

J. Lloyd Grimstead

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Interviewers: Ruth Terwilliger and Shirley Trense
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Abstract: James Lloyd Grimstead (1885-1976), son of James Augustus Grimstead and Amanda (Edgar) Grimstead, was a lifelong resident of Metuchen who was born and raised at 576 Middlesex Avenue. His father and his two uncles, Francis and Silas Grimstead, owned an ice business that included icehouses in Bonhamtown and along Middlesex Avenue in Metuchen. Mr. Grimstead had one sister, Pearl (Grimstead) Meade, and was a bachelor his whole life. He graduated from Franklin School and worked as an inspector for the Wright Martin Aircraft Company in New Brunswick during World War I. He was also employed as a lab tester for Edison Lamp Works in Harrison, New Jersey and as a laboratory assistant for Brooklyn College in New York.

During the Depression, Mr. Grimstead took more than 2,800 photographs of local houses and residents in Metuchen, Edison, and the surrounding area. He sold these prints to the residents of the houses as a way to make money. He was also sponsored by the WPA [Works Progress Administration] to write a history of Metuchen. His unpublished manuscript, negatives and photographs, collection of anecdotes (which he referred to as “Nannygoats”), newspaper articles, and letters are an invaluable part of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society’s collection. The Metuchen-Edison Historical Society’s archives are named after him, and their newsletter is named after his collection of anecdotes.

In this interview, Mr. Grimstead discusses his family, his early childhood in Metuchen, working for David Trumbull Marshall at Edison Lamp Works, photographing local houses during the Depression, and his interest in reflexology. He also reminisces about the demolition of the former Lake Avenue Railroad Station, his family’s ice business in Bonhamtown, and the tragic death of his father in 1925.

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R. Terwilliger: This is Ruth Terwilliger doing an oral taping of Mr. Lloyd Grimstead at his home, at 576 Middlesex Avenue, Metuchen, on September 10, 1975. This home was bought by Mr. Grimstead’s grandfather in the late 1800s and was a farmhouse at the time. Mr. Grimstead’s grandfather raised all his own produce and sold it in New York. Mr. Grimstead explains, as far as he can remember, the property went all the way back to Durham Avenue and bordered Center Street up to Main Street. There were no other

houses and this house sort of sat in the middle of it and all the abiding property was farmland. [recording paused]

J. L. Grimstead: [sings] **Well, Daddy has to pay the four years of college, boy. Rah, rah, rah. Whoopee!**

S. Trense: [laughs] That's wonderful.

R. Terwilliger: That's terrific.

J. L. Grimstead: **You can pass that on to him.**

S. Trense: I certainly shall.

R. Terwilliger: That's beautiful.

J. L. Grimstead: **If I'd only thought of that when you were telling it to me, I'd have given it to him personal. But I didn't think of it. [laughter]**

R. Terwilliger: Well, I'm sure he's going to enjoy hearing it.

S. Trense: He will enjoy it very much.

J. L. Grimstead: **Yeah. So he'll come home to tell you that he's learned a college shout. [shouts] Rah, rah, rah!**

R. Terwilliger: [laughter] Oh, that's terrific.

S. Trense: Oh, that's good.

R. Terwilliger: Mr. Grimstead, Shirley [Trense] was telling me as we were walking over here that you were born in this house [at 576 Middlesex Avenue].

J. L. Grimstead: **Right here in this house, right upstairs in the front room.**

R. Terwilliger: In the front room. And did mothers have mid-wives at that time?

J. L. Grimstead: **Huh?**

R. Terwilliger: Did your mother have a mid-wife, someone to assist her in birth?

J. L. Grimstead: **I don't know. She had a doctor.**

R. Terwilliger: She had a doctor. You don't remember the doctor's name, do you?

J. L. Grimstead: [long pause] **No.**

R. Terwilliger: No. And how many were there?

J. L. Grimstead: **I think it was Dr. Address [phonetic], but I don't know.**

R. Terwilliger: Dr. Anders?

J. L. Grimstead: Address [phonetic].

R. Terwilliger: Oh, Address [phonetic].

J. L. Grimstead: I think it was. I'm not sure now because I was too little to know.

R. Terwilliger: Right, of course, then you were. I thought maybe it turned out that he was your family doctor later on.

J. L. Grimstead: Well, he was the family doctor.

R. Terwilliger: Dr. Address?

J. L. Grimstead: Dr. Address [phonetic], yes.

R. Terwilliger: Was the family doctor. And did you have brothers? You had several brothers, didn't you?

J. L. Grimstead: No.

S. Trense: Your father had brothers, I think, didn't he? Because I remember seeing pictures of the Grimsteads—

J. L. Grimstead: I had a brother but he—I don't know long he lived, but it wasn't long¹.

R. Terwilliger: Well, I remember looking at an old yearbook and there were Grimsteads who were teachers.

J. L. Grimstead: That was my father [James A. Grimstead] and my two uncles [Francis (Frank) and Silas Grimstead].

R. Terwilliger: They were teachers, right?

J. L. Grimstead: No, they were not teachers.

R. Terwilliger: They were not teachers, but they went to the Metuchen schools?

J. L. Grimstead: No, they didn't.

R. Terwilliger: They didn't?

S. Trense: Where did they go to school?

J. L. Grimstead: Down in Bonhamtown.

S. Trense: [laughter] Before Metuchen ever had a school system then, it was down in Bonhamtown.

¹ Paul Faber Grimstead was born in June 16, 1882, but he died in infancy on August 5, 1882.

