George] Dinnebeil used to tell us how they plowed—

**C. Peters: Who?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Mr. Dinnebeil.

**C. Peters: Oh, Dinnebeil, yes.**

P. Boeddinghaus: He used to tell us that they plowed the sidewalks so the commuters could walk to the train station [Metuchen Railroad Station].

**C. Peters: Yeah, because that was impossible to get it done in time for the—but I thought it was good because you notice when you're walking on a road and a car comes the other way and you're walking in one little path and the little tykes, they can't see them. But I gave him a lot of credit. And then, when he'd come down the street, he'd say, all he'd ask for was to tell the ladies to bring some apples out and some cubed sugar for the horse. And we used to say, "What do you want, Bert?" "Well, I'll take a coffee." So one lady brought a bottle of Scotch. She said, "Would you like one of those?" He wasn't driving, so he couldn't say [unclear]. [laughter; coughing] And I imagine he was pretty cold, but he did have a blanket on the horse. But you know after it snows, sometimes it seems to get a little warmer. I don't know why, but I felt that way. After that one, maybe you remember—do you remember a fellow coming down with—he had a bicycle with an umbrella on it and he had a—what do you call a wheel that you sharpen things with?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Like a grinder?

**C. Peters:** No, they sharpen with it.

J. Johnson: Yeah, grinder.

**C. Peters:** And he used to bring a tiny little belt and all the ladies would come out with everything they needed sharpened, both scissors to lawnmowers to everything. And he'd stay there and sharpen until he was finished. It was a very minimum fee; it didn't cost too much. But there was another fellow after this fellow, his name was John McCracken. After he gave up this job, there was a fellow in Metuchen by the name of [Francis] Earle Lawrence; he was a postal employee also. He was what you call a Mr. Fix It. He could fix everything from toasters to roasters to everything. And he had a little place on [59] Pearl Street and he used to have a lineup there with the ladies bringing their things down.

Now the next service that was sort of by a volunteer—[unclear] you remember the big square Greyhound buses? Well, he bought one one day. And he took all the chairs out and everything, made it just one big room, and he put shelves in it, and he filled it up with as many groceries as he could. And he also had a freezer. It was called a motor-grocer. Of course, those days, there weren't any supermarkets. They didn't have any stores close by like mom-and-pop stores. And a lot of the ladies, when they heard he was coming there, they were lined up in front of the house. And he'd go to each house and he'd wait on them. And he also carried a book.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, he could charge on the book.

**C. Peters:** He could charge on the book.

P. Boeddinghaus: My parents did that. Now this was around Metuchen? He would go up and down the streets?

**C. Peters:** Up and down the whole streets in town.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, very enterprising. He was very enterprising.

**C. Peters:** Yeah, I thought that was—and you know he had almost everything on that. And if he didn't have it, there was another man that came around. He had a horse and buggy (one of these buggies like the average people use). You know one of these high ones. And guess what he had? He carried eggs and butter and stuff like that. That's what the grocer man didn't carry. And then shortly thereafter, right in the back here, was a fellow by the name of Harry Oliver. He used to carry ice (no refrigerators in those days). So he'd come and he had these hundred-pound cakes of ice. He used to get them from Costas<sup>3</sup> (Costa's Ice Cream Company) probably on [16] Pearl Street and he'd chip off a piece, maybe twenty-five pounds or something and carry in the house with his ice tongs for twenty-five cents. And he'd open up the top and put it in there. And you know what the people did with

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<sup>3</sup> In 1923, Gregory Costa Sr. built an ice cream and ice plant at 16 Pearl Street. This was at a time when automatic household refrigerators were in early development and not in wide use. The ice plant manufactured several tons of ice each day.

those iceboxes<sup>4</sup> afterwards? They made little bookcases out of them. They painted them up; they put glass doors in the front. They looked beautiful. They were just like an antique.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, they were made of very good wood, maybe oak, and had very nice hardware. They were very durable. Like what years are you talking about with this?

C. Peters: **This time? Well, let's see, what would you say? I was about six, seven years old. So I remember that might be [19]23, [19]25, something like that. But that was where I was beginning to think that Metuchen was sort of leading up to that name that we have, the Brainy Borough. And you know every time I go anywhere, or if I go downtown, or if I go to a meeting—of course, I belong to four [unclear] organizations—and then the first thing they say, “Hey Chet, what about this Brainy Borough thing? Where'd that come from?” I said, “Yes, and did you know that if you want to mail a letter anybody from anywhere to Brainy Borough, New Jersey, we would get it?” And it's happened some, but now that they have a zip code on it, it's easier too. And they also have a postmark with the Brainy Borough. And if you go down Central Avenue, if you notice the Central Avenue Substation [at 195 Central Avenue] has “Brainy Boro Station” [sign]. So that was one of the reasons they did it.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So like now, when did you start to work in the Post Office? And where was it located?

C. Peters: **Well, the Post Office was located right back where the—I think there's a Chinese Laundry there, Leon Chin [Hand Laundry at 9 Pennsylvania Avenue].**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, on Penn Avenue.

C. Peters: **Pennsylvania Avenue, that's right. And they used to take the mail up by—it was one of these railroad carts. Jimmy knows what I mean. And they put the mail on it, and pushed it up. And then if you had the registered mail, you had to take a revolver with you. And I said, “Boy, what did they give you that for?” [chuckling] I wondered if somebody would take the registered mail. And lots of times, they did have a lot of registered mail. And then I started in, I graduated from high school in 1936 with my good friend James [Johnson]. And I worked in New York for two or three years. I commuted here, which I didn't like anyhow. But some of these men I'm going to tell you about, they're the ones somewhat responsible for that name Brainy Borough. There's at least a half a dozen or more, probably some I don't know about, where they built their own offices and buildings in Metuchen so they wouldn't have to commute and they wouldn't have to pay taxes. And they were saving at the same time; they wouldn't have to run for the train. Jimmy will remember some of these names: Harold T. Edgar<sup>5</sup>. He was the founder [president] of Edgar Clays and he has a little building, if you go by, you'll see it, Edgar Clay Company [at 10 Station Place]. All his life, he was interested in clay and he told me one day, “Someday, there will be a lot of clay used in building.” And he was right because they used it for flooring now and for tile. And they used it also for the blocks that they put in the cellar because you**

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<sup>4</sup> An icebox, also known as a cold closet, was a non-mechanical refrigerator that was commonly used in the early twentieth century before the invention of safely-powered refrigeration devices.

<sup>5</sup> Harold T. Edgar was the president of the Edgar Plastic Kaolin Company, also known as the Edgar Brothers Clay Company. The company was founded by his brother, Charles S. Edgar

**don't have to paint them because it's the actual color of the clay that is in the [unclear].**

P. Boeddinghaus: May I just interject this, were his clay pits in New Jersey? Or did he ship the clay up from the Carolinas or Georgia or something?

**C. Peters: No, [unclear] Georgia, some little town. He made clay about an abandoned clay mine and there was a manufacturer down there where he hired him to make the different products that he was going to sell.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Because there was a lot of clay in our area. It was a big industry.

**C. Peters: I know, at one time. Yeah, there's a place where the kids used to go swimming years ago. They used to call it the Clay Pits, and that was one of them. Now he, when he was talking one day to somebody, he said, "Boy, I don't have to run now for the train." And one good thing about it, he helped business in Metuchen because his customers used to come by train to Metuchen to look at his displays and look at all his—so while they were here, they could do a little shopping or something like that. And that helped a lot.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I heard that he used to have dinner at the Metuchen Inn [at 424 Middlesex Avenue]. That was flourishing in those days, and he liked to eat there.

**C. Peters: Huh?**

P. Boeddinghaus: He liked to eat at the Metuchen Inn.

**C. Peters: Yeah, that's right.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And who else?

**C. Peters: He [Harold T. Edgar] lived on 335 Middlesex Avenue. And to keep the memory of Georgia, he built the Georgian Colonial home with the big—you probably see it when you—big white posts.**

J. Johnson: Yup, still there, yup. Didn't he [Charles S. Edgar, brother] have a lot to do with the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association at 65 High Street]?

**C. Peters: Yeah, let me tell you that too. He was very instrumental in youth. He loved those—everything he do, like even they named a school after him. But he has a beautiful picture in the Metuchen YMCA with his—a paragraph under how he was instrumental in having that YMCA built. He donated a lot of money and he was a great walker too. You could see him walking around, down Main Street or something. Now he was located down on Middlesex Avenue. He could walk home from his office and showroom and that he could wave goodbye to everybody as they were commuting.**

**Now the other one was—was that three or four? [rustling of papers] Oh, here it is. [long pause; reviewing papers] I told you about the iceman.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, you said about Harry Oliver. Where was that icehouse?

