

Gregory Costa

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Interviewer: Phyllis Boeddinghaus and Marie Vajo
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Abstract: Gregory Salvatore Costa Jr. (1912-2009), sometimes referred to as “Sal,” was the son of Italian immigrants Gregory Costa Sr. and Matilda (Moglia) Costa. Born and raised in Metuchen, Mr. Costa was the oldest of three children. He attended Franklin School as a young boy and later transferred to and graduated from New York Military Academy in Cornwall, New York. Mr. Costa graduated from the University of Notre Dame in 1936, and received a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Harvard University. Due to an injury suffered while playing football, he was unable to serve in the military during World War II. However, he was eventually admitted to the U.S. Army Reserve where he served as a second lieutenant. Mr. Costa was president of the Costa Ice Cream Company for several years, and his younger brother, Joseph Costa, served as mayor of Metuchen during the 1950s. He married Mary Madora (Grigsby) Costa of Edison and they had three children: Mary Elizabeth, Andrew, and Gregory III. In the 1940s, he and his family settled along Southfield Road in Edison. Mr. Costa is buried alongside his family at Hillside Cemetery in Metuchen.

From 1895 to 1905, Mr. Costa’s maternal uncle and aunt operated a small ice cream shop at the corner of Hillside Avenue and Main Street. They sold the shop to his parents in 1905. In 1914, his father constructed the ice cream shop at 416 Main Street, and due to growing demand for their ice cream products, he 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. The factory plant moved to the Avenel section of Woodbridge in the 1940s, and the company closed in 1977.

In this interview, Mr. Costa talks about his family history and the origins of the Costa Ice Cream Company. He also discusses his early childhood memories of Metuchen including participating in baseball, working in the ice cream shop, and sleighing along Daniels Hill. He mentions his education, his service in the military reserves, his hobbies, and the construction of his house in Edison. The interview concludes with a review of historic Metuchen photographs.

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P. Boeddinghaus: This is an oral history done under the auspices of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society. Today, Friday, December 8, 2006, Phyllis Boeddinghaus and Marie Vajo are interviewing Gregory Costa at his home on [10] Southfield Road. [recording paused]

[recording begins mid-sentence] ... conducted in Gregory's home on Southfield Road in Edison. [recording paused]

The date of the interview is 2006. [recording paused]

Now, we're on. Thank you very much, Greg, for allowing us to interview you today and do an oral history. And I'm going to ask you first about your genealogy, about your parents, and where you were born.

G. Costa: **My maternal grandfather came from Italy in 1860. He was a confectioner: ice cream and candy. He set up a small shop in Newark and eventually wound up in Morristown. He did not bring his family to America, but he did go back to Italy every two or three years. And then, I guess, these visits accumulated into a family of about four or five—I've forgot now—four or five people. And before he left America in early 1900s, he had all those children, as they grew old enough, to come to America, one or two at a time, and he set them up in stores in Morristown, Flemington, I don't quite remember the town in New York State not too far from Newburgh, and one in Metuchen. Now that group of children all matured here, married, and had children. So my grandfather's family was quite widespread. And they are now located all over America, these people. And we have lost count of some of them. Once in a while, we'll mention a name and they'll say, "Oh yes, he's down in Texas." And two or three or five years will pass and they'll say, "Someone's up in Seattle." So goodness knows where they are. They spread out all over the place.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now that's on the maternal side?

G. Costa: **My maternal side. My paternal grandfather never came to America. My father [Gregory Costa Sr.] lost his mother when he was about seventeen or eighteen years old. He was a bricklayer. His father was a contractor, had quite a large facility over there in Italy where he built houses and roads and things. And when his father married again, he didn't get along with his [step]mother. He had no money, but his brother was in the Army somewhere around Rome, and his brother lent him enough money to get to America. So when he arrived here, he was supposed to go to a bank, he told me, in New York to a friend who had recommended him. And he went to this—I think he was supposed to go to the bank. He went to the bank and these people never knew who he was, had no recollection of such a name. So dad told me that he was in New York in a bad section and he just couldn't stand it. I guess there was a lot of violence and things going on. So within a month, he was on the Lackawanna Railroad¹ and got out of New York, crossed the ferry and picked up the Lackawanna Railroad train and he got off at Morristown. He didn't know anybody, but he did look for a job. He walked from Morristown to Whippany every day to his work and back. I guess it must be four, five, or six miles, but he did that. He met my mother [Matilda (Moglia) Costa] because she worked in my uncle's ice cream shop [Moglia's Ice Cream] in Morristown. And when he went in to buy ice cream or sodas or sundaes, my mother made the sundaes and sodas even with that side. [laughs]**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, that sounds familiar.

¹ The official name was the Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad. Incorporated in 1853, the rail line connected Buffalo, New Jersey to Hoboken, New Jersey.

G. Costa: That's how that started. And when they were married, of course, they bought out my aunt and uncle in Metuchen. That's how they happened to come to Metuchen. My dad didn't know anything about ice cream. He learned all that from my mother's family. But he became quite adept at it and did very well with it. He liked it by the way too; he enjoyed it.

P. Boeddinghaus: So when we talked to you last, you said you were born in Metuchen.

G. Costa: Yes, I was born on the corner of Hillside Avenue and Station Place. That property right in that section belonged to Mr. [Charles] Frank. Mr. Frank's tombstones are now at the [Hillside] Cemetery where my parents are buried and I often think of him. That property that's next door to the—it was a shop—Lucca's [& Company, Inc. at 416 Main Street]. That property from Lucca's to the corner of Hillside, from the corner of Hillside and Main Street back to Station Place was all owned by Mr. Frank. Then the house that my mom and dad rented from him and where I was born, of course, was part of his property.

I had a nice relationship with Mr. Frank when I was a boy. There was a little porch out in front of his store; he had a dry goods store [at 418 Main Street] next to Lucca's. It was an old wooden building there. And some of the old gentlemen in town would stop there. They had rocking chairs and chairs on the porch and they would talk. And one time I was just old enough to know what the Civil War was about, and I sat there and listened to these old men. I can't think of one of the men—it was so far back—I think that his name was [James S.] Oliver², I think. Mr. Oliver, who talked, who talked—I may be wrong about that, but there was a gentleman there. It might have been Mr. Oliver or someone else, who'd talk about their experience in the Civil War. That kind of thing always interested me and it still does. What it set up for me is a wonderful childhood that I had in Metuchen. The children of the storekeepers—Louis Hahn [phonetic], whose father had a butcher shop. [long pause] There was a shoemaker, Hymie Cohen [Herman Cohen]; Hymie Cohen was my age. His father [Jacob Cohen] had a shoe repair shop [at 431 Main Street] out in Metuchen. And Kenny Horn [phonetic], his father was—I mentioned to you the last time we saw him—funny, I can't remember his—

P. Boeddinghaus: That's okay. Can we backtrack just a little bit, you were saying about the cemetery. What cemetery were you referring to?