J. L. Grimstead: No. I think Metuchen had a school. I think the old Franklin School up here was going then. No, wait a minute, I don't know whether it was or not.

R. Terwilliger: Did you go to Metuchen schools?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh yes, I went to Metuchen schools.

R. Terwilliger: And where was the elementary school?

J. L. Grimstead: Right over there, where the [Franklin] Middle School is now [on Middlesex Avenue at northwest corner with Center Street]. That was it.

R. Terwilliger: And did that go from kindergarten all the way through to twelfth grade? Did you stay in that one school all the way through?

J. L. Grimstead: I don't know anything about the doctor. I don't know where he went to school or whether he was a native of Metuchen or not. He probably wasn't. Probably some doctor that came out here and settled because there wasn't any—well there were doctors in Metuchen before him, quite a number of them.

R. Terwilliger: I wondered if I could ask you about when you were a boy and you lived in this house—what it was like around here? Were there many houses?

J. L. Grimstead: No, there weren't many houses.

R. Terwilliger: And was it a dirt road out front?

J. L. Grimstead: It was a dirt road out front, yes. I'll tell you about that road in a minute. But it was all dirt road, and the only laid sidewalk here was on this [north] side of the street, little square stones about two feet wide. Those stones that lead in from the street are the stones that were in that sidewalk.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's interesting.

J. L. Grimstead: That's what the sidewalk was. And out in front—well sometimes the streets were muddy and we worked on it and things. And on the other side of the street, there wasn't any sidewalk at all. There was just a little narrow path where the people would use it and worn the grass down. And that was that way for a long time. I don't know when that was paved. But I remember when they macadamized the street out in front. Now from Central Avenue across the Lehigh Valley Railroad, that was swampy. And they built a corduroy road there, so the people to get across the swamp. They had to keep building it up every summer.

R. Terwilliger: A corduroy road?

J. L. Grimstead: Corduroy road, yes. You know what that is?

R. Terwilliger: No, I don't.

J. L. Grimstead: That's a lot of tree trunks, logs laid across the road and brush to fill up the swamp, make a solid place for wagons and things to cross on. Well in 1900—I don't know how early, but right after the borough was formed—well they put in water pipes. We had a ten-inch pipe, maybe even twelve-inch pipe, I don't know, put in along here. Well, when they got down there to Central Avenue, across Central Avenue, then there was this corduroy road way down about that much below the surface and all the rest had been filled in on top of it. And that was all exposed. Well, I didn't have any camera then; I wasn't old enough to have a camera and I didn't get any picture of it. But that was the way it was. Dr. [Alonzo Clark] Hunt's house [at 625 Middlesex Avenue], where the [Metuchen] Food Fair [Market] is now—

S. Trense: [Metuchen] Foodtown, yeah.

J. L. Grimstead: I don't whether you call that—Foodtown now. Foodtown. It's changed its name so much, I don't know what I'm talking about at the time. [laughter]

R. Terwilliger: You're right. It was Food Fair at one time.

S. Trense: Was it?

R. Terwilliger: Uh-huh.

J. L. Grimstead: It was only just recently that they tore Dr. Hunt's house down and extended that store. They doubled the size of the store. Now it's so big I can't find my way around it. [laughter] It takes a half an hour just to go around and locate things, find out where [unclear].

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I know, I get lost in these big stores. Could I ask you something about when you were a young boy? What kind of things did you do to have fun? What kind of mischief did you get into?

J. L. Grimstead: I didn't get into mischief. [laughter]

R. Terwilliger: Oh, you were a good boy?

J. L. Grimstead: Apparently yeah, I was a good boy.

R. Terwilliger: What kind of games did you play then or how did you have fun?

J. L. Grimstead: Well, I had a toy train and I remember I used to play in the dirt with and—I don't know what I did, really.

R. Terwilliger: Did you read a lot?

J. L. Grimstead: Read?

R. Terwilliger: Yes.

J. L. Grimstead: No, I couldn't read.

R. Terwilliger: You didn't read? [chuckles]

J. L. Grimstead: No, I didn't read. Any reading that was done was done to me.

R. Terwilliger: I see.

J. L. Grimstead: I wasn't a good reader and I'm not now.

S. Trense: Mr. Grimstead, you mentioned once that you would play up by the railroad tracks by the Penn—

J. L. Grimstead: Oh, that was when I grew up!

S. Trense: When you were a little older, I guess.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, I can come around to that later.

S. Trense: Okay. [laughter]

J. L. Grimstead: And, now wait a minute—

R. Terwilliger: How about Halloween? Did you dress up like the kids do today and go out trick-or-treating?

J. L. Grimstead: No

R. Terwilliger: Didn't do that? No?

J. L. Grimstead: Not until quite a bit later. I did a little bit of it, not much. Now let's see—

S. Trense: I bet Christmas in this house would have been a wonderful time of the year, with the fireplaces and the large rooms.

J. L. Grimstead: No, there wasn't—I got the fireplaces. I got the cranes in the fireplaces still there.

R. Terwilliger: The cranes? There are cranes in the fireplaces?

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, you used to put a kettle on and cook your breakfast in.

