

## **Joseph Fater**

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Introducer: Phyllis Boeddinghaus  
Transcribers: Janena Benjamin, June 2005 and Laura Cabbage-Draper, December 2019  
Editor: Jennifer Warren, March 2020

Abstract: Joseph J. Fater (1911-1997), the son of Hungarian immigrants Joseph and Rose Fater, was born in Bonhamtown and moved to Metuchen around 1950. Mr. Fater owned Fater's Greenhouses along South Main Street near US Route 1 in Bonhamtown and was a member of St. Francis Cathedral in Metuchen. He also served as exalted grand ruler of the Metuchen Elks Lodge No. 1914, chairman of the Metuchen Elks Youth Activities Committee, president of the American Hungarian Democratic Organization, and manager and president of the Metuchen Little League. Mr. Fater received the Boys and Baseball Award for outstanding service in the Metuchen Little League in 1963 and the Outstanding Achievement Award from the Metuchen Chamber of Commerce in 1983.

In 1998, the Metuchen Little League posthumously dedicated the Little League Field and Clubhouse on Oakland Avenue to Joseph Fater, who was an active member of the league for eleven years from 1959 to 1970. Mr. Fater, who lived at 73 Spring Street, was married to Julia Fater and they had one son, Joseph Jr.

The following transcription is from a presentation by Mr. Fater during the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society (MEHS) meeting at the First Presbyterian Church. Mr. Fater spends the time discussing his memories and anecdotes of old Metuchen and Bonhamtown related to the themes of transportation, sports, local businesses, railroads, disease, local figures, war, and recreation. He also takes questions from several audience members, who share their own recollections of the area.

Interview note: Audience members and speakers during this presentation cannot be accurately identified. Therefore, these individuals will be generically identified as "Speaker 1," "Audience 1," "Audience 2," and so forth.

*Disclaimer: Please note that all oral histories presented by the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society are unaltered. The language, comments, and thoughts contained therein are solely those of the individuals interviewed. Our goal in presenting them is to make the personal recollections of these individuals available, to be considered within both their historical context, and during the time the comments were made, as a part of the historical record. The content and language of these interviews should not in any way be attributed to any of the past, current, or future members of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society Board of Directors, or to the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society membership as a whole.*

P. Boeddinghaus: [recording begins mid-sentence] ... [Metuchen-]Edison Historical Society meeting on March 1 and the guest speaker is Joe Fater. [recording paused]

Speaker 1: [recording continues mid-sentence] ... a long-time Metuchen resident and he is going to speak to us about old Metuchen.

**J. Fater:** Thank you. [audience applause] I'll also introduce myself. My name is Joseph Fater. I have been a resident of Metuchen for, oh, fifty some years. I was born in Bonhamtown in 1911. You talk about [President Abraham] Lincoln being born in a shack, me too. [audience laughter] And my father immigrated from Hungary. I have a family of, right now, four people here. My two, three—how many sisters have I got? [audience laughter] Three sisters<sup>1</sup>—

Audience 1: Too many, Joe!

**J. Fater:** —one son [Joseph Fater Jr.], and a dear wife [Julia Fater] that put up with me for all these years. Number one, I'd just like to say something: Metuchen doesn't know what a town this has been because I have been around here a long time, long years. And right in between New York and California, right across our alley, goes the Lincoln Highway. People don't know it's the Lincoln Highway; they say it's Route 27. But a lot of people have traveled through here with horses. And I tell you, sometimes in the years when I was a young boy, you could walk past here and don't worry about a car within five, ten minutes. From there, my family from Bonhamtown, where I was born, moved a little bit south and came into what they call—well, it was Bonhamtown—and then it came to the trolley car, the Green Line (the "Fast Line"<sup>2</sup>). That was where US [Route] 1 is at present. That Fast Line ran from New Brunswick to Newark. It had a stop right on Main Street, just on the boundary line of Metuchen there.

And also, I'd like to present—we're here today at the [First] Presbyterian Church—I just want to mention in this town we had a baseball player that's name was "Bud" Humphries<sup>3</sup>. He was one of the most noted baseball players and had a chance to be in the big leagues. His only drawback was the Sunday law was here and he wouldn't play baseball on a Sunday. So that stopped his momentum to go to the big leagues. I remember when I was a kid, Campbell Field was a place where the Metuchen baseball team played and one event that they had was bringing the St. Louis Cardinals here with a man by the name of Joe Medwick<sup>4</sup>. And Bud Humphries had a chance to join up with the St. Louis Cardinals at that time, but he didn't want to play Sunday baseball so that squashed that.

Another item that I'd like to mention, we had a tile works [Empire Floor & Wall Tile Company<sup>5</sup>] here on Middlesex Avenue that employed quite a number of Metuchenites and the local people by the other end of town: Edison, Bonhamtown there. And the tile works was run by a family—the Adams<sup>6</sup> family. There was the father and a few boys, and they were quite an employer for

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph Fater had three younger sisters: Mary, Margaret, and Rose.