G. Costa: On Lincoln Street or Avenue.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Lincoln Avenue, right. Hillside Cemetery.

G. Costa: Hillside Cemetery.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. But you were talking about the downtown merchants and the shoe repair shop before.

G. Costa: Yes, just forgive me sometimes.

² James S. Oliver was the last surviving Civil War veteran in Metuchen, passing away in 1932 at the age of eighty-seven.

P. Boeddinghaus: That's okay.

G. Costa: Doesn't maybe to be as articulate as I should be at this age in my life.

The blacksmith—Kenny Horn [phonetic] was member of our [group]. Those boys on Main Street whose fathers worked nearby or had shops there represented a little team that I was captain of that team. And I made it an effort. Since we didn't have a Little League, we made up our own league in Metuchen. I was there on my bicycle in the morning and route everybody out to get the ball to the field by nine or ten [o'clock]. I've forgotten how long we started our games.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now what field would that have been? Campbell School?

G. Costa: Campbells? I don't know what the—I think there's a school on that property now.

P. Boeddinghaus: Durham Avenue. Is it Durham Avenue?

G. Costa: You know where the telephone building [former New Jersey Bell Telephone Company] is on [515] Main Street.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, um-hm.

G. Costa: Down that street.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, that's Durham Avenue and that's the Campbell School. I remember.

G. Costa: You can remember when the Campbell School was not there.

P. Boeddinghaus: Right, yeah. There was a ballfield.

G. Costa: That's where we played. And actually, another thing about Metuchen played, they had a town team, of course, called Metuchen Baseball and they played Fords Corner and Highland Park. So on Saturday afternoon, the people of Metuchen were always down to the field to see the games. There was great interest in that. I love that. I'm sure that that kind of interest still exists in Metuchen, but the sports are different.

P. Boeddinghaus: You were telling us too, somebody would have a glove and somebody else would have the ball and bat and the makeup game.

G. Costa: Yes. Well, I don't know. Our parents probably provide enough money to buy a baseball or a bat and we shared a number of things. If one didn't have a glove when he was turned to go to the field, he'd have a glove and we exchanged gloves out on the field. We didn't have all the equipment.

P. Boeddinghaus: How about the rules and regulations and the reffing [refereeing]?

G. Costa: We had no umpires, of course. But we just went along, played, and just we made up our own rules and we did very well. There were very few fights by the way. It all worked out quite well.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now let's get back to—you were telling us last time that you helped your mother a lot with preparing things for the candy at the shop.

G. Costa: Yes. The Metuchen school system when I was a child had funny little—had great culture about when you grew up. The first time you wore long pants, you were initiated into a manhood, I guess, by the rest of the older boys. And there was a coal chute at the school and you would go down that coal chute, hit the coal, and of course, were a mess. But that was manhood right there. They don't do things like that anymore, but no one complained about it. It was just something you did to a boy when he would start to wear long pants instead of [unclear] britches.

P. Boeddinghaus: That's cute.

G. Costa: After school, there was so much activity on Main Street. All the children there, it was quite an active community of children who enjoyed playing with each other. When I would get back from school, I had a terrible decision whether I would go in and spend a little time with my mother or go out and play. And I liked both, of course, but my loyalty to her, I'd go back to the shop where she was making candy and I'd try to find some work to do so I could talk to her. Of course, as a child, I had a wonderful relationship with my mother. All mothers seek that I'm sure. But it was an experience that I think I still have it with some of my relatives, a devotion to them, I guess. But nonetheless, my mom would say to me as I was working and I was hesitating to go, she'd say, "Please, you've done enough. Now please go out and play. Have some [fun] with your friends." Sometimes they would come to the door and get me. "Oh," she'd say, "you've just got to go." All those contributions to my childhood, those memories, this wonderful little town of Metuchen, I don't think that kind of atmosphere, that healthy atmosphere, existed anywhere else now that I'm an old man and think about it.

P. Boeddinghaus: So now like are you the oldest in the family?

G. Costa: Yes.

P. Boeddinghaus: How many siblings did you have?

G. Costa: I have a sister that's, let's see, seven- or eight-years junior to me. And a brother who's actually fourteen months [younger]. I was the oldest one, yes.

P. Boeddinghaus: You're the oldest. And there was your brother Joe [Joseph Costa].

G. Costa: Joe. He was the mayor of Metuchen in the fifties.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. And then your sister Maria [Marie Costa]. Is that her name?

G. Costa: Now, I think she's eighty-six. She lives in South Carolina. There's another one that's scattered about. [chuckles]

P. Boeddinghaus: So you would help your mother prepare some of the nuts and fruit or whatever, if she wanted you to, and help melt the chocolate?

G. Costa: Yes, I would roast the nuts and I would stir maybe a pot of something that she was doing, or if she was making caramel or something that needed some agitation before it all burned up. [chuckling] But I liked to do those things and after a while, I felt I knew something about it. Especially, I did that with my dad too. There was a little shop behind his store at 416 Main Street where all this candy making and ice cream making took place. It was a very small and modest facility.

But during the First World War, my dad delivered ice cream to the Officers' Club at Raritan Arsenal. And they bought things called the ice cream bricks and it had to be sliced and wrapped. And one day, oh, several years ago before it was [Louis] Tagliaboschi, who was a veteran of that war—the United States hadn't yet declared war or gone to France—he had trouble getting his orders ready for Camp Raritan³. They hadn't had nobody to help him with the getting the order together. Before Mr. Tagliaboschi died, Louis I used to call him, he said to me when he was sick, said, "I told your dad that I had trouble—." He said, "Your dad said to me, 'Well, why don't you wait for Greg to come home, he'll help you with it.'" I was just a little guy. So as soon as I got in the door, he was there, "We need to get the order together."