- C. Peters:**           **The icehouse was almost right next door to the diner where Mr. Edison used to eat. There was a house, 542 Middlesex Avenue, and right in the back they had it. And that's where they kept it [the icehouse].**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Did he deliver by horse and wagon too?
- C. Peters:**           **I don't remember that. I don't think so. My wife bought me some Yankee hanky. Thanks a lot, Irene [wife]. [laughter] That's what they are.**
- I. Peters:            He's a great [New York] Yankee [baseball] fan.
- C. Peters:**           **While we're on the subject of ice, did I name the five or six?**
- I. Peters:            Yes, go ahead, speak about that.
- C. Peters:**           **You know we have a great man in Metuchen; [he] came to Metuchen from Italy. He used to sell lollipops on Main Street, Salvatore Costa<sup>6</sup>. And he had an ice cream factory on [16] Pearl Street where he manufactured the French ice cream. And he used to send it to New York—would you believe it?—by train! He had a special car on one of the trains [that] was an ice car and he'd put one man in New York with one of the hundred-pound pieces of ice. He used it for his, I think, fish markets. And he used to put French ice cream on there. He'd go to his icehouse and load it up. And then every once in a while, my mother [Cecelia Sherry (Wisniewski) Pydyszski] would send me down if I didn't get ice from the iceman, take my wagon and go get a piece of ice, and you'd put the money in the machine and they would come from upstairs from the men who were working in there. And that's how you would get your ice.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Now they made the ice there?
- C. Peters:**           **Yes.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: They made the ice and the ice cream?
- C. Peters:**           **That's right. Then a few years after that, just recent years, he bought that ice cream factory<sup>7</sup> on Route 1. I forget what the name was.**
- J. Johnson:          Woodbridge. By Woodbridge.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Up in Woodbridge.
- C. Peters:**           **Woodbridge, yeah. That's right.**
- J. Johnson:          His son<sup>8</sup> later became the mayor of Metuchen.

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<sup>6</sup> Gregory Salvatore Costa Jr., sometimes referred to as "Sal," was the son of Gregory Costa Sr., who established the Costa Ice Cream Company shop at 416 Main Street in 1914 and built the company's first factory plant at 16 Pearl Street in 1923. During this time, Costa Ice Cream Company became the largest independent manufacturer of ice cream in the New York metropolitan area. Gregory Salvatore Costa Jr. took over as president of the Costa Ice Cream Company for several years.

<sup>7</sup> The factory plant moved to the Avenel section of Woodbridge in the 1940s, and the company closed in 1977.

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Costa served as mayor of Metuchen during the 1950s.

- C. Peters:** Yeah, he was mayor, one of the mayors, yeah.
- J. Johnson: Joe [Costa].
- P. Boeddinghaus: Right.
- C. Peters:** And I want to tell you who the first mayor of Metuchen was. I'm going to get to live—but the first mayor of Metuchen, I think you know now, Jim, right? You tell her? William Thornall. William Roy Thornall, yes.
- I. Peters: Like what year, Chet?
- C. Peters:** Nineteen-hundred, he was the first mayor. We're having a reunion shortly, and one of his sons and his wife, they were on our committee. We lost both of them, Blanche Bates and [Jay] Worthington Thornall.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, Worthington did an oral history. I was listening to it. Worthington did an oral history years ago and I've listened to it, yes.
- C. Peters:** Oh yeah. He has the books down in the library. And he has a—his family and he—they [the books] are very interesting. I enjoyed reading them.
- J. Johnson: There are several volumes. [chuckles]
- P. Boeddinghaus: And he lived outside of Metuchen? Did he live in Menlo Park area? Thornall?
- C. Peters:** Metropark?
- P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, up that way.
- C. Peters:** No, there was—I know where she means. By where that—that's a bunch of homes where Blanche used to live.
- P. Boeddinghaus: He does not live there?
- J. Johnson: Where the Elks [Lodge No. 1914 at 87 Middlesex Avenue] is now there.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Along in there.
- I. Peters: They were over at Forsgate Farms.
- C. Peters:** I'm trying to find out where the Elks building was. There was a nice old-fashioned residence there and it was a restaurant run by two middle-aged ladies. I think their name was Acken, if I'm not mistaken.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Or was that the Litterst? The Litterst sisters?
- C. Peters:** That name sounds very familiar. Yeah, he was a bank director. But Alexander C. Litterst and the family, they decided to open a restaurant [formerly located at 36 Middlesex Avenue]. And right in back of it there was Middlesex Nursing Home

[at 34 Middlesex Avenue]. Was that run by the Stonaker family? Now that other one that was—

I. Peters: The junk man.

**C. Peters: Pardon?**

I. Peters: The junk man.

**C. Peters: Oh yeah. All us children in the family used to wait for this one. This man used to come down and he's here coming because he had a loud voice, the junk man. And you know everybody, if you say, "Rags" and everything, and the first child that got the bag of rags would take it out to him. They get a quarter or something like that, and they'd save it up and then go to the movies or something. Not only that, he picked up all kinds of metal or anything that you might have that might bring him something. When he'd get finished, his truck would be full.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You mentioned other—you had brothers and sisters?

**C. Peters: Me? Yeah, I had a large family. Six boys and five girls.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh! That is a large family.

**C. Peters: And that's why it was a big house [at 60 Jonesdale Avenue]. It had four or five bedrooms or more.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And are any of your siblings still living?

**C. Peters: Yes, yup. They are living all over the place too. They live in many states and many areas.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I'll just tell you a quick junk man story. We lived in Highland Park as a kid and the junk man came in the neighborhood. And my mother wasn't home or something, and I felt so sorry for the junk man. He looked so ragged. And I took my mother's velvet slippers and gave it to him because she never wore them. And when she came home, she was furious with me! She said, "Do you realize he's a millionaire? And you're giving him my good slippers!" Oh boy, I never forgot that. [laughter]

**C. Peters: You remember Berry Borum, Jim?**

J. Johnson: Borum?

**C. Peters: Berry Borum, who used to live on [20] Pearl Street next to Costa's Ice Cream. He had the oldest car I ever could see, oldest truck. And he used to go around, collect junk too, but this other guy beat him out because he used to get there earlier in the morning. But we would push Berry Borum's truck up the hill a couple times. But he was a fine Negro man and everybody loved him.**

P. Boeddinghaus: My husband Jack [Boeddinghaus] used to fix the truck for him and change the tires because he worked in Henry Schroeder's [phonetic] City Service Gas Station by the diner. And Berry Borum used to come in with that truck, and Jack always remembers trying to keep it going for him.

**C. Peters:** Yeah, they did everything. His tires were pretty bare at once.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now do you remember the trolley? The trolley that was on Main Street?

**C. Peters:** Yeah, I'm going to tell you about the trolley. It reminded me so much—not really, but when I hear about the Metuchen trolley, I think of the great trolley out in San Francisco. But I was walking down Main Street one day when I was a little fellow, and I didn't know what that was. Nobody told me what a trolley was. But it looked like a great big box car coming down the street, like it would come off the railroad. But then I found out why the tracks are on Main Street, but they had overhead wires with that—what's that thing on top of the train that touches the wire?

J. Johnson: The pantograph, but that isn't what they called it on the trolley. [laughs] It's a trolley, I think that's it. The trolley line.

**C. Peters:** The [unclear]?

J. Johnson: Yeah, the pole, trolley pole.

**C. Peters:** So we used to watch it; it was going up the hill. Of course, San Francisco had a cable, but this was electric and they had a man by the name of—a former policeman. His name was Daddy Smith. He was a conductor and well, he'd roll in and he'd collect the tickets and everything. And he had a habit of having this great, big, heavy police coat on and in one pocket, it had lollipops, [and] one pocket, tootsie rolls. So the kids used to bother him all over, needless to say.

P. Boeddinghaus: Let's get back to Mr. Costa. You were mentioning that he gave out lollipops or did you say he sold them?

**C. Peters:** Sold them! He sold them, yeah. But he had that store [at 416 Main Street], everybody was hoping that we would have an ice cream store. And he opened up one and it's still there, but it had been many businesses since then. That's what makes me so happy that I am a Metuchenite because stores in Metuchen, they don't stay empty too long. They could be empty now and then all of a sudden, there'd be a long list of people trying to get in because I think, like with the [Metuchen] Country Fair we run, we jump with one subject to another. But I think you understand that is really mainly for the Metuchen Chamber of Commerce people who stayed after all the shopping centers were being built. While other towns were falling by the wayside, Metuchen continued to grow and grow. And now, if you notice, all of a sudden we have five new restaurants again and all kinds of pizza parlors and all kinds of stores that—in fact, my wife finds that she can get everything in Metuchen that she needs and everything that they always have in the shopping center. What's one of the best stores [that] I think Irene is very unhappy about was Morris Stores [at 413 Main Street]. What's happened to that? It's going to be a big restaurant; I think it is already.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, part of it is.