<sup>2</sup> The Fast Line refers to the trolley line from Newark to Trenton via Elizabeth and New Brunswick that was operated by the Public Service Corporation.

<sup>3</sup> Bertram "Bud" Humphries was the son of Rev. George M. Humphries, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Metuchen. He pitched a shutout with the Metuchen men's baseball team against the World Champion St. Louis Cardinals as part of exhibition game at Edgar Field during the 1930s.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Medwick was leftfielder for the St. Louis Cardinals during the "Gashouse Gang" era of the 1930s.

<sup>5</sup> The Empire Floor and Wall Tile factory was located near the intersection of Middlesex Avenue and the Lehigh Valley Railroad. Constructed in 1916, the factory was taken over by the government during World War I and the company failed to make a profit in subsequent years. The factory closed in the early 1930s and was taken over by a branch of the Celotex Corporation of Chicago in 1936.

<sup>6</sup> The company was owned by John Bartle Owens.

Metuchen at those times. After they got out of here, I think Celotex [Corporation] came in. And after Celotex, I don't know who came in. But it's a dead issue now. I don't know what happened in the meantime, but I know that they're not in the existence. That's part of it.

Right now, I'll just bring you to an item here. You had the Lehigh Valley [Railroad] here that is obsolete here. Years and years ago, from Perth Amboy to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, that was a main line that brought in all your fuel! What I am referring to is coal. The yard was Perth Amboy and from Perth Amboy, the coal was distributed all through this section of the county. And well, there was a number of yards (coal yards) around that distributed the coal. And most of this coal came by horse and wagon.

Another item I want to bring up is in 1900 and, I think, it was sixteen or seventeen or eighteen, when I was a little boy, we had the biggest epidemic you ever laid eyes on in this part of Jersey. We had what they call the influenza [Spanish flu]. And this was treated by a certain doctor in Metuchen by the name of [Dr. Herman] Gross. And he had his office next to what now is the post office on the corner—a stucco house [at 344 Main Street]. It doesn't look like a stucco house now because it's pretty well modernized. And he treated the people—I guess I was one of them too—feed us with kerosene! And after a while, guess what happened? The doctor died in influenza! [audience laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: The patients lived.

J. Fater: Yes, like Phyllis said, "The patient lived!" [audience laughter] But as I remember as a small boy, there was a tremendous amount of people that passed away. And most of it was elder. I could remember at least twenty or thirty people around here that passed away on it.

And I don't know if you people know, we also had a rubber factory<sup>7</sup> in Metuchen on the corner of Whitman Avenue and where the [Bonhamtown Branch of the Pennsylvania] Railroad goes over Whitman Avenue in South—well, near the [Route] 287. Just as you pass over 287, there was a rubber factory there for quite a number of years. Down the street from that was a dock that mined clay and there was a pier where the railroad stopped and loaded the clay. Now there's no more clay, but there's Ford Plant [formerly located along Route 1 South in Edison] there. So I just wanted to say that this section of the town and county was a tremendous asset to the people that lived around here.

I'd like to say there—also I'm briefing everybody, I hope I'm not out of order—by the railroad station, we had a family by the name of Crowell<sup>8</sup>. They supplied all the feed supplies for all the farmers around Metuchen, Dunellen, Bonhamtown, Edison, Oak Tree. They were the main suppliers of it. And this is a sad note, he supplied there and his family lived on [63] Spring Street—in fact they owned half

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<sup>7</sup> During World War II, this factory was used as part of the New Jersey Fulgent Company, which manufactured military flares with parachutes.

<sup>8</sup> William A. Crowell owned a feed store at 389 Main Street.

of Spring Street—and a horse kicked him, that was the end of him<sup>9</sup>. [audience chuckles] There were some good moments here and some sad moments.

I'd like to say—I know I lived in Bonhamtown—we had a farm and on [468] Main Street near the corner of Highland Avenue was a hardware store by the name of [Benjamin D.] Ford. And if you needed any farmer equipment, you got it. There was very few hardware stores. If you couldn't get it in Metuchen, you had to go to New Brunswick to Strong Hardware [Company]. But this is a place where you were able to confiscate almost anything that you needed for the farm. [audience laughter] And next door to that [at 460 Main Street], guess what it was? The movies! That's where Jimmy Forgione [James Forgione] was the last owner of the movies there. And from there I think he built the other movies up near Amboy Avenue: the Forum [Theatre at 314 Main Street]. But Jimmy Forgione was the last owner of this movie house on the corner of Highland Avenue and Main Street.

P. Boeddinghaus: Is that still the same building, Joe?

**J. Fater:** Yes, it's only modernized. If you didn't have a dime to go to the movies, Jimmy would say, "Go ahead and go in." And there was quite a bit of hanging around in them days, at my time, to see that we all got in.