P. Boeddinghaus: Excuse me, then how did you transport the ice cream out to—?

G. Costa: I was just going to tell you.

P. Boeddinghaus: Okay. [laughs] I'm ahead of myself.

G. Costa: After he got it ready, he had to put it in the tub and put ice all around it and put ice and salt all the way around it and hold it until we got to Camp Raritan. And I sat on the tailboard of the truck going up; I was just a little guy, of course. There were no roads—I've forgotten what, as a child I would remember—I remember what it looked like. And we hit a bump, we went over a little creek and there was a bump there and it bumped me off. I fell off; it wasn't going very fast, but I fell off the truck on the road. The truck kept on going. It was just a pickup kind of truck, and I ran after it, ran after it. [laughs] Of course nothing happened to me but we got to the Officers' Club and delivered the ice cream.

P. Boeddinghaus: So about how old were you then?

G. Costa: Oh, I would say seven or eight. In that sense, it must have been after the war. The Officers' Club was still operating there.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. You told us you were born in 1912.

G. Costa: Yes.

P. Boeddinghaus: We have some interesting information in the archives about Camp Raritan.

G. Costa: Have you?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

³ Established in 1918, Raritan Arsenal in Edison was originally known Camp Raritan during World War I. The Arsenal was abandoned in 1964.

G. Costa: I'm sure that someone has mentioned that the boys (the soldiers) from Camp Raritan would march down through Main Street. It was a long march. I guess they had to train to get them in good condition so they could hike for four or five or six hours.

P. Boeddinghaus: So do you have any recall of what the area was like, say like between Main Street (downtown center Main Street) going toward Camp Raritan? Was it rather rural with farms?

G. Costa: I don't remember any farms in what we called that area of South Metuchen to Camp Raritan. I don't remember anything in there, in that area. But the farms in this direction—there were farms out here—Roosevelt [Park] and open areas, estates—the [Walter R.] Williams estate, which was right over here. You remember the Williams⁴?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, Park [Avenue] and Plainfield [Road], yes.

G. Costa: The mansion there, yes. And the [Gustav] Lindenthal estate here, right here where this property was. I think Mr. Lindenthal owned all this property over to Grove Avenue; it was called Dark Lane at that time. Remember?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, I've heard about it from Mrs. [Ruth] Eby.

G. Costa: That Dark Lane was just a dirt road, very primitive road.

P. Boeddinghaus: I've always heard about that, yes.

G. Costa: Talking about Metuchen too, there was Crowell's Feed Store on [389] Main Street. That store brought many of the farmers to the town, especially early in the morning. They would come to get some food for their animals, hay and straw, feed of all kinds.

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you think they had fuel too? Did they have coal?

G. Costa: I don't know. They didn't have coal, but they had all kinds of food that the animals, they [unclear] it on the farms in the area of Raritan Township, was called that.

P. Boeddinghaus: That's right. That was surrounding Metuchen. Well, you say you went to Metuchen school system. You mention the Franklin School on New Street.

G. Costa: I went to the eighth grade. Then my mother passed away at [19]29 or [19]28. I went to New York Military Academy [in Cornwall, New York] and in my fourth year there, I played football. I'm an old man; I just weigh 139 to [1]40 pounds. But at that time, I was closer to 160-165 pounds. And I was well developed as a young boy and I played football and had an injury there that—the [unclear] of my foot wound up in my armpit. I was in the hospital at Medical Arts Sanitarium in

⁴ Walter R. Williams was the director and purchasing agent of the Woolworth Company. His estate was known as "Roselawn" and was located on the south side of Park Avenue approximately where Mulberry Lane is today. Built in 1912-1913, the mansion had 23 rooms and 7 bathrooms. The house was demolished in 1968.

[Queens] New York for about a week or ten days. And that was over Christmas vacation. And that injury, when World War II came along, even though I was in the reserves–

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, I was going to ask you if you had military service. You say you were in the reserves.

G. Costa: Yes. I was in the reserves and I couldn't pass any test. The injury that I had—my leg was bad, not knee, and I couldn't bend it all the way back so I had restriction in life. I tried the Army, the Navy; nobody wanted me. It's ten or twelve years ago, I went to Hospital for Special Surgery [in New York] and they straightened the leg. Today, this leg is straight. At one time, it came in this way and went this way. Nonetheless, I was in Plattsburgh [New York] in 1931 the whole summer. Before I was there, I was in the reserves as second lieutenant. They really didn't want any cripples. I regretted that because I was proud enough to think that I would like to be in the Army and it was embarrassing for me to walk down Main Street, and the mother who had her son in the Army would stop me and say, "You look young enough to be in the Army." And that hurt. [chuckles] It happened many times.

P. Boeddinghaus: But they didn't realize the circumstances.

G. Costa: Yeah. Well, they could see I was [unclear]; they could see how I walked.

P. Boeddinghaus: So then when you left the Military Academy, is that when you went out to Notre Dame [University]?

G. Costa: Yes. I went there for four years.

P. Boeddinghaus: And what was your major?

G. Costa: Business Administration, BS [Bachelor of Science]. Yeah, that was a wonderful experience. I had the military training for four years at the New York Military Academy. And I was, I think, fourth in standing there and I had about 130-[1]40 boys under my command and I was captain of the company. So I liked that; I still have it by the way. I'm very, personally just [unclear]; it still stuck with me. Notre Dame was a wonderful place. I don't know that I should mention this because it has something to do with my wife.

P. Boeddinghaus: What?

G. Costa: Am I talking loud enough? Am I talking loud enough?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, you know let's just check it [the tape] right here and now.

G. Costa: I'm soft spoken, so I'm afraid–

P. Boeddinghaus: I have the volume turned– [recording paused]

[recording begins mid-sentence] ... the red light go. Yes, we are getting it Greg. We're getting you.

G. Costa: I'm sorry the quality of pronunciation isn't what it should be, but any rate.

P. Boeddinghaus: So I have a question, let's see, while you were at Notre Dame, was your family continuing with the confectionery business?

G. Costa: Yes. My father by that time had that [factory] building on [16] Pearl Street⁵. He built that place in 1923. And the property across the street from the old plant, where the parking area [present-day parking garage] is now, was my father's property there. From Pearl Street down to Lake Avenue, there were houses all the way down on the left side.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember that.

G. Costa: On the right side, there were no houses. It was during the Depression and dad had a hard time, of course, maneuvering through those years when the Depression seemed to hurt an awful lot of companies, hurt the economy. But somehow, he was able to pull through that long period of difficult business years. We had, I think, about employees there—maybe twenty or twenty-two people worked there; some driving trucks and others were working in the plant. And then there was the refrigeration now, taking place pretty much in all the stores, at least had ice cream cabinets, and that equipment was rather primitive and gave a lot of trouble. So dad had, I think, two or three mechanics running around taking care of those things because they were inclined to give some trouble once in a while, especially in the hot weather.