J. Johnson: There's four or five different stores in there now.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. But getting back to the Costa Ice Cream, he did have an ice cream shop on Main Street, 416 Main. And I worked there after high school for John Kalkanis.

**C. Peters: Oh, John Kalkanis. Yeah, he had a little store up a little further.**

P. Boeddinghaus: It was such fine quality ice cream. It was wonderful.

J. Johnson: Very good.

P. Boeddinghaus: And I worked for John after school making up ice cream sodas and sundaes, and he made sandwiches and he made his own candy.

**C. Peters: Do you remember Mr. Costa had candy on his counter? Three chocolate chunks. Did he make that too?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Mr. Kalkanis was Greek and he was trained in making candy and he was very secretive about it.

**C. Peters: Oh boy.**

P. Boeddinghaus: He used to do it in the back room and he wouldn't let any of his employees see how he did it.

**C. Peters: That reminds me, it was secretive place in Metuchen. I didn't have it on there [the paper], but now you reminded me of it. But I remember John Kalkanis—well, he sold, what, your own candy and ice cream?**

P. Boeddinghaus: And soda and made sandwiches. And that was a very lovely place. It had booths and a nice marble counter and stools. It was very nice.

**C. Peters: You know we used to have an ice cream stand and booths in the Boyts and everybody was so unhappy when he closed because he had to expand his store. And then Mr. Costa built the store there and he had about—it was a place where all the youth used to go and they were glad because he never chased them out or anything like that. They would go there [unclear] or not at all, I hear, from Metuchen High [School] or other places. And brings back memories to me because Irene will probably—wouldn't want me to say this—but I met my wife in the Boston Candy Kitchen in Perth Amboy. [laughter]**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes. And that's where I met Jack in Costa Cottage. [laughs]

**C. Peters: You're kidding? Insane!**

P. Boeddinghaus: I used to make him extra-special ice cream soda. [laughter]

**C. Peters: That's good to know.**

I. Peters: Well, I remember Costa when I first was married and came to Metuchen, yeah.

**C. Peters:** And then Salvatore Costa, when he went over to Woodbridge and he had this big home up on Chestnut Avenue, 245 Chestnut<sup>9</sup>. They hated to leave but his daughter and Bill Storts, who she married, he used to have a store in Metuchen by the name of Contessa [at 416 Main Street]. And we could go over a list of all the stores that used to be and all the stores there now, but that would take quite a while. What was the subject we were talking—you wanted to know about Mr. Costa? Well, he came here, I don't know what year, but he was like a figure. He would walk up and down Main Street. And you know when you get to see him and like Tom Edison, and these are all brainy, startling men because even after the 1900s, if you pick up a newspaper years ago, and even today, they'll be writing about it, that after 1900 Metuchen was—they couldn't figure out—they were trying to figure out why they got the name and there's all kinds of stories. But the one that I really stick to was about the people that stayed here and built their own office and there's one other man—do you remember the name Mr.—what did they have—oh yeah, Leslie K. Gulton.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh Gulton, yes.

**C. Peters:** Gulton Industries [at 212-250 Durham Avenue]?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, Gulton, yes.

**C. Peters:** He transferred most of his business from the New York City / Brooklyn area. So he bought the old Public Service building on Durham Avenue and he was manufacturer of transistors and resistors for radios, televisions, computers, and everything else that they could use it for. He also manufactured batteries to use in all materials.

P. Boeddinghaus: And that gave a lot of employment to the local people. They could walk over there.

**C. Peters:** Yes, it did. That employed a lot of people. And he modeled the building and he made it very comfortable for the people that work for him.

P. Boeddinghaus: Unfortunately, that's all empty now. There's nothing going on there. It's all empty. That reminds me too, what do you know about Gort? Do you remember the Gort Bone China?

**C. Peters:** Oh, Gort Bone China, the best bone china you could get. Now they were not the real secretive like you talk, but they wouldn't even let you come into the back of the store. They had regular [unclear] and things like—there were a lot of industries like that; they're not the only ones. But I still have a figurine they gave me for Christmas. And I was glad to get it because you know people remember the mailman on Christmas, and boy, it's beautiful.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, it's very collectible. Believe me, it's very collectible because there were so few pieces made from 1944 to 1955 and then they went out of business.

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<sup>9</sup> According to the 1961 City Directory, the residence at 245 East Chestnut Avenue was owned by William A. Storts. His wife was Marie C. Storts, who was the sister of Gregory Salvatore Costa Jr. and the daughter of Gregory Costa Sr.

**C. Peters:** Now you know what? I don't even know. One was Eric Gort, and I think, I don't even know where they went. I do remember they moved.

J. Johnson: They went up to Lake George [New York].

**C. Peters:** Lake George?

J. Johnson: Um-hm. They [Walter Gort, ceramist] lived next door to us on Sheridan Avenue. We moved there in 1952. So shortly after, they did move out. But they lived there from 1952 probably two, three years. They lived right next door to us and we visited them at Lake George several years later because they opened a—

**C. Peters:** You know you reminded me of something. You say Lake George, there's another family [who] moved to Lake Placid. Do you remember Waylande Gregory [sculptor], he built that beautiful little statue up in the Roosevelt Park. I forget what he called it—World of Vision<sup>10</sup>? Something like that. And he put that up there and it's been there for a few years. It hasn't whittled down; it hasn't whittled or nothing.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, see that's what I'm saying, this area is known for its clay. There's Waylande Gregory, there was [Francis Joseph] Von Tury, and what was that tile company in Perth Amboy? The tile place in Perth Amboy. A lot of men worked there.

J. Johnson: Terra Cotta?

P. Boeddinghaus: Terra Cotta. And the Gort. And [Charles] Volkmar.

**C. Peters:** Who?

P. Boeddinghaus: Volkmar made pottery in Metuchen around Volkmar Place, off of New Durham Road.

**C. Peters:** I know where that is. See when we dealt with the things like this, when I read the books at the library, it gives a paragraph on Metuchen, the Brainy Borough, then there's there this "See this note," and then you have to go find it, but it takes time. Some of this I had to research and it turned out there was the one that you talk about a secretive company. Did you know there was a very—what should I say—exclusive needle company in Metuchen?

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yeah. Tell me about that.

**C. Peters:** Do you know the Loyal T. Ives Company [at 544 Middlesex Avenue]?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**C. Peters:** And that was run by the Kanis brothers, the German brothers, they lived on Central Avenue.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, my husband went to school with the boys.

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<sup>10</sup> The sculptures in the fountain at Roosevelt Park are titled Light Dispelling Darkness. It was designed by Waylande Gregory in 1937.

**C. Peters:** But you know you couldn't even go up the driveway; they wouldn't let you go up the driveway. If I had to carry mail or they got a package, I would park in Oliver's driveway [at 542 Middlesex Avenue] and walk to their door. And I always wanted to talk to them, I never got a chance because there's one man around yet. I'm trying to find out where he is. So somebody told me they had a leaflet printed when the company first opened, and what type of needles they made. They made needles for anything you wanted. I know both my sisters used to work there. And they said it wasn't hard; you just had to sort them out and things like that. And they just walked around once awhile and watched them, and that's all. But nobody else could go in there unless they had a special permission or something like that.

P. Boeddinghaus: That was like behind where Friendly's [restaurant at 550 Middlesex Avenue] is now; it was back in there, wasn't it? Off Middlesex Avenue?

J. Johnson: Yes.

**C. Peters:** Which one?

P. Boeddinghaus: The needle factory was like behind where Friendly's is now.

**C. Peters:** Yes, in that area. In fact, there was a good friend, it was my—in that little garage was Judge Brehmer, former justice of peace. Reinhold Brehmer, he was one of these guys. I bet he even performed a marriage in his garage. [laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: That wasn't you though?

I. Peters: No.

J. Johnson: His garage is where the Metuchen Fire Department is now. It wasn't the same building. It's a new building there, but that was his garage there. They may have even used part of that building. But yes, he owned that garage.

**C. Peters:** Yeah, at one time they had—one garage [Eagle Hook and Ladder Company] was up on 398 Main Street, the fire engine. And the other one [Washington Hose Company at 503 Middlesex Avenue] was down, and they built that garage [Metuchen Fire Department at 503 Middlesex Avenue] and they keep them both together, both the fire engines now.