But I forgot to say the clay pit that was by the Ford Plant was owned by a man by the name of [William Thomas] Campbell's<sup>10</sup>. And Campbell's is the one that all these Campbell Field and Campbell School is named after. I know the Campbell Field was quite a little ball field there, and that's where Metuchen, the baseball teams played a number of years to the audience and brought in quite a bit of teams like the [New York] Black Yankees and all those that—there's a lot of people [that] don't remember. I hope that somebody [unclear] an inkling of what has transpired, and this was quite a good town that they were able to visit some of these teams. And if they didn't visit Campbell School in later years, they went to Edgar Field. And Edgar Field wasn't like it is today. The pads were up and the holes were a little bit deeper.

Is there anybody that would like to ask a few questions?

Audience 2 (Bob): Yeah Joe, I read about down where you used to live in Bonhamtown about a Mill Pond there.

**J. Fater:** I am coming to that.

Audience 2 (Bob): Yeah because there is none there now though.

Audience 3: I wondered what happened?

**J. Fater:** Right. Well, shall I tell you?

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<sup>9</sup> The Crowell that Mr. Fater mentions as being killed by a horse may be Reginald Bulkley Crowell, who was the son of William A. Crowell. Both men worked at W. A. Crowell & Son Feed Store along Main Street.

<sup>10</sup> William Thomas Campbell of Metuchen was the son of Augustine Campbell and he owned the Raritan Ridge Clay Company, which was incorporated in 1901. He sold the land on which the Campbell School was built to the Metuchen Board of Education at a reduced price with the stipulation that the board maintain an athletic field for borough youngsters.

Audience 2 (Bob): Sure. You do what you want to do.

**J. Fater:** Listen, there is a lot of interesting things like Bob said there. The Mill Pond, which is obsolete now—US [Route] 1 has taken some of it, others have taken some of it. I just want to say—people are talking about refrigerators—now I’m going to brief you a little bit of what the Mill Pond was. The Mill Pond was quite a pond where during the winter, they skated; during the summer, they were swimming. And during the winter, if they weren’t skating, the ice company that was owned by man by the name of Lawrence [phonetic] had a house on [South] Main Street—the picture’s here. Behind that, it had a big barn where the horses were—what do we call it? They were there anyhow.

Audience 2 (Bob): Stabled.

**J. Fater:** Stabled. And the horses at those times—I don’t know what the difference is now—when I was a kid, I’d go down there, the horses were on the pond and they were cutting the ice! And after they cut the ice, they had a horse in the side there on a merry-go-round going around and pulling the belt up with the ice. And they stored the ice in this big building with salt hay. And that stood there until April and that’s where everybody in Metuchen and Edison and Perth Amboy got most of the ice because they were mined there. After that, the mining was finished there. Costa’s had an ice cream store<sup>11</sup> and they had an ice machine here in the back, and people would come to Metuchen to buy ice because there was no more ice in the ice house—burned down. So they had to come to Metuchen to get ice. But on the whole, it was a terrific pond and there was no—well, you have pools now—but in the summertime, you went to the Mill Pond. You couldn’t get hardly a space there to go swimming because there was so many people and it was free.

Then going down towards the end to Old Post Road, there was a beautiful dam that all the excess water went off the dam into the brook [Mill Brook]. And the dam busted. They repaired it, but they were never able to repair it to a certain extent that it was usable. It became just an overgrown brook.

Audience 4: Is that how it disappeared? [coughing]

**J. Fater:** Yes, that’s how it disappeared and US 1 came and put the kibosh into that there.

Audience 5: That Mr. Lawrence [phonetic], who ran the ice company, is he the man for whom Lawrence Street on the south end of Metuchen is named? Or is this a different Lawrence?

**J. Fater:** No.

Audience 6: [unclear] Dittifield [phonetic]; Lawrence Dittifield [phonetic] the street is named for. He was one of the builders, he and his two brothers.

Audience 5: So Lawrence is a first name, in other words?

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory Costa built an ice cream shop at 416 Main Street in 1914 and an ice cream plant at 16 Pearl Street in 1923.

Audience 6: Yes, his first name was Lawrence.

Audience 5: Okay.

**J. Fater:** This was a last name, Lawrence [phonetic]. Yeah. From where he is left, Lawrence [phonetic] went across the street with what is now the [Raritan] Arsenal, was the Arsenal. There was a [Public Service] Car Barn [on Woodbridge Avenue] and he (people) lived there after the pond delete—well, they got rid of.

Audience 5: After it was drained.

**J. Fater:** [laughs] It was drained pretty good!

Now I don't know if you people know, there's a thing that was very nice here. Years and years ago, if anybody remembers, where Westinghouse [Plant, formerly located at Vineyard Road and Route 27 in Edison] is now was a polo field where polo horses, polo teams were playing polo for a number of years. I don't know if anybody remembers that or not, but it was quite—

Audience 7: There is an old man back here that every time you say something, he agrees with you. [audience laughter]

**J. Fater:** The reason why he agrees with me is, he knows because he was around too! [audience laughter] Yeah, right. And he could tell you how neat this town was, and how social everybody was, and be honest with you, there wasn't many people here and you knew everybody. If you went to church, it took you fifteen minutes before you came into church because everybody was talking to you.