P. Boeddinghaus: And so they not only made ice cream, you also had ice. The company sold ice?

G. Costa: Yes, during in 1923 or [192]4-[192]5 after dad built that facility. Ice was the only source of refrigeration in most homes so they had what was called an icebox⁶. I guess our refrigerators right now are sometimes referred to as iceboxes, but that's where it got its name. Usually a horse and wagon had four or five or six cakes of ice and he had a route in different parts of Metuchen and the area around it, New Brunswick, et cetera. And these people would come to the plant and pick up their ice and then deliver it house to house. And of course, the cars too—the customers would come and cars had, in those days, bumpers that extended out in front of the car and in back of the car and made it a good secure bench to carry twenty-five or fifty pounds of ice. That ice plant, by the way, ran night and day. There was no shift there. It just ran all the time.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, looks like your dad was very enterprising.

G. Costa: My dad was very much an entrepreneur, as they say. Yes, he was a hard worker, very modest man, and he set a good example for his family. When my mother died [in 1929], he became both mother and father. When we were all away at school, my sister was at [St. Mary's Academy in] Lakewood as just a child. She

⁵ 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.

⁶ An icebox, also known as a cold closet, was a non-mechanical refrigerator that was a commonly used in the early twentieth century before the invention of safely-powered refrigeration devices.

lived there and dad would visit her every weekend. And he visited her every Saturday, and he get in his car and then drive up to Cornwall, New York while we were in school to see us [his two sons], spend an hour or two with us. He was an example for all of us in the family, my sister, but we still talk about him.

P. Boeddinghaus: And I think you were starting to tell us how you met your wife and I interrupted.

G. Costa: I don't know. I cut it off because I didn't think that entered, that had any interest in Metuchen or someone's— [chuckles]

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, she's living in the area here for a long time too.

G. Costa: Well, if you want me to finish that, I'll do it.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, okay. And then we'll go back to the history of the ice cream. You started to say something about how you met your wife. I'd like to continue that.

G. Costa: I hope I can make it a short one. When I went out to Notre Dame, there was no way to go out there except by my favorite mode of transportation [which] was the railroad. So I went to East Orange, I think it was, took the train, the Lackawanna train, to Buffalo and that changed to New York Central somewhere out there. There was a young boy who sat next to me on the train. He happened to be at Notre Dame for a year and his parents couldn't afford the tuition so he went to work and now he was going back for his sophomore year. He oriented me about the school. I should shorten this sort of story because of it's not important to everyone. But nonetheless, when we got to Notre Dame to South Bend [Indiana], he took me around the campus to show me what was available there, what it was like. He took me to where my dormitory was and then we finally wound up to a place called The Grotto [of Our Lady of Lourdes shrine], which is an outside chapel along the lake. And we went down this for a few minutes prayer or two and as we left The Grotto, he was walking back to the dormitory, he said to me, "Greg, every time you're on the campus, make sure you come here and pray for a happy marriage." And I was just a greenhorn, a young kid, I was looking for leadership and suggestions for life and I never missed a day through the storms and the snow and everything else—just go down there after dinner at night. The winters at Notre Dame, ninety miles from Chicago, were severe. Any rate, as it turned out, I was blessed by all that.

P. Boeddinghaus: Sweet story.

G. Costa: Anyway, what else do we have from—

P. Boeddinghaus: We were going to ask you a little more about the ice cream company. So I guess eventually you came back into the area and worked with your dad?

G. Costa: Yes, I worked with my dad throughout the war [World War II]. We were able to—we were growing pretty much. And we got to the point where the little plant wasn't big enough to take care of the capacity that was now moving out. So we built a plant over in Woodbridge and we were there until 1976 or [19]77 and sold it to two Wall Street people. And we didn't do very well there. As you know the business operated for two or three years after and then Borden [Dairy Company]

moved everything up to Syracuse [New York] and that was the end of it. It was difficult.

P. Boeddinghaus: You told us something interesting too, when you were going full swing in Metuchen, about using fresh fruit in the ice cream.

G. Costa: **Yes, that was something my dad insisted on and that continued, that underlying fundamental need for the quality of the product that was produced. The integrity of that was important to continue over the years. Dad started out by buying crates of strawberries and bushels and baskets of peaches. We went so far as the years passed working with the Agricultural School at Rutgers [University] looking for peach ice cream. Peach ice cream is the most difficult ice cream to flavor because of the amount of water in a peach. It's very difficult to duplicate that freshness that comes with the amount of water and the taste of the fibers that the peach give. So we actually went to Rutgers to find what peach it was (a variety of peach) that had a resistant and pungent strong flavor of all the peaches, of all the varieties. And we found one called the Triogem. We had an orchard in South Jersey that had these Triogem trees and I still remember the man's name, Pud. Pud I called him—Pud Morrison [phonetic]; Pud was his nickname. He was the orchard owner. Pud and I got along very well. He kept planting trees because he couldn't produce. We bought everything; we bought all the peaches he could plant out there because it took quite a while for a little tree to produce enough fruit. So it took a long time, but we did it. And we changed the composition of the formulations in order to do all this. I think we made the best peach ice cream and still to this day, you don't see any peach because no one seems to know how to do it. It has no flavor whatsoever. Eat it, you wouldn't—if you were blindfolded, you wouldn't know what it was.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I must say Costa's peach ice cream was my favorite. [laughs]

G. Costa: **Was it really?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, because as I mentioned to you, I had worked at the sweet shop. I had worked at the Costa Ice Cream Shop as a teenager.