**How about the blacksmith, Jim? You know a little bit more about him.**

J. Johnson: The blacksmith? Yeah, the blacksmith was also behind the needle factory.

**C. Peters:** That's right, yeah.

J. Johnson: I don't know if it was a chestnut tree, but there was a spreading tree over there anyway. And we lived at that time on [43] William Street, which is right closer. We went often up there to watch the blacksmith. And he did a lot of shoeing horses at that time. That was back in the twenties.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, there was a couple of liveries in Metuchen, wasn't there? Mrs. [Mary Ruth (Burroughs)] Eby tells me about the liveries. I can't remember the names, but you know they would provide the carriages for funerals or weddings.

**C. Peters: Yeah, in those days they needed them because same with the horses. With the horses hopefully had to be somebody who knew how to put them on and take them off. You know I'm very glad now that we're here and that my friend Jim is here with us. Where were you born, Jim?**

J. Johnson: I was born in Brooklyn [New York].

**C. Peters: Brooklyn? And Gordie Sterling [Gordon Sterling] was born in Jersey City. But he has a little—if I want him to tell me now, maybe tell you, about—what was that man's name that took care of the railroad track on Grove Avenue? Mr. Cheche.**

J. Johnson: Oh! Yeah, well, yeah.

**C. Peters: He had a little sign.**

J. Johnson: Grove Avenue years ago, not too many years ago, was a grade crossing and had a watchman there. He had a sign. There was nothing (no gates or anything like that), but he had a sign "STOP." And his name—the one that I remember was Archie [Archibald Herron]. And I don't know his last name.

**C. Peters: I don't know either.**

J. Johnson: But his name was Archie and he was there for years and years. And his father was the one that murdered [Judge Samuel] Prickitt, and they sent him to prison. In the court, when the court case came up, they found him guilty, but they didn't sentence him at that time. They were going to sentence him later. In the interim, the judge died. So he never was executed, he lived. And he lived to a ripe old age in, I guess, it was at Trenton Prison. But I've seen that in the papers several times.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, that's referred to, and Dolly Buchanan, she did an oral history in the seventies and she mentions all that and the name escapes me of the man who did the shooting. There was some disagreement with the Prickitt. Was he a judge? Prickitt was a judge and this man was disgruntled about something and came up to the house and shot him.

**C. Peters: I thought maybe he put something in the paper he didn't like.**

J. Johnson: He was a newspaper. Newspaper. He ran the *Metuchen Recorder*<sup>11</sup>, I guess it was.

**C. Peters: For years.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And then who was this Sam Cheche that was at the railroad crossing?

**C. Peters: You know what he did to me? When I was a kid, we used to go ice skating up to Sages Wood; it was called Redfield Pond. And we'd go past him going up Henry Street, then we'd go up to Oakland Avenue, and he'd call us over. He'd say,**

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<sup>11</sup> The *Metuchen Recorder* was owned during the early twentieth century by Charles Abram Prickitt, who was the son of Judge Samuel Prickitt.

**“Chester, come over here.” I said, “What do you want, Mr. Cheche?” I said, “Watch, there’s a car coming.” He said, “Wait a minute, I’ll be right back.” So he got his little GO and STOP sign and he says, “Go home and get some potatoes.” He always had a fire down there outside with a little grate. And I’d go home and get the potato, and I didn’t know what he wanted at first. He says, “When you come back, I’ll give them to you.” So we’d go skating and we were kind of cold, and we came here and we’re sure glad. And they were a little black, they were burnt, but the skin is better when it’s black. My mother used to tell me, curly hair, right? Like the toast. And did you know something? He used to have butter there.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh really?

**C. Peters: And boy, they were good. So that’s why I remember [unclear] Mr. Cheche.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now tell me again, you called it some kind of woods. What woods? What was it called?

**C. Peters: Sages, S-a-g-e-s. Sages Woods. But I never could find out whoever named it. I know the Redfield Pond, and then Spears Pond. And there was of course Little Africa. We had another pond.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, where was Little Africa?

**C. Peters: Little Africa by Clive Street, right?**

J. Johnson: You wanted to come out of Clive Street there. We called that Little Africa. I don’t know what the real name of the pond was.

**C. Peters: Right after the woods was the golf course [Metuchen Golf and Country Club at 244 Plainfield Road] or a wide-open space. But we used to go up to Little Africa skating. And in the summertime, we’d take our pop tents there and either go to the woods there or Sages Woods.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And how about Connors Pond? Did you ever skate on Connors Pond?

**C. Peters: I never did, no. But I know where it was.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You know where it was. Well, now you can’t see it. It’s still there, but it’s concealed by homes.

J. Johnson: Is that the one up at the end of Linden Avenue?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, up in that area, yeah.

J. Johnson: We went there a lot.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, see, Jack used to ice skate a lot too.

**C. Peters: Isn’t it funny how the names stick? Like Spears Pond, that’s a big family in Metuchen. They used to live on Grove Avenue, but they named it after them for what reason I don’t know. Maybe because they skated there and kept it clean and**

**all that. Maybe they built the fire, I don't know. Then Roosevelt [Park] came and that's where we all went.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So would you say you had like a happy childhood? You were free to run and play and go skating?

C. Peters: **Yeah, you know another little thing that nobody remembers that I think there is a sign post there—Woodbuff? What do you call it? It was a little stage show on the ground, Wildwood? Woodruff Pond?**

J. Johnson: Woodwild Park.

C. Peters: **Woodwild Park, yes. Have you heard of that?**

P. Boeddinghaus: The amphitheater up there.

C. Peters: **And we used to go there for school. They'd take a class over, and we'd sit on the bank on the grass and they put a show over at some point. And I thought that was great. And we spent the afternoon there. That's right in the back of Mrs. Wright's Nursery School [at 62 Oak Avenue], where our children went to nursery school. And she had a lot of success because she had a nice place to take them and to walk through the woods and everything.**

J. Johnson: Before there was a Memorial Park, the Memorial Day Parade wound up at that amphitheater (Woodwild Park). That was where the activities took part after the parade. And did you know that that hollow there is where the glacier ended. It was a big block of ice and the block of ice sunk down and created that park there. And there was a swamp—I don't know if it's still swampy—right next to it. But that was all part of it.

C. Peters: **I often wondered why. I often wondered why that hole was there and what they dug it up for. [recording ends]**

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

C. Peters: **You know you've got to realize if you go to a lot of towns, now we're very lucky that we have cranes and we have a lot of room [unclear]. Of course, you know our Country Fair takes up a lot of room. That's why a lot of these store keepers stay here. And I've been to a lot of towns where you have to park one way and you don't get any pleasure leaving your car in the middle of the road.**

**And as you know right next to us is a tremendously large township which we're surrounded by: Edison. They don't have a Main Street. And I used to talk to Tony Yelencsics [Anthony Yelencsics] quite a lot, the great mayor of Edison, and he felt so bad, but I said, "Why don't you get together with Mayor [Donald] Wernik and then you can have your parades here?" I think he did one year, but I don't know how many times after that. They say you always need the hole in the doughnut like we were the hole in the doughnut.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, we were. We are. We still are. [laughs]

**C. Peters:**           **We still are, right.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you remember when the Forum [Theatre] was on the Main and Highland Avenue? The theater?

**C. Peters:**           **Yes. I know the man who [unclear].**

J. Johnson:           It wasn't the Forum then. He'll tell you where the Forum got its name. Do you remember?

**C. Peters:**           **Oh yeah. The Forum Theatre was named after two men in Metuchen: Jimmy Forgione [James Forgione] and Henry Rumler (Fo-rum). They built it, and they bought the land and built it, and they kept it going.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. That one is still going strong up there on Main Street. But how about when it was on Main and Highland?

**C. Peters:**           **Yeah, I don't know, maybe it was called just a theater [Metuchen Theatre at 460 Main Street]. But Henry Salaki, he was a policeman, and he was also an organist, one of the organists. And he used to play the organ and he introduced in between the—when it started. And then when they had the old serials, remember? Wood Gibson [phonetic] [unclear] said, "Continue next week." But he used to play in between that. And after he went, we mentioned Mr. Thornall before? Worthington Thornall, he was a great organist and he used to play at the Forum. I think he played in some other big theater in New York, but I don't remember where it was. But that little theater in Main and Highland, ten cents. That was it.**

J. Johnson:           Yeah, for years it was ten cents.

P. Boeddinghaus: I heard too that the owner was very generous and that [if] the kids didn't have the money, he'd go in free.