R. Terwilliger: Oh yeah, a real crane he's talking about.

J. L. Grimstead: Real crane, yeah. They're just built right in the fireplace.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's beautiful.

J. L. Grimstead: And where that stairs is, there used to be a brick oven. When my mother [Amanda (Edgar) Grimstead] first came to live here, why that brick oven was there and they used to do their baking in it.

R. Terwilliger: Oh that's interesting, that really is.

J. L. Grimstead: Now, I think I'm right there. But anyway, the brick hearth is down there now under this gas stove—the same old brick hearth where they pull the cinders out and things, and then put whatever they're going to cook in there. I may be mistaken about that, maybe I'm just romancing and imagining things.

R. Terwilliger: Well, it sounds good. [laughs] It really sounds good.

S. Trense: Did you have to take the cinders out?

J. L. Grimstead: Did I have to take the cinders out?

S. Trense: Yeah right, when you were a little boy.

J. L. Grimstead: I wasn't born yet!

S. Trense: Oh, you weren't born yet, okay. [laughter] What year approximately do you think this house was built, Mr. Grimstead?

J. L. Grimstead: It was built in 1858, before the Civil War. When the Civil War broke out, my grandfather had a store in New York and his family lived in an apartment over the store. I think that was over on Eighth Avenue—I don't remember just what street, and I've got a record of it somewhere. Well one time, they were having a riot there in New York and my uncle—he was a boy who worked in the store at that time—and he saw this mob coming up the street. They had all these wooden shutters they put on the outside, so he ran, he put on all those shutters and fastened them. And the mob, they ran across some Negros hanging from the lampposts there in New York; the mobs were wild then. So he moved all his family out here. This is the place he came to, this house.

S. Trense: Did he build this house himself, or did he have it built for him?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh no, this property here belonged to—

S. Trent: The Campbell?

J. L. Grimstead: Nobody home.

S. Trense: [laughter] A Campbell?

J. L. Grimstead: No, no, no.

S. Trense: I don't remember the name².

R. Terwilliger: But it was already built when he came here?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh yes, it was already built. It had been built about four years, I guess.

R. Terwilliger: Now this was your uncle you say that came here.

² According to 1868 Beers, Ellis and Soule *Map of Metuchen, Middlesex County, New Jersey*, the land and house were owned by Dr. W. Knight.

S. Trense: Grandfather.

R. Terwilliger: Grandfather?

J. L. Grimstead: My grandfather brought all his family out here because he didn't think it was safe for them in New York.

R. Terwilliger: Well, families are still doing that today.

J. L. Grimstead: This was a ten-acre lot all the way over as far as that hedge the other side of the schoolhouse [Franklin School]. That was the boundary. And it went back to Durham Avenue and came up William Street. That was the place. Well my grandfather grew vegetables and things here and everyday he'd take a load of them on the train into New York to sell in his store. Then at night, he'd bring home the groceries. So that was quite a chore.

R. Terwilliger: Right, yes.

S. Trense: What was his name, Mr. Grimstead?

J. L. Grimstead: Benjamin Edgar.

S. Trense: Benjamin Edgar was his name. Now, was he related to the Edgars that—

J. L. Grimstead: He was my grandfather.

S. Trense: Okay, he was your grandfather. But how was—

J. L. Grimstead: My mother's father.

S. Trense: How was he related to the Edgar that left the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] to the town?

R. Terwilliger: And Edgar Clay [Company]³.

J. L. Grimstead: He was a cousin to him, I think. I think he was a cousin.

S. Trense: So you have some very famous relatives here in town then.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah.

R. Terwilliger: Well what did you do when you got out of high school—when you finished school?

J. L. Grimstead: Well my mother saw [David] Trumbull Marshall and got him to give me a job in New York in the Edison Lamp Works.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, Thomas Edison's Lamp Works?

³ The Edgar Brothers Clay Company, also known as Edgar Plastic Koalin Company, was founded by Charles S. Edgar and his two brothers.

J. L. Grimstead: Thomas Edison didn't have anything to do with it at that time, but he used to go there regularly.

R. Terwilliger: Did you ever meet Thomas Edison?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh yes, I met him and shook hands with him.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, tell us about it. [laughter] Where did this happen?

J. L. Grimstead: Well, they had the fiftieth anniversary of the electric light. Thomas Edison was there in Menlo Park and I was one of those that went up and shook hands with him. My father used to deliver ice to him. He was in the ice business, and he used to deliver ice to Edison's Laboratory. So he went up and he shook hands with Edison. I went up a little later all by myself. [laughter] Then another time I saw Edison and Henry Ford driving past the laboratory in an old Ford Runabout. That was at the time that Edison invented the—

R. Terwilliger: Phonograph?

J. L. Grimstead: No, another battery. It was the—

R. Terwilliger: Oh, battery that Mr. Ford used in his cars?

J. L. Grimstead: No, he didn't use it in the car. He just had a regular old Ford Runabout and he and Edison drove right past me and if I'd had any sense, I'd have hollered out, "Hello Mr. Edison, Hello Mr. Ford!" [laughter] You see I was working for Trumbull Marshall.