G. Costa: **Yes. You know, Phyllis and Marie, you never know the effort we made to make good ice cream. Every two weeks over the years, and I'm talking about thirty or forty years, we would meet every other Tuesday night and compare our product with our competitors. Now I had the assistance of Rutgers and Professor Leeder [phonetic]—I can't think, somebody that—Joe Leeder [phonetic], I called him, was my dear friend and we got so—we loved what we were doing. We would meet at seven o'clock every other Tuesday night. And the people from our laboratory, we had three or four men in the laboratory, all of us had this tremendous interest in making flavors right. Sometimes we'd be there till two or three o'clock in the morning. We'd get involved in how to do this or that. We eventually couldn't find—you know how you'd go to the grocery store and see things with better flavor—we couldn't find anything that was good enough so we set up a kitchen in the plant to make these things ourselves instead of buying them. But that lasted about thirty or forty years. Joe Leeder, Dr. Leeder [phonetic] just died about two years ago.**

P. Boeddinghaus: That's very interesting. I don't think the general public even thinks about the effort.

G. Costa: You don't know the effort, how clean we kept the plant. The plant was a beautiful, wonderful, clean, very organized, efficient, yeah. I don't know whether might be of interest to anybody, I'm talking about after we moved to Woodbridge, we had about I'd say 120 or [1]30 employees. And you know that after the business expired, eventually Borden took it over. These two men from Wall Street got Borden to take this business over. Borden had trouble with the union and moved everything to Syracuse. But those employees were just like big family, you knew them since 1930 and since when that happened in 1977 or [19]76. Those old employees, we would meet every spring and every fall and we still do it. Out of that group, most of them have died and we still get together in that routine. There are about, I'd say, fifteen of us left. Isn't that nice?

P. Boeddinghaus: That's very nice.

G. Costa: All those people, it was just a big family. And we had a wonderful spirit with the employees.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, when you showed us the old photographs, you knew the names of the people right away, the Louis Tagliaboschi.

G. Costa: Yes.

P. Boeddinghaus: And who was that other gentleman?

G. Costa: [Dominick] Altavilla.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, Altavilla and the women's names, Sue Benchoff [phonetic] and Mrs. Roxbury.

G. Costa: Yeah. Roxbury. The rest of the Roxburys are in Metuchen, aren't they? Wasn't there a Roxbury that had a bar up on [Route] 27 there?

P. Boeddinghaus: There could have been, yeah.

G. Costa: Oh, that was Nick Knox [Nicholas Knox].

P. Boeddinghaus: That was Nick Knox [of Knox Tavern at 932 Middlesex (Essex) Avenue]. That was somebody else. But you had very fond memories of your employees and remembering their names. Well, I could relate to that. We still hear from some of our employees and we feel good about it that they—

G. Costa: Yes. It's nice, isn't it?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, it is.

G. Costa: They're old friends. It's awfully nice. And the sad part of it is when one of them passes away, and we all get together to talk about the things we did.

P. Boeddinghaus: It's very important.

G. Costa: **The first Chinaman that I knew had a laundry there on Main Street. Do you remember that, Phyllis?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, I remember the one on Penn Avenue [Pennsylvania Avenue]—the Chinese laundry [Din Lee Dry Cleaning & Laundry] on [9] Penn Avenue. Was it one and the same? Or was it someone else?

G. Costa: **No, this was right on Main Street⁷.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, okay.

G. Costa: **The children of Metuchen were—the young people were quite creative and full of fun. There was a change on Main Street that the Chinese laundry, which was next to Perry’s Confectionery [at 405 Main Street]. Do you remember Perry’s?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Other oral history people have mentioned Perry’s.

G. Costa: **Yes, next to Perry’s was this building that China [laundry] was right along in there somewhere. Someone was going to put up a different store there. They had to move this Chinese laundry back—**

P. Boeddinghaus: Okay, just hold up a second. We have to turn the tape over. Just a minute, please. No, no, I’ll—

M. Vajo: It might have been mine that shut off.

P. Boeddinghaus: Okay. Well then, I was watching the time. Greg has spoken for forty-five minutes and it’s an hour and a half tape.

M. Vajo: Okay. [recording ends]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 1]

P. Boeddinghaus: Okay. Now we can continue. I’m sorry you were talking about the Chinese laundry in Metuchen.

G. Costa: **Yes, yeah. Young people are mischievous today and we think we didn’t do these bad things when I was a kid, but there was. When they moved the Chinese laundry, they had tremendous big logs. In order to move one log on top of the other, they were greased with heavy grease and the Chinaman had a line outside where he hung his clothes. And he continued to operate even though they were moving this little building, and he would come down what looked like a ladder (as a device that looked more like a ladder than stairs). The boys thought they’d play a trick on the Chinaman because they were always making fun of the way they talked and so on; you know [how] children and young people are. They put some of that grease that was there on the steps and the Chinaman came out—now, this isn’t funny, but it shows that the little kids in Metuchen were not all saints. [chuckles] They put some grease on the steps. They didn’t have to fall very far,**

⁷ He may be referring to Quong Leung Laundry at 409 Main Street.

but when he came out with this great big basket—I wasn't involved in this, but my interest was. I knew something was going to happen. When he went down the stairs, of course the laundry dish went all over the place. They told that story over and over again and he was so upset when he jumped up and screamed and hollered and shouted Chinese. Fortunately, he wasn't hurt, but it was a funny event with mischievous kids of Metuchen. Oh my!

P. Boeddinghaus: Can you think of any other incidences?

G. Costa: The only other incident, I think, is the children, the people you'll not see anymore. I think the tragedy of Metuchen was when a horse broke down and he had to be put down. It was a favorite policeman in Metuchen called—oh boy—Daddy Smith! You remember sad Daddy Smith?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well I've heard him mentioned in other interviews.

G. Costa: Have you? Daddy Smith, I remember the day Daddy Smith had to put down a horse. That was tragic, but those things happened.

P. Boeddinghaus: Was he a barber?

G. Costa: Who? Daddy Smith?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, was he a barber?

G. Costa: No. Daddy Smith was a policeman.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, you said that!

G. Costa: Yeah. Now I'm trying to think of these names you even called—[talking to someone else] come in. The policemen in town were given names that were, that sounded as though you knew them well, that these names were more in an attempt to be friendly or affectionate or something. So he wasn't really a policeman. He was a friend that was up there trying to keep the place from falling apart. He had a paternal attitude about him. That was Daddy Smith.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, I get that, yes. Now you had mentioned too, about when you lived upstairs over the confectionary store [at 416 Main Street] and the windows were open and you loved to hear the sounds of Metuchen.

G. Costa: Yes, my mother left my bedroom and my brother's bedroom—we slept in the same room—my mother would leave the window on Main Street open even in cold weather, had a little fresh air coming in. It might have been open an inch or two, but enough to hear what was going out on the street. And our interest in sleigh riding—the children of Metuchen congregated after a snowstorm on Daniels Hill. I'm sure the youngsters or many of the people of Metuchen wouldn't know where Daniels Hill, where it existed [along Hillside Avenue]. But the entire community of children in Metuchen—there might have been a hundred of us, seventy-five—but from all over town they came with their sleds, or at least if they didn't have a sled, then there was a toboggan slide there too that we enjoyed. That all was on my mind or on my brother's mind too in the morning when we would hear sleigh

bells on Main Street. The open window was an early morning present for fun at Daniels Hill. Immediately if there had been snow during the night, we'd be on the hill that day. It would be interesting to talk to someone who had that experience at Daniels Hill. The sound of those children, it must have been delightful, the fun they were having there. I don't think there's anything like it in Metuchen now. All these little things made the community just a playground of itself. It was a happy place. At least as a child I felt tremendous pleasure, security, and fun.