**C. Peters:**           **I wouldn't doubt it. I don't know who that was. Do you Jim?**

J. Johnson:           Was it Forgione?

**C. Peters:**           **Who owned the theater. Who?**

J. Johnson:           Forgione?

**C. Peters:**           **It could have been him.**

J. Johnson:           I think [James] Forgione was the owner. And later on, he built the big theater [Forum Theatre at 314 Main Street]. But Salaki was the one that—I guess he was the projectionist; he was a one-man band. [laughs]

**C. Peters:**           **No, his brother. Charles Salaki<sup>12</sup> was the projectionist at the Forum and he was the policeman<sup>13</sup> in Metuchen. [coughing] That was Henry's brother. You know**

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<sup>12</sup> Charles Salaki Sr. produced the 1929 film titled *Metuchen...THE MOVIE*.

<sup>13</sup> The Metuchen policeman was Henry Salaki.

how they used to see something and tab it? Henry Salaki's mane was always slicked down like you couldn't even blow on it. When he'd come down, they'd all yell, "Here comes the Sheik!" And that's why we used to call him, the Sheik. [laughter] The Sheik of Metuchen, that was our beat.

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you remember that unsolved murder at the tavern on Main Street that's still unsolved.

**C. Peters:** Yes. Yeah, that's when Jimmy was talking about Archie. Maybe he might have been on that one too. One was the McGuinness boys was killed. They used to have what you call, near where Mario's [Restaurant at 419 Main Street] is, I think it is [unclear] stores, the Ratskeller. And he [William McGuinness] used to live across the street on New Street and he was walking across the street one day. This fellow was already stalking him and to this day, they never have found out who it was<sup>14</sup>.

P. Boeddinghaus: I talked to Eddie Leiss [Edward Leiss, former Metuchen Police chief] about that.

**C. Peters:** You did?

P. Boeddinghaus: And he said it's still unsolved and he was not robbed. He had the day's receipts and they don't know why.

**C. Peters:** No money. He didn't take a money.

P. Boeddinghaus: They didn't take any money off of him. That's the mystery. Yeah.

**C. Peters:** And even the people that were in there at that time didn't even know it happened.

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you remember Mrs. Eby?

**C. Peters:** Who?

P. Boeddinghaus: Mrs. Eby from Rector Street?

**C. Peters:** Yeah, she used to live on 24 Rector Street. Notice I'll give you the numbers all the time.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, you and Teddy Haas [Theodore Haas Jr., former Metuchen postman] talk that way. [laughter]

**C. Peters:** He was what?

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<sup>14</sup> William McGuinness was murdered on the porch of his home in 1937. According to the *Metuchen Recorder* from July 14, 1938, "The tavern keeper, who locked his place of business at the usual time, stopped in the restaurant across the street as usual and then proceeded to the next entrance, his own, was shot once through the stomach, as he pushed open the door from the street onto the side porch. McGuinness staggered back and dropped on the sidewalk, where his cashbox and a copper-nosed bullet were found, the only clues in a puzzling case ... While no motive has ever been definitely established it is believed that McGuinness' movements had been watched and that a robbery was planned, but something went wrong. Unless the revolver turns up at some time, it is improbably that the crime will ever be solved."

P. Boeddinghaus: You and Teddy Haas talk house numbers.

**C. Peters: Now I'm glad Teddy, you mention him, he's a wonderful boy like his daddy<sup>15</sup>. I wonder if he named all the trains that went by and when they left, Mr. Haas.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And Mrs. Eby is one-hundred years old.

**C. Peters: Is that right?**

J. Johnson: She's still living?

P. Boeddinghaus: And she's still living. And she's in the Reformed Church Nursing Home in Irvington. And every chance I get—well, I don't drive out of town, so Jack will take me to visit. And she's very happy to be there. She tried to keep her own home on Rector Street; she even got a reverse mortgage, which I think is very—

**C. Peters: Well, didn't she have a daughter?**

P. Boeddinghaus: She had three daughters. They've all passed away.

**C. Peters: Oh my gosh!**

P. Boeddinghaus: They preceded her, yes.

**C. Peters: I'm trying to figure out which one I knew from school. Maybe it was not that time.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, there's Patricia, Adelaide, and one other<sup>16</sup>. She had nicknames for the girls, I can't remember. But she's still going strong.

**C. Peters: Isn't that something?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. So like, you postmen, you always talk about addresses. So tell me some interesting stories about delivering mail.

**C. Peters: About delivering mail?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah.

**C. Peters: Well, some of it was very enjoyable. Everybody has different jobs all their lives and different things they do, like Jimmy loved his railroad work. I worked in New York for three years, and I couldn't see going in there paying, was it was twelve dollars a month computation, when I only got twelve dollars a week.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now did you work in the Post Office?

**C. Peters: In New York, no. Then I saw the ad in the paper about—they have a notice once in a while, the Civil Service Exam for postal carrier or clerk. So I said, "I think I'll go over." And they had it in New Brunswick. And I was sitting there looking**

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<sup>15</sup> Theodore Haas Sr., the father of Theodore Haas Jr., was a longtime ticket agent at the Metuchen Railroad Station.

<sup>16</sup> Mrs. Eby had three daughters: Barbara (a painter), Patricia (a musician), and Adelaide (a sculptor).

around and all the people that were there, some of them I knew, and there was one young lady there and I said, “Oh boy! I have competition.” So when I had to— it was just a general test (history, geography, a few little things) and then what do you call the fill-ins where you check off? Let’s see, how long was it? A few months after when I got my rating and they said, “Please appear at the Post Office.” I went down and saw my good friend Carlton J. Lake. Yeah, that name familiar to you?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, he worked at the flower shop [Jack’s Flower Shop at 182 Main Street] for a while taking flower deliveries.

**C. Peters: Did he do that?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, he did.

**C. Peters: And Elwood Drake, right?**

P. Boeddinghaus: And Elwood also. They both worked for us, yes. It’s funny you didn’t work for us or Jim? [laughs]

**C. Peters: Yeah. Well, what was I doing? I was working for John MacWilliam, and I worked for—what was the other one, Irene? Oh, I worked as a CYO [Catholic Youth Organization]. I worked over there. But getting back to the hundred years old, I had someplace in my story, this book—Irene has convinced me to write a book. And by the way Jim, I would like to ask you at this time if you would collaborate with me on that book?**

J. Johnson: Sure.

I. Peters: Yeah, sure, why not?

**C. Peters: Not *Boyhood Days in Metuchen*, but childhood days. The man that wrote the other book<sup>17</sup>, he shouldn’t have said boyhood. He left the girls out.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Very, very astute of you.

**C. Peters: He said, “Boyhood Days.” And my book is going to be *Childhood Days of Old and New Metuchen*.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Very good, Chet, very good. But you were saying then, you went for your test and then Carlton Lake—was he—?

**C. Peters: Called me up and told me my mark was very high. But remember I mentioned about the young lady, she had one point higher than I did.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh!

**C. Peters: But she didn’t refuse it. She kept it for a little a while, but I guess her mother and father didn’t want her to. Her name was Betty Bedell. Remember Betty?**

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<sup>17</sup> He is referring to the book titled *Boyhood Days in Old Metuchen* written by Dr. David Trumbull Marshall in 1929 (original print) and 1930 (second edition).

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes! The Bedells from [60] High Street, yes.

**C. Peters:** **On High Street. See, I guess you remember a lot too because you delivered the flowers and things. You remember them too.**

P. Boeddinghaus: That's right, Chet.

**C. Peters:** **Yup. And they had a brother by the name of Benny. And she carried mail a few months. But you what it is, Phyllis? They get disgusted when a bag of these come, you know you get *Life Magazine*, *Ladies Home Journal*, and the other ones, *National Geographic*. [coughing] When you put your bag up with that, that's pretty heavy. And you know, Phyllis, people think the mailman pulls his bag up once and that's it. No, you go through what you call relay boxes<sup>18</sup> because you get your mail all-ready in there from six-thirty or six o'clock till nine o'clock, and then you go out on the street. And while you're getting that ready and marking relays and mark it down, and he delivers it direct to those boxes on the street. Once in a while you'll see a mailman open one of them. He has not just to get mail out of it, that's to get his relays, his mails for delivery. So then a rainy day would come and they wouldn't last too long, those girls. I used to tell him, I said, "Don't worry, you don't get that too many." I said, "My worst time was not the rain, it was the ice and snow because you can't control yourself on ice." And if you got a bag that's on one side of your shoulder, you're going to go down anyhow. I did convince one to stay. I think [unclear] is the lady that I [unclear]. She's still working.**

I. Peters: She's still there. What about the dogs?

**C. Peters:** **What? Oh, the dogs. Let me tell you—thanks Irene! Did you know I was never really bitten by a big dog? Some of these little son of a guns, the little guys that yap at your heels, bite your legs. But the big ones, you know what they do? They stay inside of the bushes and go "Woof." [laughter] And that was it! The mail would fly in every direction.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, a couple of our drivers were bitten making flower deliveries. The drivers have been bitten by dogs.