Well, other thing is, now I'll get down to the clay pits. On the clay pits concerning Bonhamtown, there was Bloomfield's clay pits [Bloomfield Clay Company]. And I want to brief you on the Bloomfields. The grandfather [Charles A. Bloomfield] was the big cheese in the Bloomfield family and if anybody was around here, they had most luxurious house you ever laid eyes on—a real mansion, a southern mansion. It had a circular driveway in the front of the building. In the back was a stable there where the help lived. [chuckles] They had horses and all that. Eventually the clay pit went bankrupt, and I guess the Bloomfield clan got bankrupt too. One of them worked in the post office for a while. And I know that was Lundy [Howard Lundy Bloomfield], I think. His wife [Patricia (Ward) Bloomfield] was a great Boy Scout leader.

Audience: Girl Scout! [audience laughter]

**J. Fater:** Huh? [unclear]; the Gs change very fast! [audience laughter]

Audience 8: Where was the Bloomfield mansion?

**J. Fater:** The Bloomfield mansion was right on the corner of Woodbridge Avenue and Amboy Avenue [in Clara Barton, Edison].

Audience 8: Oh, okay.

P. Boeddinghaus: Joe, we used a picture of that in our [Metuchen-Edison Historical Society] calendar last year (1995) and also a shot of the clay pits with the grandfather standing in the clay pit with his long white beard.

**J. Fater:** Yeah. Besides Bloomfield, there was Dittermarsh [phonetic] clay pits and another clay pit, and all of this clay would go down to the [Raritan] River. And I just want to tell you, they had little wagons that the horses pulled, and they were like a little dump cart. The horse backed into where you're going to drop the clay, they pulled the pin out of the wagon, and it dumped. The back end dropped all the clay. And they talk about modern methods, well this was pretty modern in them days too.

But on the whole, the clay pits, they drained them so bad that they had to move. Edgar [Brothers] Clay [Company] was one of them that took care of a lot of clay in Bonhamtown, Keasbey, and by the Ford Plant too also. They took care of most of the clay and it all went to Keasbey where there was a factory that made terracotta. Believe me, terracotta was number one till Best Block [Concrete Products] or the concrete block business came into business. You don't see the terracotta because it was always covered with stucco. And the building [at 344 Main Street] that is on the corner by the post office that I was referring to where Dr. [Herman] Gross—that's all terracotta. It's all terracotta; it's covered up real nice and looks good.

Now I'll just come to a point where—I know in 1916 or something, World War [I] came. I was only a boy; I think seven years old or something like that. And the [Bonhamtown Branch of the Pennsylvania] Railroad never came into the [Raritan] Arsenal. It stopped at before Woodbridge Avenue. One side of the railroad was a bypass and that was a sand pit. At the sand pit, that's where they loaded the sand onto the railroad and the railroad came back into Metuchen there. On the other side, they drained the sand pit so good that the only thing was left was the weeds, cranberry, and a few other idle—wild strawberries and all that. That was a picnic for us. Today, the senior citizen homes are all there. So you can see the difference of what has transpired. Then after that, the war was going along, the railroad went into the Arsenal and way down to the river. One part of the Arsenal was four houses or five. The government picked them up and they were moved to Old Post Road. The houses are still there.

One of our members—or whatever you call it—that's where Tony Yelencsics' house<sup>12</sup> [along Woodbridge Avenue] was first, right across what they called the Bonhamtown [Union] Hotel, which was built in 1912 there. And on the other side of Bonhamtown Hotel, was a man by the name of Tappen<sup>13</sup>. Tappen was a tax collector, mayor of Edison, and a few other positions that he held. So you can see that we've been going back quite a ways in order to visualize what has transpired here.

The Arsenal was built there. After the war got over, they flooded the Woodbridge Avenue with cannons by the thousands. The cannons were there and stood there for a number of years. The Arsenal (or whatever we would call it) was very nice

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<sup>12</sup> Mr. Fater is referring to the childhood homestead of Anthony M. Yelencsics, the former mayor of Edison.

<sup>13</sup> Mr. Fater may possibly be referring to Bonhamtown politician Luther Hamilton Tappen. The Union Hotel was located next to Tappen's Tavern at the corner of Woodbridge Avenue and South Main Street.

to the town. Everybody was invited to the movies at the Arsenal every Sunday there, free of charge. That was quite an event for us children there.

I think I may be going out of my routine or something there. Now I'll get to a little bit of Highland Park. Highland Park had what, when I was a boy there, a racetrack where the sulkies<sup>14</sup> were racing. Across the street from that was a grove (a picnic grove) and a recreation center and—well, all kind of equipment in that—called Forest Park. That was there. Down the bottom of that Forest Park was what they called Tea Pot Dome. If anybody remembers Tea Pot Inn [present-day Raritan River Boat Club at the end of Player Avenue in Edison]? At Tea Pot Inn, all the retired Broadway players came to Tea Pot Inn and emerged there and bought houses and lived there. Tremendous amount of people from New York, all actors and actresses, they migrated and were there for a number of years.