P. Boeddinghaus: And you recall hearing the sounds from the blacksmith shop? You could hear the blacksmith.

G. Costa: In the morning. Yes, you could hear if you walked down Main Street as far as Danford's [Store at 376 Main Street], or you came up Main Street towards where the [Metuchen Savings] Bank is now or Kramer's [Department] Store [at 441 Main Street], you could hear the anvil where the—you could hear them shaping the horseshoe to fit the horse he had there. Those sounds were—

P. Boeddinghaus: Can you think of any other sounds? Any other sounds that are reminiscent?

G. Costa: I think, yes. I think the coal locomotive. The coal locomotive was a real giant mechanical piece of iron that made a tremendous amount of noise and power that you had to almost drop your jaw from the size of this monster. There was a siding in Metuchen, a rail siding where they backed their freight cars for delivery to, I guess, people in the area. And as a child, it was of great interest to see these great big things moving on this track. They just towered over you so large. You probably remember the news cars?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, you see I'm a little younger than you are. Let's do our mathematics here. You were born in 1912, I was born in 1929.

G. Costa: Well, that's a little different, isn't it?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. But interestingly enough, I'd like to interject that the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society has adopted as their logo a steam engine locomotive. Do I have it right?

G. Costa: Is that right?

M. Vajo: Yes.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. And then it says, the logo, it says, "Saving the Past for the Future." And I have this picture of the locomotive.

G. Costa: Well, I have some [unclear]. I would go up there with a friend to watch this, as they worked the engine and the freight cars back and forth. I didn't go once; I went enough to know the engineer who would call out to us. But we just sat there and watched this operation going on. One day—now it might have been—I don't know the length of time, but it was—I did long enough so there was interest enough that one day that engineer, I can't remember his name, said to me and the friend I was with, "Come up here. I'll give you a ride." And you know it was quite a job to get up that engine; that engine, it must be four or five feet up we

climbed. We got up there and we spent all the time we were moving the cars back and forth. And we watched the firemen load the coal into the boiler. And the way he operated the [equipment], oh, he was thrilled to death. I think he went up there maybe an hour and a half or two while he fiddled around with it.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now did your parents wonder where you were?

G. Costa: I'm sure they did. They knew where I was out playing. They didn't worry about, no.

P. Boeddinghaus: Because it was a safe community and everybody knew each other.

G. Costa: Yes. You know where the—I'm talking about the area where the commuters park now. Up there, there was a track there. And that track went all the way over to the—I've forgotten that plant—now that's, it's on an extension of [Route] 27.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, the Ford Motor [Company] and the Westinghouse over that way? Revlon [along Lincoln Highway]?

G. Costa: Yeah—well, no. You know where the Ace Hardware Store [at 655 Middlesex Avenue] is now?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, yes.

G. Costa: If you go towards High Bridge, on the right side there was a big plant there with little—I forgot what they made there now. But at any rate, we went on up there. There were only a couple plants and we had railroad cars and siding.

M. Vajo: Celotex?

P. Boeddinghaus: Maybe Celotex?

G. Costa: Celotex [Corporation]! Yes, that's what I meant, yeah. And add other things of [unclear], some of those other plants around here [unclear] cars. Didn't go very far, but it was right in the town itself.

P. Boeddinghaus: Right, yeah. So my next question is now, to what do you attribute your longevity?

G. Costa: I had an interest in physical fitness. I did at NYMA up there at the school, you know. NYMA (New York Military Academy) is about four or four and half miles from West Point, and Storm King Mountain divides the two of them. Boys would come from all over the country to spend a year or more at NYMA in anticipation of getting into West Point. Sometimes their math would be bad or needing improvement, their English, et cetera. And they would spend a year or two so they would be qualified to enter West Point. One of the boys was right across the hall from me and he was from Iowa. I can't think of his name. Any rate, he had these heavy weights and barbells and he was doing it and I got interested in that. Now I'm an old man, but it's lasted all my life, not necessarily try to get strong as them but my physical fitness even today now that I'm approaching my ninety-fifth year, I spent almost an hour and a half every morning [unclear]. I go

to bed at eight o'clock and I'm up at a quarter after four. And I dress and by five o'clock, I'm over at the hospital here.

P. Boeddinghaus: JFK [Medical Center]?

G. Costa: **JFK. They have a large parking lot that's not used in the morning and it's [unclear]. And I go over there no matter what the weather's like and I walk until the gym opens at six. Now sometimes I walk for a full hour, sometimes I'm delayed a little bit ten minutes. But I usually get at least forty-five minutes of a walk in the cold in the morning this time of the year. I love it. And then I go in the gym and I spend another hour in the gym.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Good lifestyle.

G. Costa: **That's my lifestyle. And being on time is something that I got out of that four years of military training as a boy.**

P. Boeddinghaus: I'm glad that we were early today, Marie. [laughter] See? Yeah. Well, that is important, some self-discipline.

G. Costa: **You asked me about my interests. I love to sail.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you?

G. Costa: **Yeah, I don't it anymore. But I haven't sailed any at all in the last twenty years.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And did you have a sailboat?

G. Costa: **I had a sailboat. As I talk to you, I can't say that I was a good sailor. I didn't know how to sail until 1956 or so, and I built a house down the shore. And a friend of mine said to me one day, "Greg, why don't you buy a boat?" I said, "Well, I don't know how to sail." He said, "I'll have my children teach you." Oh, I got so that I loved it. I did pretty well for a newcomer anyway. And when I was at Notre Dame, I learned to fly. I got four and a half dollars a week spending money, and my dad sent me this money and I didn't spend a dime. I spent it all on my flying lessons. I went out to the Bendix Airfield, it was called, and I took flying lessons there. As a boy, I told you I liked to duck hunt over here on this pond. Eventually, I had two dogs here at this house and over the years maybe more than that. And I liked to duck hunt down there on the bay.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Now, what area were you down the shore?