**C. Peters:** **Yes, a lot of times. I guess because they're running—they run out of the truck. If you are going to run, they're after you. They think you're going to take something from their house. Like even when a dog in your own home, that's what he's there for, to protect it. And there is only one time I had to go to the doctor for a dog bite. He gave me the usual needles and stuff and after I answered a million and one questions: Did I entice the dog? Did I frighten the dog? I don't know if I frightened it. I know I was frightened, but I got home all right. So hereafter, I was going to tell Irene, you better get me a pair of leggings like the Army leggings. But all and all, I had close to 600 patrons on my route. And whether you know it or not, you get to know each one personally and they're so nice. You know there's all kinds of people, there's good mailmen and bad mailmen, good patrons and bad, but a lot of them would be waiting for me. And I**

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<sup>18</sup> The 2013 US Postal Service Glossary of Postal Terms defines a relay box as "an olive green lockable receptacle in which city carriers leave mail on the line of travel for later pickup and delivery by another carrier."

have to tell you this story because there's a grand old lady was on my route. She wasn't very old, Angelina. I think that was a one of my best little—Angelina Cheche from [3] Central Avenue. You know we used to deliver the—we still do, on the third of the month—social security. Angelina would wait for me every third—right there sitting on that porch—wait for Chester. And boy, I better not be late. [laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: So like what was your territory?

**C. Peters:** Well, let me tell you, I finish with her. You know what she did? She'd go around telling everybody that Chester brings me money every month so I can live, so I can stay here. [laughter] She says Chester brings—that was the check.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, that's cute.

**C. Peters:** Well, you know it is—the delivery area you want to know?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**C. Peters:** Well, when I first started, you know you start as a substitute. And that's what Betty Bedell didn't like that too much. She had to go on a different route every day like I did. But you have to learn them all because when the other fellow is off, somebody has to carry the route because the mail always goes through slower than that. Even this last big snowstorm, we delivered the mail by truck. We had one fellow on each side of the truck, and they loaded up to the big van truck and made sure the mail went out because it was days before the sidewalks were clean. You know that.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, it was bad.

**C. Peters:** And you see there was no Bert McAdams to do it. He wasn't around. So I made many friends out of my patrons and they all were very good to me and try to be good to them. There were times I thought that maybe they did something against the rules, but I would go back when some storekeeper would say, "Hey Chet, did you see such-and-such came in?" or something. So I'd sort the mail and I bring it down to him like Jack was [unclear] or something, I would bring it down to him.

P. Boeddinghaus: So you gave like personal service?

**C. Peters:** Yeah, and I told Mr. Lake about it a couple of times, "This is just so—you know you just couldn't do it for everybody." But it worked out fine. Then I went to the area that was mostly residential area. Then I went to the business area for quite a few years. And mail is quite heavy on that route because if you have ever mailed to the telephone company or a gas company, you know what I mean, they get a stack of checks every day.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now did you deliver twice a day?

**C. Peters:** When I started, yes, it was twice a day. But most of the people would tell us, they would say to us, "We don't need mail twice a day." They would even—I don't know how it started, but they probably had quite a big meeting about it in the General Post Office in Washington [D.C.; District of Columbia]. And then they

**cut out the mail delivery in the afternoon. And then there was a big squabble about that. But sooner or later, it surpassed because we—as I said, we get out on the street by eight-thirty or even before that, nine o'clock, and they got their early mail. And especially the ones we were very much concerned about were the business people that were actually waiting for it.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Right. You know Elwood Drake used to tell us that he found a lot of money when he was delivering mail, like a dollar bill here or there be stuck in the hedge or in the gutter. He was so lucky and when he was delivering flowers here, “Oh, he’s found money.”

**C. Peters: Is that right? [laughter]**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. He was delivering the flower shop truck and he saw currency in the middle of the road in Perth Amboy. And he pulled to one side and he parked and he got out and ran over. It was a twenty-dollar bill. But he was, you know his eyes, he was so sharp. He claimed he found a lot of money when he made mail deliveries.

**C. Peters: He probably was a good working man too, wasn’t he?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Oh, he was. Oh yes, he was very quick, very light, and he knew all the streets.

**C. Peters: What?**

P. Boeddinghaus: He knew all the streets, the name of the streets and where they were located.

**C. Peters: That’s right, yeah.**

I. Peters: He knew all the numbers so Christmastime he might go down the yard [unclear] Christmas cards.

**C. Peters: You talking about Runyon? When I worked at Runyon’s [Mortuary at 568 Middlesex Avenue]? You know he liked to have somebody that was friendly and pleasant, not someone ragged. But I like people. You can tell by the way I talk. And when Fred [Runyon] had me as an attendant as you stand by the door and greet the people, and they come and say, “Hello Chester,” try to come—oh my goodness. So he didn’t want people to greet me as that friendly, but I treat them and show them where to go and what room. And try to calm him down a bit and it all worked out fine.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, I had forgotten that you worked there. I had forgotten that you worked there.

**C. Peters: Yeah, I did.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, you were ideal for that because you knew so many people.

**C. Peters: And I had to do flowers too because I had to pick out all the cards, make sure that they get the “Thank you” and the order. And that everything is written down so that when the people come around and a lot of people do come around, “Did you get a flower for this person from here?” And then you got to have that or else hell to pay.**

P. Boeddinghaus: The florist hears about it too. [laughter]

**C. Peters: I was going to ask you about that.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, oh yes. But see Runyon has such good records. You know Runyon recorded everything as it came in the backdoor. And it could be documented that it was in fact delivered.

**C. Peters: And he made sure that when he left, he says, “Don’t forget, before you close, take all the cards off and put a rubber band around them,” and then some of them were already recorded. So I rather him record it because that way I would know there would be no mistake.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So you really liked working for the Post Office and meeting the public and like being a part of families, their life?

**C. Peters: I did. And it was a great thing and I felt bad when I retired. I knew I’d have to retire. But I retired just a year ago or so, wasn’t it?**

I. Peters: It was two years back.

**C. Peters: Two years, okay. And you get to know the people, you miss them.**

J. Johnson: What year did you start?

**C. Peters: Right after [19]36? I think so. I think I started in about [19]37.**

J. Johnson: No, it had to be [19]38?

I. Peters: You worked three years in New York, so that was [19]39. Nineteen-hundred-thirty-nine or [19]40 you probably started.

**C. Peters: I didn’t worry too much when I started. I remember when I was finished either. [laughter]**

J. Johnson: He worked for the Post Office before I worked for the railroad. I started working for the railroad [Pennsylvania Railroad] in 1941.

**C. Peters: That’s right. Hey Jim, while we’re on that subject now, would you please tell these nice people about—and I don’t know what it was either—but you told me there was a train robbery or something by the—?**

J. Johnson: Oh yeah! Did you hear this? Grove Avenue when its grade crossing was there was called Dark Lane. And a freight train, and I don’t know what year it was, but it had to be maybe in the thirties, a freight train was stopped there and hijacked right by the crossing. It was an inside job we found out later. [laughs] And what they hijacked was Old Gold cigarettes, the whole carload of them, and drove, backed the truck up to it and loaded these cigarettes into the truck and took off down Dark Lane. I don’t know if they ever caught them or not, but they finally determined that it was an inside job. One of the trainmen there had applied the air so that the car would stop right on the crossing. And they backed it up and hauled the cigarettes away. They were Old Gold

and they used to—at that time, the factory was in Jersey City, Old Gold factory [P. Lorillard Tobacco Company].

**C. Peters: Yup, that's right.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You were saying too about the man Sam Cheche that operated that crossing. Now someone told me that he was born at the Hillside Inn. Can you tell me more about the Hillside Inn? It was on Main Street.

**C. Peters: Well, the Hillside Inn wasn't too much in my year. There was built where the bank [former National Bank of New Jersey at 442 Main Street] is now, in that, up on sort of a hill. But you used to get entrance in from Inn Place, which was called the Hillside Inn and Restaurant. And Inn Place, that's where you go in. And the rooms were three dollars a night. There were twenty-five rooms on each floor, and there were three floors. It was a big place.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. And we have a picture in last year's calendar [Metuchen-Edison Historical Society Calendar]. We have a nice picture of it.

**C. Peters: Is it last year's?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Last year. This is [19]97, in the [19]96. I'll make sure you get one. It's a very nice place.

**C. Peters: Could that be reproduced into a book because I want to put one of those in a book? I mean everybody's asking, nobody's remembers where that was or anything.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I know they get it mixed up with the Metuchen Inn [at 424 Middlesex Avenue], but it's two different places.