R. Terwilliger: Yes. What kind of business was Trumbull Marshall? What did you do for him?

J. L. Grimstead: I was in the laboratory there, the Edison Lamp Works.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's right. You did tell me that, right. See, I have nothing up here either. [laughs]

J. L. Grimstead: They were always testing the lamps. I put the lamps up on the racks and set the lines for whatever voltage the lamps were supposed to burn at. They'd all be tested down in the [unclear] room. Then they'd all go up there after the readings were made, and everyday they'd be taken down to be read. And I'd take them down and then I'd bring them back and put them up. Then there were other little things I used to do around.

S. Trense: Was this in New York that you worked? Or was it right up—

J. L. Grimstead: No, this was in Harrison, across the river, from—

S. Trense: Oh yeah, near Newark.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, across the river from Newark. I had to get off at Newark [Railroad] Station and walk that mile or more over there to the place.

R. Terwilliger: How was train service at that time?

J. L. Grimstead: It was good.

R. Terwilliger: Steam engines, I guess.

J. L. Grimstead: Well, I had to get up there and leave about seven o'clock in the morning to get down there at eight o'clock.

R. Terwilliger: And was the station [Metuchen Railroad Station] where it is now?

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, the station has been where it is now ever since about—oh, I can't remember the date now—I think it was in 1888 because I was three years old when they tore this station [Lake Avenue Railroad Station] down here over the [American] Legion [on Lake Avenue]. And they'd just built this station up here and Alonzo Hunt wanted to keep the station there and the railroad was going to tear it down. Well they were going to tear it down piece by piece so they could save the lumber, I suppose. But then the head of the railroad was in Jersey City there, then word came from Jersey City they'd heard that—what's the lawyer down here at the corner?

R. Terwilliger: Mundy?

J. L. Grimstead: Mundy?

R. Terwilliger: Yes.

J. L. Grimstead: Lawyer Mundy had gone to Trenton to get out an injunction so they couldn't tear the station down. So they sent word out here. There was a conductor of the wrecking train and the repair train—his name was Lloyd—and they sent word to him to get down to Metuchen and tear that station down. Well, he came down here with a wrecking train and they backed the locomotive up to the station and they took a big hack saw and put it through the windows on the top floor and the engine started off “choo-choo” towards New Brunswick. And well, my father [James Augustus Grimstead] and I were just coming along at that time. We come down New Street and we turned around the corner there to Center Street and father stopped the horse so we could watch it go down. I was three years old then. And it's all things were rip, snap, cracking, and a crash and a big cloud of smoke going up in the air, and the top of the station was down. And then they did the same thing with the bottom parts, it was all down.

R. Terwilliger: Oh my. Didn't it spook the horses?

J. L. Grimstead: No. They were half a block away, or a whole block away.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I see. I didn't realize you traveled with a horse and buggy.

J. L. Grimstead: We didn't have any. It was the ice wagon.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, it was the ice wagon.

J. L. Grimstead: I was on the ice wagon with my father and we stopped there and watched them tear it down and then we went on. But I was only three years old.

R. Terwilliger: And you can remember that?

J. L. Grimstead: Well, I can remember that distinctly.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's really beautiful. I can't remember too many things, except the only thing I remember when I was three is we moved. And I guess I remember it because it was a big event. We moved from Elizabeth to Metuchen.

J. L. Grimstead: Well, you ain't heard nothing yet.

R. Terwilliger: Okay, I'm all ears. [laughs]

J. L. Grimstead: When I was three years old, my sister had just been born and well—mother used to give her medicine. Well, I was upstairs—this part comes after what I'm going to tell you now—I had a little piece of well chain about that long that I used to play with. Well, I was missing it and I couldn't find it.

R. Terwilliger: What was this you were playing with, what did you call it? Well chain? Oh, chain?

J. L. Grimstead: A chain—you know these old chain wells where they used to have a wooden pipe go down in the well, with a hole in it about that big around and little rubber buckets. And the chain was fastened on the chain at different distances apart and you turned the crank and you'd wind up the water and it went out the spout.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I see.

J. L. Grimstead: Well, I was leaning out the window looking for that and first thing you know I leaned out too far and I went head over heels down. It had been raining the night before and there was a little muddy spot where the ground was soft and I landed on my back in that. I don't know whether it knocked me out or not, but anyway, I got up and I walked around back and my aunt, she was sitting on this back stoop shelling lima beans. [laughter] I can remember that. Well I was quite sick afterwards and I guess she got the doctor and I was there in the room alone with my sister. Well she wasn't crying or anything, but I thought it was time for the baby to have her medicine. So I went and got this bottle of black medicine and tried to give it to her, and the doctor said he didn't think she got any of it.

R. Terwilliger: [gasps] Was it the right medicine? Was it the right kind of medicine for her to have?

J. L. Grimstead: It was a medicine my mother had been giving her. Oh, no, no, no, it wasn't medicine—it was medicine my mother had been taking, I think.