Audience 9: Where was that, Joe?

**J. Fater:** **Tea Pot Inn?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Where was Forest Park?

**J. Fater:** **What's that?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Where was Forest Park?

Audience 10: Lindenau.

**J. Fater:** **Yeah. Forest Park was in Highland—just a little bit past—**

Audience 10: Silver Lake Avenue, Joe.

**J. Fater:** **—past Silver Lake Avenue.**

Audience 9: Oh, over there by Woodbridge Avenue. Yeah, okay.

**J. Fater:** **Yeah. I don't know, maybe somebody can help me out here. But all that I know is that all the clay that was mined in Metuchen / Bonhamtown went to Keasbey where they made the terracotta. And terracotta was the number one building material there. Well, now you can get lumber from all over. But in them days, there was just terracotta, period. And the other one, I have some notation in this book here about the brickyards in Sayreville [unclear].**

D. Kahn: We had a couple of farms here, [unclear] farm and the boneless barn out [unclear], right? My question is, we had some chicken farms, where were the chicken farms?

**J. Fater:** **On Vineyard Road.**

D. Kahn: Were there a couple of them? What were they about?

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<sup>14</sup> A sulky is a light two-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle for one person, used chiefly in harness racing.



- J. Fater:** Okay, the chicken farm was the father of the guy that owns See-More's [TV & Appliance Center].
- D. Kahn: Were there others out there?
- J. Fater:** Yeah, there was one someplace out there, but I don't remember. I also remember there was also a grape orchard someplace there.
- Audience 11: They made wine there?
- J. Fater:** I don't know if he made wine or not, but I know he had a grape orchard. You know Don [Donald J. Kahn]—
- D. Kahn: There was more than one chicken farm.
- J. Fater:** Right, but the main chicken farm was See-More's father. And I don't know what See-More's father was named or something; yeah, but he had a chicken farm. It's almost on the corner of Whitman [Avenue] and Vineyard [Road]. It was right in there, Don, yeah. [long pause]
- I didn't mention, but I know the Crowell people that had the feed store in Metuchen were delivering tremendous amount of feed to the farmers in Bonhamtown, Oak Tree, and all that. And they were the number one feed company in Middlesex County at that time.
- And another item, I don't know if you people remember the two ladies that had an electric car?
- Audience 12: Yeah. Oh, yes.
- Audience 13: No, tell me about that.
- Audience 14: I don't know a thing about it, that's all new to me. [audience laughter]
- J. Fater:** The two ladies were the Litterst family. I'm pretty sure.
- Audience 15: No. Orr, Orr. O-R-R.
- J. Fater:** Is that what their name was?
- Audience 15: A woman by the name of Orr<sup>15</sup> I know had an electric—
- J. Fater:** Well, who were the two ladies that had the candy store on Main Street?
- Audience 16: Perry? Yeah.
- J. Fater:** Perry, the Perry girls. I just want to say that now, I get to the point where the candy store on the Main Street where you got your candy for a dollar, or a hundred or something like that, or [unclear] there, a penny a piece. [laughs] And

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<sup>15</sup> She may be referring to Elizabeth Orr, who was the wife of Horace J. Orr. They lived at 49 Home Street during the early to mid-twentieth century.

**they had the candy store and if you didn't have no money, you got the candy for nothing.**

Audience 17: Was this Tom Perry's mother or something?

**J. Fater: No, this was two gals.**

Audience 15: No, this Perry's that was the candy store was Mr. & Mrs. [Jesse] Perry [at 405 Main Street] and then there was the sister of Mr. [William H.] Perry, who lived on [340] Amboy Avenue. The house is still standing on the corner of Amboy Avenue and—now what was that street? It was one block from Lake Avenue. [Angeline] Perry. Yeah, Halsey [Street]. But the Perry—yeah, they weren't—maybe the two Litterst sisters did have some other kind of business?

Audience 18: They had the Ramble Inn Tearoom.

Audience 15: Yeah, they had the Ramble Inn Tearoom at one time.

Audience 19: There's a name for you—the Ramble Inn Tearoom. I never heard of that one. [audience laughter and talking]

**J. Fater: If I don't get my notations right, please help me out and maybe you could push some of the people—**

Audience 20: You're doing a great job, Joe. Keep going.

P. Boeddinghuas: That electric car was neat.

**J. Fater: Yes, and I tell you, everyday everybody was astonished when they see the electric car and the two ladies—one of them with the handlebars on the side there, steering it. It was quite an event. And I don't know what happened to them, but they're gone.**

Audience 21: It wasn't so great for kids because you couldn't hear it. If you were like me, you're playing in the street, you suddenly looked up and it was almost on you.