**C. Peters: I know it, two different places. I don't even know who owned it.**

P. Boeddinghaus: For a while, [David] Gross owned it from out at Shorty's Corner [phonetic]. There was a [William] Gross, they had wholesale groceries, they had feed, and they had fuel. And one of the brothers owned the Hillside Inn.

**C. Peters: They named it for that street, I guess, right?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, yeah. And it went from Highland [Avenue] to Hillside [Avenue]. [coughing] It had a circular driveway, I understand, because Mrs. Eby told me about it. And we have a beautiful picture of it.

**C. Peters: Isn't that something? I'm glad you mentioned that because I have it—I put Metuchen Inn and Restaurant, but that's wrong. There was another one about the railroad that I know too. Of course, Jimmy knows it too. We had a couple bad train wrecks in Metuchen, and not about the one that was recently passenger, but the one that was a freight train when—you'd be surprised what was on those trains. Wouldn't tell you we were out and around town, everyone is running around trying to catch the pig. And they were running all over the place. [laughter] And if you were lucky enough to have your solid door open, they'd run right in. And that was yours. So you had a lot of bacon and pork for a long time.**

J. Johnson: Do you remember that train wreck, Chet? Do you remember when that train wreck—the one you are talking about?

**C. Peters: The recent one?**

J. Johnson: No, the one where the pigs were running around<sup>19</sup>. [chuckles]

**C. Peters: Yeah, that was just after they had a wreck.**

J. Johnson: It was between Menlo Park and Metuchen, wasn't it?

**C. Peters: It wasn't far. Before that, they had one that had fish on it. And boy, the people picked up some of it, but they didn't want to take it home because they want to make sure. It wasn't two trains, it [was] just some trackers because in that curve, that curve is very dangerous, isn't it? Isn't it slanted?**

J. Johnson: Yeah, they've upgraded that now so that it's not nearly as bad as it used to be. But it was always a speed limit on there. The trains had to slow down. But they don't anymore.

P. Boeddinghaus: And so what organizations have you been active in?

**C. Peters: Oh, okay. I'm a chaplain of the [Metuchen] Elks [Lodge No. 1914], and then I'm a member of the Knights of Columbus and American Legion [Fugle Hummer Post 65]. I just received a lifetime membership. Those are the three, right? That's the one I have to leave Irene for.**

I. Peters: The library. You have Friends.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, Friends of the [Metuchen] Library.

**C. Peters: Oh yeah, the Friends of the Library. That's true. Absolutely.**

J. Johnson: Trojans?

I. Peters: You're Trojan. Don't forget your Trojan Club.

**C. Peters: Oh, the Trojan Club [of Metuchen]. That was the club that—I don't know if you know much about that? The Young Men's Club? We started when we were in high school and we were very successful at keeping running till just the past few years when most of us fellows went to the service. And these younger boys couldn't keep going for some reason.**

P. Boeddinghaus: The building was on a side street there. What was that? Coan Place?

**C. Peters: Yeah, Coan Place. And then they sold it. They didn't notify us or nothing. We kept running by—would you believe it?—five-cent turkey raffles. We used to sell more of them. And then we ran dances and we had—we offered trophies to the**

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<sup>19</sup> According to John Brinckmann, the freight train wreckage where the pigs ran free occurred on the Pennsylvania Railroad at Menlo Park on October 26, 1936.

**high school athlete or football of the year, and baseball and all that. And we donated that to them, gave the students something to work for, like an incentive. And that worked fine.**

P. Boeddinghaus: You know who I'm going to see this week is Bill McLaughlin [William McLaughlin]. Wasn't he an active member?

**C. Peters: You're going to see Billy?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Billy McLaughlin, yes.

**C. Peters: Oh yeah, he used to live on [14] Wilmer Place.**

I. Peters: Where's he?

P. Boeddinghaus: He's living in Forsgate.

I. Peters: Oh, down that way.

P. Boeddinghaus: His wife passed away.

**C. Peters: Forsgate? That's near that place where Lance French [phonetic] used to live.**

J. Johnson: He lived down there, senior citizen.

I. Peters: Julia died, didn't she?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, she did. And I am trying to think of some of the other members.

**C. Peters: So don't forget to tell him that you saw Chet and Jim.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh definitely, definitely, yes.

**C. Peters: Because I will tell you one thing about Billy McLaughlin, I don't think he'll remember it though. When we were kids, we used to throw stones up in air, and no matter where I threw it, Billy McLachlan was always under it.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, let's see, you were in the same neighborhood if you were on Jonesdale and he was on Wilmer. So you were playing in the neighborhood, yes?

**C. Peters: That's right. Right around the corner, yeah. Then we had a man next door to their house by the name of Conrad Skoquist [at 20 Wilmer Place]. He had a tennis court there he built himself. And he used to be a darn good tennis player. I used to tell him, "Why don't you go in for a tournament?" He said, "I should." But he never did. But Billy had a brother by the name of Richard and he was a great reader. These are the things I remember. I was a mailman, and boy, I was at his house almost every day or other date with the Book of the Month Club or something. I just opened the door and say, "Hey, Richard? There's another book!" And I'd throw it in. He says, "Where am I going to put it?" [laughter] All the walls were his books. I said, "Rich, do you read all these?" "Yeah, I read most of them."**

P. Boeddinghaus: And they had a sister Gloria.

**C. Peters: Gloria married Phil Ruegger, yes.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, I see Gloria too. See my husband was connected with Bill McLaughlin through hunting. They go deer hunting together, fishing, or duck hunting, yeah. He was an avid sportsman.

**C. Peters: Like what's his name? The Kornblatt. They said he was one of the veterinarians [at 37 Highland Avenue].**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, Lloyd.

**C. Peters: Lloyd. Is it true he used to go bear hunting?**

P. Boeddinghaus: I think so. Yeah, up to Maine.

**C. Peters: Up north someplace. Remember the time he had his picture in all the New York papers. Not him, but the elephant. He had an elephant [that] was being transported from someplace out west or Pennsylvania. And that poor elephant, his leg fell through the floor, and it was being rubbed on the concrete all the way. He stopped by a traffic light and some nice man said—I don't know who—Metuchen? It must have been Metuchen. And he called the police and told them and they came and they called Lloyd. And Lloyd, they took it down there, he says, "How am I going to get him in the door?" [laughter] That's the first thing he thought about. So he worked on him on the outside. And would you know that elephant put his trunk around him? Like just took the pain away. So that was Lloyd Kornblatt.**

P. Boeddinghaus: To thank him. Yeah, that's a good story, very good, yeah. Well, you've seen a lot of changes around town.

**C. Peters: Yeah, a lot of change, a lot of good. Most of them good. I missed a lot of things they had, but my children would probably miss—we used to have a circus regularly across from the Franklin School. The Hunt Brothers. Now, thank God they also have a carnival every year, and that keeps the little ones busy. The good things about Metuchen and why they stay and don't leave, and they come back, Jimmy can tell you about Rev. Perry from the [Centenary] Methodist [Episcopal] Church. Probably the church was being renovated or knock them down, they're building a new one and he left. [coughing] Theodore Perry.**

J. Johnson: He was our pastor when I graduated from high school in 1936. And he left town, I don't know when, not too much longer after that, because the Methodists rotated their pastors quite often. When he retired, he thought enough about Metuchen to come back as an associate pastor, and he lived on Essex Avenue. And that's not too many years ago, I guess probably more than I want to say.

**C. Peters: Where did he live?**

J. Johnson: He lived on Essex Avenue.

**C. Peters: I thought he lived on Home Street, okay.**

J. Johnson: Oh! That was the parsonage on Home Street. He lived there when he was a pastor.

**C. Peters: Fifty-one Home [Street], right? Why did they have it so far away? Weren't there any houses nearby?**

J. Johnson: I don't know.

**C. Peters: But I used to remember him. Nice guy.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, Dorothea Peck's father was a pastor of the Methodist Church.

J. Johnson: Rev. [Audley Janes] Bliss. Her name was Bliss.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, I see. That was her maiden name.

J. Johnson: He died [in 1935] while he was pastor of our church and he's buried in Hillside [Cemetery]. And so is his wife [Mary Arabella (Goodwin) Bliss]. She's buried there.

P. Boeddinghaus: And so the parishioners thought a lot of Pastor Perry.

J. Johnson: Oh yes, very much. Very much so.

P. Boeddinghaus: He was highly thought of, yeah. The pastor you have now is very nice also. Pastor Paul.

**C. Peters: What's the pastor's name now?**

J. Johnson: Maliel, like Daniel; [Paul] Maliel.

**C. Peters: Somebody told me that there was an Indian pastor in your church.**

J. Johnson: He's the one.

**C. Peters: He's the one? Because there is a little Indian girl and there's—and I just can't think of—will you write the name down so I can ask her if she knows him?**

P. Boeddinghaus: He's very community-minded, if anything.

**C. Peters: He is?**

P. Boeddinghaus: And he lets the historical society meet in the church now. And it works out beautiful because you go right in off the parking lot [at 200 Hillside Avenue]. Now the tape is just about ending so what would your closing comments be today?