R. Terwilliger: So you were being helpful. You were going to help out.

J. L. Grimstead: Oh, I wanted to be helpful. [laughter]

- R. Terwilliger: Well you're lucky you didn't kill yourself falling out that window.
- J. L. Grimstead: You're right. I might have landed on my head and broke my neck. [laughter] Well, the Lord has taken care of me so I'm where I am now.**
- S. Trense: Where did your father get the ice?
- J. L. Grimstead: We had an icehouse down in Bonhamtown, down in Mill Pond.**
- S. Trense: So then he would cut ice in the wintertime?
- J. L. Grimstead: He cut ice in the wintertime and sometimes there was very little ice and he had to go down to Rahway and buy it there at the ice factory. He'd bring home a load of ice and he had a little icehouse there alongside of what is Danford's Store [at 476 Main Street] now. And he used to load it in there and then when he wanted to get a new supply of ice, why he didn't have to go so far.**
- S. Trense: He'd come back for it then, so he wouldn't have to go back to Bonhamtown for it. That was right next to where Danford's is now?
- J. L. Grimstead: Yeah.**
- S. Trense: Was it on Middlesex [Avenue] or on Main by Danford's? Was it on Main Street or was it on Middlesex?
- J. L. Grimstead: On Middlesex. It was just on the other side, the place that's all built up now and added to the store. And this was right alongside of that. I used to go down to my uncle's store on Saturdays and his son Percy, he worked there and I used to ride around with him when he delivered groceries. And sometimes they'd get us some bananas that were a little bit spoiled or get a mushball [phonetic]. Percy would take us back there and we'd each have a little bit of mushball [phonetic] or bananas.**
- S. Trense: Refreshments!
- J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, we'd get up on top of the roof and enjoy ourselves. [laughter]**
- R. Terwilliger: That sounds like fun.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

- R. Terwilliger: Shirley, you mentioned when we were walking over here that Mr. Grimstead had helped with during the Depression when some of the houses were put on the market for—was it tax sale?
- S. Trense: No, I don't think so. I think you took pictures of houses during the Depression, right?
- J. L. Grimstead: Just a minute, just a minute. You'll have to stop— [recording paused]**

S. Trense: Could you say that once more?

R. Terwilliger: Say that again.

J. L. Grimstead: I took pictures of nearly every house in Metuchen.

R. Terwilliger: My gracious.

J. L. Grimstead: That was during the Depression.

R. Terwilliger: Now why did you take pictures of them, Mr. Grimstead? What was the—

J. L. Grimstead: To make money.

R. Terwilliger: To make money. And who did you give the pictures to?

J. L. Grimstead: I tried to sell them to the people that owned the houses.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I see.

J. L. Grimstead: That was the only way I had of making any money.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's very interesting. You did this just as kind of a business on your own.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah.

R. Terwilliger: That's really something.

J. L. Grimstead: By that time, I had a camera.

R. Terwilliger: And how did you make out? Was it a success?

J. L. Grimstead: I got three or four, maybe eight dollars in a week sometimes.

R. Terwilliger: And that was good money. [laughs]

S. Trense: It was good for that time, wasn't it?

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah.

R. Terwilliger: And how much did you charge for the pictures?

J. L. Grimstead: Let's see, I think it was six for a dollar. Yeah, six for a dollar or something like that.

R. Terwilliger: Did you do all the developing yourself?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh, I did all the developing myself, you bet. I wouldn't have made any money if I hadn't done that.

R. Terwilliger: Did you have a little dark room here in the house?

J. L. Grimstead: Still do.

R. Terwilliger: Downstairs or where was it?

J. L. Grimstead: No, it was upstairs.

R. Terwilliger: It was upstairs. That's wonderful!

J. L. Grimstead: There was no heat in the room and it was kind of hard in the wintertime. You couldn't get such good results on your pictures in the wintertime.

R. Terwilliger: I'd love to look at them sometime and see if you took a picture of my old house. Do you know where I lived?

J. L. Grimstead: No, I haven't any idea.

R. Terwilliger: I lived in the old Ten Eyck house.

J. L. Grimstead: The old what?

R. Terwilliger: The old Ten Eyck house on [108] Middlesex Avenue down toward the Ramble Inn. Do you remember Russell Ten Eyck—he had a gas station [at 110 Middlesex Avenue]?

J. L. Grimstead: Well no, I don't.

S. Trense: Maybe it was "Ten Eck"—would you know that name?

J. L. Grimstead: I didn't know the names of anybody in those days.

R. Terwilliger: Well my house was a two-story brown house that originally belonged to the Wemett family. Do you remember the Wemett family? No?

J. L. Grimstead: Unh-uh. I don't remember nothing that had anything to do with anybody else, just my own personal experiences. And I wasn't interested in people. I didn't know anybody.

R. Terwilliger: So you charged six prints for one dollar?

J. L. Grimstead: I think that was it. I'm not positive now, but I think that's what it was.

S. Trense: How many years did you do this? Was it two or three years or how long did you do this?

J. L. Grimstead: Well it might have been a couple of years because I did the same thing with Highland Park and—

S. Trense: I see some addresses in here that seem to be Highland Park.

J. L. Grimstead: —and Plainfield, yeah.

S. Trense: Plainfield? Plainfield too?

R. Terwilliger: How old were you then, Mr. Grimstead?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh, gee-whiz. I don't know.

R. Terwilliger: You must have been a young man.

J. L. Grimstead: I was.

R. Terwilliger: In your twenties maybe?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh, probably older than that. I don't know—sure I was older than that.

S. Trense: Thirty? You were about thirty, I should think.

J. L. Grimstead: Something like that, yeah. But how old, I don't know⁴. I could figure it out. I got the dates on some of those things.

S. Trense: You have the addresses on them, and he has them all catalogued with numbers.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, I'd love to look at them. I really would. I'll have to come and look at them. And was there anything more interesting that you did after this? After the Depression, did things pick up a little bit? And did you go back to work someplace else?