**J. Fater: And I want to tell you something. I don't know if you people know, we had one of the most-fanciest stores in this town by the name of Kramer [Department Store]. [Edward] Kramer. And not only that, but he made sure if you needed a loan to buy a house, Kramer would be one of the men from the bank that would come out and investigate your house. After Kramer got done, there was a gentleman there—his father took over, Don's father [Louis Kahn] took over Kramer's Store. Don's father came from Perth Amboy where Sears Roebuck—he didn't like them so he came to Metuchen. [audience laughter] Right? That's my neighbor [Donald J. Kahn].**

**Is there anything that somebody would like to ask? If I'm running out of material, I don't know if I—**

Audience 22: I would like you to tell me how old you were when you went to the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association at 65 High Street].

**J. Fater:** Oh gee [chuckles], let me tell you something. When was the YMCA—1921 or something? When was it built?

P. Boeddinghaus: Twenty-one or twenty-seven.

Audience 23: In the twenties, yeah.

**J. Fater:** I tell you, I owe the YMCA a tremendous amount of money because I snuck in all the time. [audience laughter] You look at the YMCA today, believe me, they're run fantastically. And in them days, we were all poor, I don't care what anybody said. And we tried to sneak in as much as possible. And I just want to say, we had a man by the name of Mr. [Chalmers] Reed that ran the YMCA for quite a number of years.

Audience 24: [unclear] Reed, was it?

**J. Fater:** Yes.

Audience 25: [unclear question]

**J. Fater:** Well no, this was before. And he was doing a good job, but Rahway YMCA did a better job and Mr. Reed left Metuchen from the YMCA. After he left the Metuchen YMCA, it went down quite a bit. But now from what I gather, it's really a good paying proposition. There was no—well, Mr. Reed was a secretary and it ended there. But offhand, he left for Rahway. I guess every—go ahead.

Audience 15: No, I was saying—you said you were wondering if somebody else had similar little thing. You were talking about the Mill Pond. Well, we used to go swimming there in the Mill Pond. We'd walk from Metuchen down there, and then there was a man by the name of—well, there was Boy's Landing and I forget what the other one was. Boy's Landing was the one with the rope where you jumped off and then the other one—

**J. Fater:** The other one was The Point.

Audience 15: Yeah, The Point, that's right. Mr. Davis, he lived right there and he wanted to make it a resort. So he had me type some sheets of paper that he was going to send in. And [I] type them up and then he sent them to the newspaper, to the New York newspapers for people to come there in the summertime. I don't think it made out very well.

**J. Fater:** No. [audience laughter] Yeah. Where you are referring to—there was a big mansion up by The Point where—

Audience 15: Yeah, was that Davis' house?

**J. Fater:** That was where Davis—like the lady said, Davis lived there and his son was a patrolman in Metuchen for a number of years. I think he moved to the shore because there—but he was a policeman here, Davis. He was one of the four. That's going back quite a number of years. I think he—up until about say, twenty years—he's been out of here about fifteen, twenty years from the force. But he was a patrolman. He lived in Metuchen, but moved to the shore.

Audience 26: Joe, roughly how big was that pond? It doesn't sound bigger than I thought it was.

**J. Fater:** Oh, it must have been about 150 feet wide and about a half a mile long.

Audience 26: That long?

**J. Fater:** Yeah, it was there. But it was a tremendous pond where people would swim from one end to the other or skate from one end to the other. It was one of the things where everything was free.

Audience 27: Was there actually a mill near that pond or was it just called Mill Pond?

**J. Fater:** Yes, going up further there was a [Eggert's] Mill<sup>16</sup> at Mill Road. You know where you go south by the college [Middlesex County College], you turn right and you go down the gully there, and there was a flour mill.

Audience 27: Were they still milling flour when you remember it there or was it a bakery?

**J. Fater:** No, all I remember is the beers and all that. That was done quite a bit before my time there.

Audience 28: A whole bunch of apartments [coughing].

Audience 29: Yeah. Oh, I know where that is, right, okay.

**J. Fater:** Right, yeah, yeah. In fact, where you see Edison Glen [Apartments], there was a picnic grove there that was built by a gentleman by the name of John Anderson.

Audience 15: Shady Grove.

**J. Fater:** Right. So there's people—no, that was built by John Anderson, and John Anderson's daughter [Norma (Anderson) Yelencsics] was Tony Yelencsics' wife. So on the whole there was quite a turnover.

Now I'm going to get to the part about—now finish me. [audience laughter]

I want to tell you something. There's two wars that this part of New Jersey had, and this, be honest with you, I think this was the hub of World War I, also World War II. World War I: the Nixon Nitration Works was a factory that made gun powder. Everything that was transpired from US [Route] 1, the Arsenal, went straight from here to Raritan River to overseas. So you can see that this was a hub of World War. World War II: you wouldn't realize how many people came to the Raritan House Arsenal. It was something like 11,000 or 12,000 people that came from New York and surroundings to work at the Arsenal.