**C. Peters: My closing comments would be that I'm glad to be here with Irene and my classmate Jimmy and Mrs. Moynihan [phonetic], my good friend. And of course, Jack and I were very good—I delivered mail on the house and I think that was one of the doors I knocked on. But I'm thankful for living in Metuchen. There is a fellow by the name of Lawrence Harp [phonetic], who used to have a—he used to portray George Washington. And he had a sign in Metuchen on both entrances, "If you lived here, you would be home." He put that on both, and he kept it up**

every year. And he repainted it and that's true. Of course, every time we leave, we're so glad to get back. When we go on a trip or something, we say, "Thank God, we're back."

I know I liked the wonderful services that the community offers, and then the special services that I explained to you that were offered by individuals. And I know that, possibly, I am quite certain that many other towns have similar but I'm not sure. But I know we do have them. The fires that we have in Metuchen can prove that the Fire Department was on alert. The Reformed Church didn't burn to the ground [in 1948], they saved a lot of it [formerly at the corner of Amboy Avenue and Graham Avenue], but they built a new one [at 150 Lake Avenue] up on High Street and Franklyn Place.

And what else do I like about the Police [Department], I don't remember any other town had only one unsolved murder. I don't know of any others. And the [Metuchen] First Aid [Squad], we can't forget them. They're always having a hard time getting volunteers. And all and all, I say I'm quite thankful that my father [Ignacy Pydyszski], when he came from Poland, and he got off an immigrant and rode up and down from New York to Philadelphia [Pennsylvania], he'd get off at different stations and he picked Metuchen for our home. And he bought a big home on Jonesdale Avenue and that's where we grew up. That was a dirt road.

P. Boeddinghaus: So then is it possible that your last name is not really Peters? Is it more than that?

**C. Peters: Yeah.**

P. Boeddinghaus: What's the rest of it?

**C. Peters: But we only go by the name of Peters though because it was changed by an American principal. When my mother and father should have gone to get a lawyer and made him—he wasn't supposed to do that. But that happened to so many people.**

P. Boeddinghaus: So like what was the whole name then?

**C. Peters: Well, he took the first part, P-y-d-y-s, that's Peters. And so the Polish name was Pydyszski.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And they shortened it or Americanized it to Peters.

**C. Peters: That's right.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I see. That's interesting.

**C. Peters: You know what his reason was? He says, "Not many Polish people in Metuchen." But I investigated and there was quite a few. In fact, everywhere. [chuckling]**

P. Boeddinghaus: Very good. I like that story. [coughs]

- C. Peters:** His name was **Thomas G. Van Kirk<sup>20</sup>**. I'll never forget that name. I was going to try to change his but I didn't know what to call him. [laughter] I should have called him **Van Kirkski** or something.
- J. Johnson: He was superintendent of the Metuchen Schools, Thomas G. Van Kirk.
- P. Boeddinghaus: And that was the auditorium was named after him, Van Kirk Auditorium, in Franklin School.
- J. Johnson: I remember him well.
- C. Peters:** And getting back to the fire, nobody was killed or injured in the high school fire in Franklin School [in 1957]. He got all the children out as quick as they should. And I talked to one fireman, he had to look all over because there's an attic there nobody even knew about. And there were kids hiding up there [and] they had to carry them out. But can you imagine the mothers and fathers waiting outside? "Is my Johnny there? Are my children here?"
- P. Boeddinghaus: I remember it was in the afternoon that fire, 1957, because my brother-in-law, Frank Urich, was a teacher there.
- C. Peters:** Oh, Frankie? I know him.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, I was concerned about him.
- C. Peters:** And let me tell you, you say it's ending [the tape] pretty soon. Just repeat over and over again that I'm glad to be a Metuchenite, and very Borough Brainite, or however you call it. But I try to explain some of the reasons why it was named that, but nobody asks why Metuchen—there's only Metuchen alive. And here, years ago in this area, they called the rolling hills and there's the red dirt. That's what they used to have with most luscious soil for the Jersey tomatoes. But the name Metuchen is derived from an Indian chief by the name of Chief Matochshegan. And he was the one that lead that Indian tribe, and they had many skirmishes along Woodbridge Avenue, from Metuchen to Woodbridge. And it was something that—of course, there's belief that he's buried in that—what's that Colonial Cemetery? Is that the Presbyterian Cemetery, Jim?
- J. Johnson: [Old] Colonial [Cemetery] by the station?
- C. Peters:** Revolutionary [War], yeah. Yeah, he's believed to be buried under—they planted a tree there and now the tree is tremendous. But that's how Metuchen got its name. That's the only one that's close. Though we used to get confused with the mail, of course when you'll see them written, Metuchen looks like Methuen. And that's where?
- P. Boeddinghaus: Massachusetts!
- C. Peters:** Massachusetts, that's right.
- P. Boeddinghaus: Because we have flower orders going to Methuen, Mass.

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<sup>20</sup> Thomas G. Van Kirk was principal of Metuchen High School and superintendent of Metuchen schools.

**C. Peters:** So we used to get mail from them and they got our mail.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, that get very easily confused.

**C. Peters:** But I was so thrilled to be a part of it, and I'm still remembering when the railroad used to pick up our mail. They had a—I don't know if you call it a hanger or hand—they put the bag on it and hook it on. And they have a piece of metal [that] would catch the bag and didn't even stop the train.

J. Johnson: That was the RPO (Railway Post Office)<sup>21</sup>.

**C. Peters:** So I think you know why I'm so pleased that you asked me. Maybe Jimmy can tell why he joined in Metuchen.

P. Boeddinghaus: There's still a few minutes on the tape.

J. Johnson: There's so much, I couldn't get it in in a few minutes.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, why don't I interview you separately then and I want to thank Chet and Jean for having us here this afternoon. An hour and a half has passed, we've just had so much to talk about.

**C. Peters:** An hour and a half?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

**C. Peters:** That will last that long?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Forty-five minutes on each side.

**C. Peters:** Well, I don't know what I'm supposed to say, "Good morning? Good evening? Good night?" to these people that are going to be hearing it. [laughter] Well, I'll end it with my good friend, who used to say, "Good evening." Maybe you can guess who he is? And whenever his show would come on, and I'd be dozing off, he'd say, "Good evening, everybody."

J. Johnson: Lowell Thomas [phonetic]?

**C. Peters:** Who?

J. Johnson: Lowell Thomas [phonetic]?

**C. Peters:** No.

J. Johnson: On the radio, you mean?

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<sup>21</sup> Established in 1896, the Railway Mail Service (RMS) was a department of the United States Post Office that carried most of the mail in the United States between 1890 and 1970. The mail was sorted en route by postal clerks aboard a separate car on passenger trains known as the Railway Post Office (RPO). The service was renamed the Postal Transportation Service (PTS) on October 1, 1948. The last railway post office car operated on June 20, 1977.

**C. Peters:** This was a mystery story and he was a little chubby guy. His name was Alfred Hitchcock.

Everyone: Oh yes!

**C. Peters:** “Good evening, everybody<sup>22</sup>.” [chuckling]

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, yes, he was famous.

**C. Peters:** I like to say to all you nice people that might be listening to this, I hope that you earned a little historical background on Metuchen. They call me a historian in Metuchen. Well, that’s all right. But they also named me the Goodwill Ambassador because I sell Metuchen every chance I get. And I know darn well that I must have convinced some people to live here because I talked to all of them, tell them about, they’d say, “You don’t have to tell us, we read about in the paper.” What do you think of that? Isn’t that nice? So you people who are new, who are living here, just take it all in, enjoy the parades, the Country Fair, and participate as much as you can.

P. Boeddinghaus: We are overdue. Yeah, we’re overdue, and we try to get together before this, but you know. I’m so glad we were able to do this today. Wonderful.

**C. Peters:** Is it covered pretty good?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, it’s terrific!

**C. Peters:** And one of these people, can they hear it at the library? [recording paused]

P. Boeddinghaus: The other voices heard on this tape are that of Irene Peters, Chet’s wife, and Jim Johnson of [24] Sheridan Avenue, who was kind enough to transport me to Roosevelt Hospital to do the oral history. And he is a possible future candidate for doing an oral history on working on the railroad and being a Boy Scout and Boy Scout leader for many years.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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<sup>22</sup> This greeting was part of the title sequence of the American television series *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* that aired between 1955 and 1962.