J. L. Grimstead: [long pause] I think I got a job somehow. I can't remember just now.

S. Trense: What else have you done in your lifetime jobwise? What other kinds of jobs have you had?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh, I had a little job in New York for a short time. It was in a radio place and I got fired from that.

R. Terwilliger: Do you remember why? Why did they fire you?

J. L. Grimstead: I don't know just why, but I did anyway. And after that, I don't know what I did.

S. Trense: What did you do after—let's see, was your mother still alive then after the Depression? You lived here with her, did you not?

J. L. Grimstead: No, I don't think she was alive then. I think she had passed on. She died in—oh I don't know—1930 sometime⁵.

R. Terwilliger: And had your father passed on at that time too?

J. L. Grimstead: He died in 1925.

⁴ Mr. Grimstead was in his forties when he photographed the local area during the early 1930s.

⁵ Amanda (Edgar) Grimstead died in March 18, 1936 after a long illness.

R. Terwilliger: I see. What happened to his ice business when he passed away? Did you ever take that over and work the ice business?

J. L. Grimstead: He sold it to Mr. [Harry] Oliver. And he got a job in—he was offered a job in New York.

R. Terwilliger: Your dad?

J. L. Grimstead: He was a collector for the gas company.

R. Terwilliger: I see.

J. L. Grimstead: Mr. Oliver had all the ice, I imagine quite a while, then the ice business went out because—

R. Terwilliger: The refrigerator came in.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, they came in.

R. Terwilliger: [laughs] I remember emptying the old water pan under the icebox and sometimes we'd forget and we'd come home and there'd be a big stream of water across the kitchen floor and oh that used to set my mother to a tizzy.

J. L. Grimstead: My father took care of that. He drilled a hole in the floor and he had a pipe from the refrigerator down to this hole and all the water ran down underneath.

R. Terwilliger: That was clever!

S. Trense: That was good. That was a very good idea.

R. Terwilliger: That was a very good idea. Could have saved myself a lot of spankings had I thought of that.

J. L. Grimstead: You got spanked?

R. Terwilliger: I got spanked if I forgot to empty the water pan, it was my turn. [laughter]

J. L. Grimstead: Well, I used to misbehave myself at the table. My father sat over on that side with his back to the cabinet and I sat there at this end. I'd do things that he didn't like and he always had a slipper down by the side of his foot. [laughter] And when I'd do something, why he'd lean down for the slipper while I'd jump out of my seat and I run out the back door and he never caught me. [laughter] I never got a licking for anything I did there.

R. Terwilliger: I guess I couldn't run fast enough.

J. L. Grimstead: Well it took him some time to untangle himself and get out that narrow place there.

R. Terwilliger: Right. [laughs] Was your dad strict with you? Was he very strict?

J. L. Grimstead: Oh no, he wasn't strict.

R. Terwilliger: No. But you sound like you were a pretty easy person to live with. You said you weren't mischievous.

J. L. Grimstead: I was. I was. I didn't get into mischief.

R. Terwilliger: Did you have chores that you had to do?

J. L. Grimstead: Nope, nothing at all. I should have had something to do and been responsible for. I'd have been a lot smarter than I am now if I'd had some of that kind of training, but I didn't get it.

S. Trense: Yet you do pretty well.

J. L. Grimstead: So I never did anything to earn money except we had a lot of these yellow plants in the grass and my father gave me a penny for each ten that I'd pull up. [laughter] Well maybe I'd pull up two or three piles and that was all the work I was good for. I wasn't a worker.

S. Trense: Then would you go off and spend your pennies at the candy store after earning them?

J. L. Grimstead: I don't know what I did with them. I don't know what I did with them, but I didn't get many pennies I know. I wasn't ambitious enough to earn money. It didn't mean anything much to me. I never had any.

R. Terwilliger: Mr. Grimstead, is there any special memory you have that you like to think of over and over again as a younger person? Is there anything special that happened to you that really means a great deal to you?

J. L. Grimstead: I don't know if there are.

R. Terwilliger: Well, you know you're certainly a peaceful man and a lovely person to sit and talk to. I just have the feeling that you've got a secret about an attitude or a feeling about life that would be worth sharing with us because you certainly lived in good health to a nice ripe age and what can you tell us? What's your secret for your longevity and your good attitude?

J. L. Grimstead: [sings] Why was I ever born lazy, if I was intended for work?
If I had a job, I'd go crazy.
I've only got the energy to shirk.
The only thing I like to do is hang around.
When I'm not eating, I'm laying down.
Oh, why was I ever born lazy, if I was intended for work?

R. Terwilliger: Wow, I'm gonna applaud to that. [laughter] I think you missed your calling. You should have been an entertainer. [laughter] That's beautiful. So that's your philosophy on life?

J. L. Grimstead: Well I've got another song that's pretty good. I'll give it to you after a while.

R. Terwilliger: Okay, but you have no special philosophy on life.

J. L. Grimstead: No. Maybe I have, but I can't think of it.

R. Terwilliger: You can't think of it. Tonight, you'll think of it when I'm not here.

J. L. Grimstead: I doubt it. [laughter]

S. Trense: I remember you telling me a story about you standing out in front of your house here, and seeing, was it your father—hurt or run over? Tell us about that, would you?