Audience 30: Did they commute there, Joe?

**J. Fater:** They all commuted on the railroad. They all came [coughing] to Metuchen and those that didn't came by, well, trolley car.

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<sup>16</sup> The Eggert family owned the gristmill during the nineteenth century that was located on the south side of Old Post Road to the east of Mill Road.

Audience 31: And then Camp Kilmer must have been very busy during the war.

**J. Fater:** Yes. Well, that part I didn't realize because on Main Street, where I lived, everything came through Main Street.

Audience 30: Oh yes. You were right there, yeah.

**J. Fater:** That's right. They would unload a train there, and I'll tell you, loaded to the ears with people. You wouldn't realize how many people came to the Arsenal to work at that time. I know the Pennsylvania Railroad must have made a lot of money. Stocks went up! [audience laughter]

Audience 31: For some of the women here who [unclear] A&P and Foodtown and whatnot. When I first came to Metuchen in [19]47, we had two little A&Ps in Metuchen. I was fortunate enough to have an apartment over one, twenty-five dollars a month. [I] had to save my money for a house. Then we had one down there where the pet store is or somewhere like that. But before that, I had an ad from the newspaper and the A&P was in Perth Amboy. And it said: "Metuchen: If you wish to place an order, phone in by Tuesday. We'll deliver to Metuchen on Thursday."

Well, I made the mistake of showing it to the manager of the A&P, Mr. Simpson at that time, and I cannot stand to see a man cry so I gave it to him. [audience chuckles] He wanted it so bad. But that was the closest A&P for we had the two little ones in town. You have it delivered if you called in on Tuesday.

**J. Fater:** One thing I forgot to say is on Woodbridge Avenue there was a bypass where you went to what they called Sand Hills there. And in Sand Hills, there was a store run by a man called Gross and he would deliver your beer, or you put your order in; it would deliver anything you want. You didn't have to go to the store, which was very few around.

Audience 32: Joe, how about the explosion?

**J. Fater:** Oh. Well, I don't know if you people know that we really had sort of a blast around here one time when we had an explosion<sup>17</sup> in Morgan's there. And everybody was moving out of Metuchen and Bonhamtown because the noise kept going and they were leery that it was going to affect them.

Anybody helping me?

P. Boeddinghaus: Joe, did your family have a farm in Bonhamtown?

**J. Fater:** Yes, yeah, in fact I didn't want to say anything, but the barn that Lawrence had for the horses was bought by—the house was bought by my father [Joseph Fater]. And it was quite a big farm and the end of the farm almost went into the Mill Pond. So I had pretty good access. [recording ends]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

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<sup>17</sup> Explosion of the T.A. Gillespie Company Shell Loading Plant, sometimes called the Morgan Munitions Depot in South Amboy, on October 4, 1918.

**J. Fater:** [recording begins mid-sentence] ... well, we had cows there. Of course, you had a cow. Almost everybody in Bonhamtown or half of Metuchen happened to have had a half a dozen of them and all the others. And we had cows; we sold milk also over there. It wasn't pasteurized, but everybody lived. [audience laughter]

Well, when the cow got into heat, who did they pick on to take to the bull but me! [audience laughter] So you could tell that the cow was in heat. From Bonhamtown, I had to go to Fords there and take it to the master. [audience laughter] It ain't all that there. I think maybe my sister had to do it once, one, two, so get used to the—realize that what the difference today of life and them days. You know? It's quite a—

Audience 33: Oh, I didn't want to interrupt you. I just wanted to say that right on Main Street in our house, in the same house we are living in now, we had chickens and a bigger number of chickens. I can remember my father chasing them around to wring their neck when he wanted to get rid of one. [audience laughter] And it wasn't illegal at that time to have chickens right in. Yeah, well I know—

Audience 34: When you moved down to Spring Street, Joe, three houses up, they had a barn with chickens, right? I think we had five barns on Spring Street.

**J. Fater:** And they were nice too.

Audience 34: And didn't they have the chickens when you moved in there?

**J. Fater:** Yeah, right.

Audience 35: They had horses on Rose Street. I think Rose Street or somewhere there.

Audience 36: I just want to tell everybody that on the farm, I was always elected to go out and plow with my brother. [audience chuckles] I would lead the horse one time and he would be behind the plow. And the next time, I led the horse and he was behind the plow. So that's how young I was when I was helping my brother. I was a little tot then, but I remember that.

**J. Fater:** Yeah. Well I tell you something, the older people that are here knows that what the situation was when they were kids, and you had to look beyond that also, you know what I mean? And things weren't that potent. I know that 90 percent of the people, when we were kids, did the baking or killed a hog or a pig. We all gathered together and cleaned it and took a share of it. Ninety-five times they would divide it up. They'd buy a pig, cut it up, and each would take a share. And not only that, I remember when they hung the ham in the barn on the attic during the winter and it froze. But then we would go up and slice a piece and take it in.