G. Costa: **I had a house; I don't have the house there anymore. I had a house there, low key. With a partner, I owned a 200-acre island down there called Clam Island [in Noyack, New York]. Maybe you know where that is?**

P. Boeddinghaus: You mentioned that, yes.

G. Costa: **That kind of thing. But I don't dance very well. That's the other—I don't know why my Dillie [Mary Madora (Grisby) Costa] put up with me, but I was never good at that.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Did she like dancing?

G. Costa: I think she did; still does. [laughs] No, I don't think she does, but any rate.

P. Boeddinghaus: You told us you met her in Miami [Florida].

G. Costa: Yes, she was a schoolteacher. Another thing I like to do is hike. For several years, we all (wife Dillie, daughter, the boys) we went to Switzerland to hike in the Alps.

P. Boeddinghaus: That's wonderful.

G. Costa: Yeah, you can't do that anymore even though I'm fair state for an old man. My last time I went was when I was eighty-eight and I was able to do it, but I wouldn't be able to do it anymore.

P. Boeddinghaus: Switzerland is so beautiful.

G. Costa: Yes. We'd go for two weeks. We had a cute little place in the Swiss Alps to stay at, just a small inn run by a family. They were happy years.

P. Boeddinghaus: So let's see, is there anything else you would like to tell us about? This is going very well. Marie, do you have any questions?

M. Vajo: You mentioned last time you were here, you went to Franklin School when it was the old school?

G. Costa: Yes. Franklin School, they put up one section. I think the school was moved there in—I don't know, I'll give a date but I'm not sure, 1970⁸ [incorrect date]—was moved from New Street to—someone who knows a little bit more about it, the history of it may correct me. But there were chestnut trees in the yard of the school. And at recess or at noontime, we had chestnuts and we had these chestnut fights; didn't amount to anything to chestnuts [unclear]. But there's chestnut trees and fun that we had under those trees was awfully nice.

P. Boeddinghaus: You know there is something fascinating about chestnuts. [chuckles]

G. Costa: Why is that?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, I don't know. They have that very sticky cover on it, you know with the points, and then when that comes off, there's that nice smooth, like a stone. It's something about it, you like to rub it in your hands.

G. Costa: Yes. It's just so slick, isn't it?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah.

G. Costa: It's almost like waxed.

⁸ The second wood-framed Franklin School, which was built ca. 1873, was moved to New Street to make way for the construction of the third brick-clad Franklin School (Metuchen High School) in ca. 1907-1908.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, yeah. I think Marie brought some pictures to show you. And we've enjoyed this so much, it's wonderful. You have such fond recollections.

G. Costa: My continuity and my difficulty I have talking sometimes—at one time, I was a bit more articulate. But since those two mini-strokes I had, I guess, I can feel the difference.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, we appreciate this very much. Now what is this, Marie?

M. Vajo: [showing photographs] Was that the school?

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes.

G. Costa: That's on New Street. Yeah, that's it. How many times—do you know what happened? After that school, they didn't tear it down even. That became a church [Second Baptist Church] for colored people. And how many times do you think I sat on those steps listening to them sing? It was wonderful. You have no idea. Wonderful! Had an audience outside listening. Yes, that's the school.

P. Boeddinghaus: That's it. We always wondered exactly where that was in Metuchen.

G. Costa: That's on New Street [formerly at the northeast corner with Pearl Street]. Yes, I remember it like yesterday.

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you remember any of your teachers?

G. Costa: No, my cousin went to this school. I didn't go here. I didn't go to the school. But I remember the building. The building was there. Yeah, oh my! I wonder if they put that thing up there with the bell? See they made a church out of this. I wonder if that thing was put up there after it was made a church, after the school left.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, I have a question for you. I'm active in the Old Franklin Schoolhouse (the Borough Improvement League building), the restored one-room schoolhouse in Metuchen [at 491 Middlesex Avenue], was built in 1807. And then it was used for a school, but I was always—

G. Costa: They called it League House, is it called?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, Borough Improvement League House. What was my question? Was it always on that site, or had it been elsewhere in Metuchen and moved to Middlesex Avenue?

G. Costa: I only knew it on Middlesex Avenue.

P. Boeddinghaus: Okay. There's a little confusion about that.

G. Costa: Yeah, it might have been somewhere. But I remember it there. They used to have dances in that building. I remember as a youngster, when there was a dance going in and it was early enough in the evening, we go out there and we stand outside, the windows were open, and just listen to the music.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, I know then—what I’ve read about that building, it was turned on the property. And somehow, I have this impression that it had been elsewhere in Metuchen and moved to that site. And then turned on the site, so that the entrance faces west and then they added on a kitchen and a restroom out the back. And a lot of organizations use that building for meetings and parties.

G. Costa: Yes, I think the Garden Club met there, yes.

P. Boeddinghaus: And different Girl Scout troops, maybe even some political organizations. So like how long have you lived here in Edison? In this house?

G. Costa: I think sixty-six or sixty-seven years in June; this next June. Now, I know we’ve—yes, it’s maybe sixty-seven years in June.

Now, did you just sit there and say nothing? You mentioned that, “We’ll have some tea if they’d like to have.” [chuckling] I’d like a cup of tea or something.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, I think we’re just about finished.

G. Costa: I’m getting—I’ll get hate for this for not mentioning it earlier. [laughs]

P. Boeddinghaus: All right, that’s okay. Could we just sort of finish off the tape and then we’ll indulge? Is there anything else you would like to tell us about you know your long life? And you’ve already eluded to your regimen of exercise.

G. Costa: I think I can’t discount the satisfaction of my long life as much to do or more with the companionship of my wife more than anything else. It’s been just a—I’ve had my heaven on Earth these years with that girl.

M. Vajo: How many years have you been married?

G. Costa: We’ve been married sixty-six or [sixty-]seven years. We built this house [at 10 Southfield Road in Edison]. We didn’t have a dime. I went to my dad and said, “I want to buy.” Mrs. [Carrie (Herndon)] Lindenthal was selling this property off. This was called Southfield, this area right here of their estate. I don’t know how many acres they had; they might have had 200 acres here. It went all the way from Plainfield Road all the way to Dark Lane [Grove Avenue], as they called it then. I guess Mr. [Gustav] Lindenthal⁹ was the engineer for the Queensboro and the Williamsburg bridges [in New York]. He commuted to New York every day by the way. And he died and she was caught with all this. She was rich with property as they called it. She was rich, but not rich; she was real estate poor. And we bought this property here for \$500 and there was no street—there was nothing, just a little open place. I didn’t have \$500, so I went down and saw my dad and he signed a note. And I went to the Metuchen Bank and borrowed the money. I borrowed all the money to get going.