J. L. Grimstead: Well, I suppose these things should come in order as they happen.

S. Trense: No, it doesn't matter.

R. Terwilliger: This is just an informal conversation with Mr. Grimstead. We don't have to be structured. This is more in keeping with your style anyway.

J. L. Grimstead: All right, have it your own way. [laughter] Well we were—mother and father and I were going down to the movies to see *Charley's Aunt*⁶. Well at that time, the bridge had been damaged down there in Perth Amboy where it crosses the river and all the traffic was routed through Metuchen to New Brunswick. And traffic was very dense. Well we were going out there and we were standing along waiting for the traffic to go by. I was standing by my mother and my father was off just a little bit. And he thought he could get across and he walked out in the middle of the street and the car was coming and he stood right in the middle between the two headlights. And the man who was driving was just learning to drive. Well he struck my father and my father went down underneath the car and the front axle just gouged his eye. Well I went over there and looked at him and I turned to the man and I said, "Don't move the car, raise it." But I doubt if they did. I imagine they moved the car and backed it up, which was not the thing to do. Well anyway, I was kind of—well I didn't want to look at it, so I turned my back and walked away. My father's hat was up the street about eight or ten feet, so I went over and picked that up. And when I got back, they had him out. And they took him in the house and laid him on the floor there in the front room. That was a parlor then. And then they took him upstairs and put him on the bed in this room upstairs. He only lived about an hour or so and then he died.

R. Terwilliger: Oh my, I didn't realize that.

S. Trense: This was an awful thing for him to see.

R. Terwilliger: Oh goodness, Mr. Grimstead, I thought he was just injured. I didn't realize it was fatal.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, it was fatal.

⁶ *Charley's Aunt* was an American historical comedy film that was released in 1941; Grimstead's father was killed in 1925. Therefore, it is unlikely that the Grimstead family was going to watch the film on this occasion.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, how terrible for you.

S. Trense: So the traffic out here on Middlesex was as bad then as it is now.

J. L. Grimstead: Well at that time it was.

S. Trense: Yeah, because of the detour.

R. Terwilliger: My goodness. So you suddenly became the man of the family then when your father passed away.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah, but I don't know whether I was working then or not. Maybe I was.

S. Trense: This was in 1925 you said your father had died, that would have been that year.

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah. Well I think perhaps I was working then, I don't know.

R. Terwilliger: Was your sister [Pearl (Grimstead) Meade] still living at home then too?

J. L. Grimstead: No, she'd got married and they went out—where did they go? Oh, they went out up there in New York state. I don't remember what town, but it was right at the top of New York state. I can't think of the name of the town at the present time.

R. Terwilliger: Well that was really quite a ways to go.

S. Trense: Do you still have relatives up there now?

J. L. Grimstead: Well I've got one up in Poughkeepsie [New York], I think. He's teaching in a college there. He has a place up in Nova Scotia [Canada], summer home where he goes there and spends the summer months.

R. Terwilliger: Well you've enjoyed, it seems, an interesting happy life in Metuchen.

J. L. Grimstead: Well, it was.

R. Terwilliger: Is there anything you'd do differently if you had to do over again?

J. L. Grimstead: If I had some of the sense I got now, there probably is.

R. Terwilliger: What's that old Pennsylvania Dutch [saying]? "Too soon old and too late smart."
[laughter]

S. Trense: That's a good expression.

J. L. Grimstead: Well I'm not especially smart now, but I get along.

R. Terwilliger: But there's nothing off the top of your head that if you had to do over again, you'd do differently. You think you would live your life the same way again.

J. L. Grimstead: Probably.

S. Trense: You and Major [Charles B.] Carman had a birthday party at the historical society in June. Are you going to be having your birthday soon?

J. L. Grimstead: Wait a minute—I'll show you what they put in the Woodbridge [News Tribune] paper.

S. Trense: Okay. [recording paused]
Monday, July twenty-eighth paper.

R. Terwilliger: This is his birthday celebration at the library, was that where it was held?

S. Trense: It was at the BIL [Borough Improvement League] at the annual meeting of the historical society.

J. L. Grimstead: What date was that? Any idea?

S. Trense: It was the last Friday in May. May the thirtieth I think, was this year, was the last Friday.

J. L. Grimstead: The newspaper doesn't want to come apart.

S. Trense: There you go [opening the newspaper]. Let's open it up and see.

J. L. Grimstead: There it is.

S. Trense: An article, "Two Honored in Metuchen." That was very nice. Shall I read the article?

R. Terwilliger: Yeah, why don't you. That would be a nice way to end it.

S. Trense: "Two Honored in Metuchen" is the headline in the *News Tribune*, Woodbridge *News Tribune*, of Monday, July 28, 1975.

"Major Charles B. Carman of 68 Linden Avenue and J. Lloyd Grimstead of 576 Middlesex Avenue were honored in advance of their ninetieth birthdays with a birthday cake and refreshments by the Metuchen Regional Historical Society. Both men have contributed substantially to the society project of compiling local history."

And then it just goes on to state the officers for the next year of the historical society. But that was a very nice thing to have—to honor you Mr. Grimstead. What month were you born?