So it wasn't easy, but I am glad that I am still existing. And for Metuchen, I'm proud to be in Metuchen. I'm proud that my family is all here. And if there's anything you people would like me to voice my opinion on, I'd be only too glad. [audience laughter] But I'm not going to take no more cows to the— [audience laughter]

Audience 37: No more what?

Audience 38: No more cows to be serviced, right!

**J. Fater:** No more cows, yeah. I had my share. Hey, I enjoyed it though. You know I walked barefoot for a number of times too.

Audience 39: Oh sure.

**J. Fater:** Huh? There was one more item that I would like to bring up before I close. I hope I didn't extend my visit and my goodwill too long. The people that I speak to are much more of a rough crowd and they are younger and they could talk back to me in some kind of language that I don't absorb. [audience laughter] On the whole, a nice bunch of people. I'm proud to present what I know about it.

There are a few more things that I probably could visualize, but haven't been able to come up with. But one item that I'm going to say is, I know when kids are kids, but from Bonhamtown, they went to Piscataway School. From Clara Barton, they came to Metuchen High School. From Clara Barton, they came to Metuchen. From Bonhamtown, they came to Metuchen. Even from New Market [South Plainfield], they came to high school for Metuchen. And it was nice that Metuchen was the only high school around. It was the main high school where people came to Metuchen until 1961 when the first graduation class was out of Edison. So you could see how far we were ahead of Edison and then they—Edison didn't have a high school! Now they got two of them.

Audience 40: Three of them.

**J. Fater:** Three of them, maybe four even. Well, they also have a high school [Piscatawaytown School No. 3] on the corner of Plainfield Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue. Yeah. And the trolleys used to go and take people to New Brunswick High School. This is a sad moment for me to say this. We used to—well you know how kids are—you had a conductor and you didn't like and he wouldn't like something, so we called him Barney Google<sup>18</sup>! [audience laughter] And poor Barney Google, well you know you got in the back of the trolley car and you're making a lot of noise and you were a real pain, whatever you are. And he was going up what they called Dunham's Hill. And from Dunham's Hill that was going towards New Brunswick, one [trolley] was coming from New Brunswick and they hit in the middle of Dunham's Hill and poor Barney Google got killed. You know when you feel that you were agitating the poor guy all your life while you were going to school, and when he passed away you say to yourself, "[unclear] should have kept my mouth shut." [audience chuckles]

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<sup>18</sup> The reference comes from *Barney Google and Snuffy Smith*, an American comic strip created by cartoonist Billy DeBeck in 1919. The main character was described as a "google-eyed, moustached, gloved and top-hatted, bulbous-nosed, cigar-chomping shrimp" who was constantly criticized by "a wife three times his size."

So if there's anybody has anything else, if not, I am pleased that you people came out to such a group here that I'm really thrilled to no expense. And if I could help you sometime, if I'm still around, please bear with me. And if I did a few other things that I shouldn't have done, bless me. [audience applause]

I just want to say—I have what here—two items here. This is an encyclopedia<sup>19</sup> from 1896 and it has a little notation, and before I leave, I'll read what it has in this encyclopedia. This goes back to some of the men here or whatever. This says:

The Raritan Township formed from the people of Woodbridge, Piscataway Township [on] March 17, 1870. Of the early settlers were the Fitz Randolph, Stelle family, the John Melosiv [phonetic], Robert Weber [phonetic], Henry Langstaff, Hopewell [Hull]. The very fine clay beds, which they drained so we don't have no clay beds for several years. A copper mine [Mine Gully] near the site of the Menlo Park was discovered in 1784 and worked for a few years. About 1880, Thomas Edison cleared the mine out and commenced working the proper mine for his factory. The village of Raritan Township, or Bonhamtown, named after Nicholas Bonham(town), who settled there in 1682. Piscataway dated back in 1668. Metuchen was named for an Indian chief "Matouchin" and founded in 1701. Menlo Park founded by the cerebral Thomas A. Edison, who had a great factory there. And Fords Corner, Dunham, New Durham, New Delaware, and Stelton schools were established early; the Piscatawaytown Schoolhouse being built in 1695. And since then, the educational interest of the township has kept pace with those of the adjoining towns.

I've suffered long enough with this book there and it's been [laughs] mutilated by a number of hands, and I'm going to give this to the—donate it to the society. [audience applause] And I don't know if this has an early edition of our presidents. If somebody has the time to read it, I guess it will benefit them. This is also out of my closet; I don't have to look at it. [audience laughter] And I want to thank you all for listening for this gentleman that stutters and a few other things, but I think I went through it.

Audience 41: Great job. [audience applause]

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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<sup>19</sup> *Biographical and Portrait Cyclopedia of the Third Congressional District of New Jersey, comprising Middlesex, Monmouth, and Somerset Counties, together with an Historical Sketch of Each County*, edited by Samuel T. Wiley (Philadelphia, PA: Biographical Publishing Company, 1896).