J. L. Grimstead: June twenty-ninth.

S. Trense: June twenty-ninth. Wonderful

J. L. Grimstead: And, now lets see—

R. Terwilliger: June twenty-ninth, what year?

J. L. Grimstead: Eighteen hundred eighty-five.

R. Terwilliger: Eighteen hundred eight-five. Isn't that wonderful!

S. Trense: So you're ninety years old.

J. L. Grimstead: There was another thing in there. I think it was in here. It tells about the spring down there in Raritan Bay where Henry Hudson went in to load up his ship with fresh water, and that hundreds of ships came in there to get their supply of water after that.

R. Terwilliger: This was a natural spring?

J. L. Grimstead: A natural spring. And the historical society there fixed it up.

S. Trense: That's good.

J. L. Grimstead: And I think that is in here somewhere, but I don't know where. It showed a picture of it, I think.

R. Terwilliger: Well we'll have to look for it. Maybe Mrs. Trense can find it.

Mr. Grimstead, can I ask you one more question please because we're almost out of time. I have to go to work in the library pretty soon.

J. L. Grimstead: Oh, you do?

R. Terwilliger: I do. I noticed your pile of books there on *Family Health*, *Magic in Minerals*, and another one says *The Organic Way*.

J. L. Grimstead: This is the thing; you want to get one of these.

R. Terwilliger: This one is called *Helping Yourself with Foot Reflexology*.

J. L. Grimstead: Reflexology, yeah.

R. Terwilliger: Do you practice this?

J. L. Grimstead: A little bit, I don't have time to do what I should do with it.

R. Terwilliger: What is reflexology?

J. L. Grimstead: Well you massage your feet, that's all. These are my tools that I made up for doing it.

R. Terwilliger: Oh, that's interesting. My goodness. Well do you know there's a whole new thing that they are really beginning to feel that a lot of your bodies' aches and pains can be relieved through proper foot massage. And that's this stuff. Hey, maybe we'd better look into it. He's ninety years old and looks so great.

S. Trense: And hale and hearty.

R. Terwilliger: When was that book published? It would be interesting to know how long he's been practicing.

J. L. Grimstead: You can get that through the library, I think.

S. Trense: Nineteen hundred sixty-nine.

R. Terwilliger: Nineteen hundred sixty-nine. And you try to do this not regularly, but on and off?

J. L. Grimstead: Well I would do it regularly if I could, but I go to bed too late, or too early.

S. Trense: Depending on which way you look at it, right?

J. L. Grimstead: Yeah.

R. Terwilliger: And what kinds of things have you helped yourself with, with this foot massage?

J. L. Grimstead: You do it for everything.

R. Terwilliger: For everything? If you have a headache, there's a certain part of your foot to rub to relieve the headache?

J. L. Grimstead: Yes.

R. Terwilliger: That's the way it works?

J. L. Grimstead: If you've got a headache, put your fingers on your temple and hold your breath for a little bit and if it doesn't go away the first time, do it again. But that hasn't anything to do with this, this is something else.

R. Terwilliger: Well how would you explain something like this?

J. L. Grimstead: Well there is a reflex for every—

S. Trense: Flex? For every flex! Every time something flexes. For every movement, there's a reflex.

J. L. Grimstead: No, for every—

R. Terwilliger: You mean for every nervous system in your body, there is a reflex?

J. L. Grimstead: Every gland in your body.

R. Terwilliger: Ever gland, ok good.

J. L. Grimstead: And these glands get clogged up, as crystallization forms and it shuts off the circulation of blood and they don't operate properly. Now the [unclear] and the pituitary gland—those two glands regulate all the other glands. Now if they get out of whack, why then the other glands get out of whack and don't function properly and then you got something wrong with you.

- R. Terwilliger: So these are the tools you use to massage your feet. Is there any special area of the foot?
- J. L. Grimstead: The whole foot. These glands are all over the foot. Some of the glands are as small as a pinhead and other glands like the liver are great big things. And you got to be very careful how you massage them when you start with because they'll throw off poisons, they'll throw off them more than the other glands can absorb and that will make you sick if you don't watch out.**
- R. Terwilliger: Pretend this is your foot now. Are there special areas of the foot for different glands? It's all in the book. [laughs]
- J. L. Grimstead: There all over the foot, yes.**
- R. Terwilliger: This is most interesting. Now we know your secret for your ninety good years. [recording paused]
- J. L. Grimstead: [referring to book] There's three of these charts here that shows where the glands are located.**
- S. Trense: And where to massage to help each part of the body.
- J. L. Grimstead: There's illustrations in the book that show you just where to massage and just how to hold the tools to do it.**
- R. Terwilliger: That is wonderful. Gee!
- J. L. Grimstead: It is.**
- R. Terwilliger: I think it's most interesting.
- J. L. Grimstead: But you try to get those tools at the drug store, they don't have them. I've only tried two drug stores, but--**
- R. Terwilliger: So you made your own. May I see your tools again? [looking at tools] Look at that. That's great. And they look like they've been well used too, don't they?
- S. Trense: Yes, they have soft edges on them.
- R. Terwilliger: Maybe I can describe them just a little bit. One looks like a piece of dowel I would say at least--
- J. L. Grimstead: That other one is a piece of dowel.**
- R. Terwilliger: This one here looks like a half-inch maybe.
- J. L. Grimstead: That's it; a half-inch dowel.**
- R. Terwilliger: And this would be about an inch, wouldn't you say?

S. Trense: Yeah.

R. Terwilliger: A larger piece of dowel and then another one that is really I think of personal design
is like a ... [recording ends]

[END OF INTERVIEW]