And then there was a Mr. [Henry] Koster in Metuchen who was in the building business. And I didn’t have an architect; I had nothing. So I went around looking

⁹ Gustav Lindenthal was known as the dean of American bridge engineers. Born in Austria in 1850, he immigrated to America in 1874. His most notable works are the Smithfield Street Bridge in Pittsburgh, the Sciotoville Bridge in Kentucky, and the Queensboro and Hell Gate bridges in New York. He died at his Edison estate on July 31, 1935.

at houses. The job I had with my dad was actually what I was looking for, what we call “stops” down the shore, down in Long Branch, Red Bank. I saw this house on a piece of property and I went, “Isn’t that a cute place?” So I went up to the door, I had a lot of nerve then and asked the lady who the architect was. And she told me who it was. It was an architect over here at Linden and I went over to his office and talked to him about the house. And I bought the plan for this house for a hundred dollars for it was already done so the specifications were all—a hundred dollars did it. And Mr. Koster told me that—I didn’t have any money—he said, “Well, why don’t you go over to see the Richmond Bank in Staten Island.” Is that Tottenville—is it over there? Yeah. I’m boring you to death.

P. Boeddinghaus: No, we love this. We really do.

G. Costa: I went to see this man and he said, “What do you want me to do? You haven’t got any money. I can’t help you.” And I told him what I had done for the property. Oh, he says, “If you can get another \$1,000, I’ll take the mortgage on the house.” Mr. Kyheely [phonetic], he knew Mr. Koster anyways.

P. Boeddinghaus: Is that spelling different than your last name?

G. Costa: K-o-s-t-e-r.

P. Boeddinghaus: Okay, yes. I know that name Koster, yes.

G. Costa: In Metuchen. So that’s how it happened. I went home again to my dad and I said, “Dad, can we go back to the bank and sign a note for me?” So I had to—got much interest—there was \$1,500 I had borrowed and we got started. We built the house and the mortgage payments were fifty-six dollars a month. That’s the way it went. [chuckles] Yeah, and so we never had any other house except this one really.

P. Boeddinghaus: And what year again was that, that you built this house?

G. Costa: In [19]39.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, [19]39. That’s interesting you mention Mr. Lindenthal.

G. Costa: Yeah, the engineer.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah. So tell me again, now he owned a lot of this property out here, hundreds of acres?

G. Costa: You know, Phyllis, I’m not sure. But I know it was a tremendous piece of property here. From here all the way back to Grove Avenue.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, Grove Avenue.

G. Costa: Yeah, that was it. And they had a beautiful mansion here, do you remember that?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, no. But I’ve heard about it because another lady I talked to, and her maiden name escapes me but I’ll try and think of it, she, well her family were the

housekeepers and the groundskeepers for the Lindenthals. And it's a German name. And it starts with an "S."

G. Costa: **Yes, that German group came here after the war. Dodi [phonetic] knows all these little things like that. They lived over there behind. And the girls needed money to go to college and there was—I think they helped them with the tuition. Anyway, there was some help there to get education in that group.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And what my friend told me then, they really worked very hard on the estate and keep the windows clean, and keep everything shipshape, and the landscape and so forth and so on. But if you had some time off in the winter and it was snow, she would go over to the Metuchen Country Club with her sled and go sleigh riding at the country club property. And I would like her to give me an oral history about the Lindenthal estate.

G. Costa: **I don't know much more [than] she knows about the Lindenthal estate, but she does know something about those German people in there.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Like you, I have a knock with the name. I didn't realize I was going to be talking about her today, but we know them from golf.

G. Costa: **You do?**

P. Boeddinghaus: And now of course they moved to Florida.

G. Costa: **Oh, have they? Mr. Lindenthal, I can see him now. He was a tall, handsome man. And he looked like a foreigner though. He was an Austrian, but he had a Teutonic look. His shoes too had great big soles on them; even the footwear he had was different. He's mentioned once in a while in the New York papers. Every once in a while, they have a script about him.**

P. Boeddinghaus: We might have some pictures in the archives of the old mansion. But we were never sure exactly where it was located, whether it was on this eastern side of Plainfield Road or on the western side.

G. Costa: **No, it was right here. It was right over here, not too far. When we first built this house, you could see it. The house is gone now. It's not even there; it's torn down. But there were trees going up to the house. It was a beautiful sight.**

P. Boeddinghaus: And then did I ask you this last time that your brother lived across the street?

G. Costa: **My brother? No.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Or was it your father?

G. Costa: **No, my father.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Your father lived across the street, yes.

G. Costa: **When we built this house, there was nothing here. And dad still lived over [at] the store though. So he lived with us when we moved in here. He lived here with us for almost a year or more. And he bought that property up there, and he was**

building that house. So he'd be up there every day, up there at that house and back here. Back and forth and he eventually moved.

P. Boeddinghaus: And did he buy his property from Mr. Lindenthal's estate also?

G. Costa: Yes. He bought three acres for \$1,500. [laughs] That sounds funny, doesn't it? He built that house too.

P. Boeddinghaus: Though I see it's "for sale" now. I thought I saw, we pulled up, there's a "for sale" sign.

G. Costa: Is there a "for sale" sign?

P. Boeddinghaus: I think I saw a sign.

G. Costa: That's the second time it's been sold. The former mayor of the town bought it from my sister in 1981 or [198]2. My dad left that to my sister.

P. Boeddinghaus: I see. And was that Sam Convery?

G. Costa: Yeah, yes, Sam! Yes. My sister made it easy. She took the mortgage, just straight away. He sold the piece right away to this person over here that I've forgotten their names. There's another family there now.

P. Boeddinghaus: That's interesting. So you've seen this whole area develop?

G. Costa: Little by little, it's all developed. We had no sewer system, no water. We had—no, that's what happened. The water and the sewer system came, I guess, about forty years ago or so.

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you remember who any of your contractors were? You know who constructed your home?

G. Costa: It was Mr. Koster, of course.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yeah. But I thought you used the architect?

G. Costa: But don't remember—oh, the architect? Webber [phonetic], yes.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, Webber [phonetic]. And then Koster was the contractor?

G. Costa: Yes, Mr. Koster.

P. Boeddinghaus: Because my husband [Jack Boeddinghaus] went to school with his son. They lived on Woodbridge Avenue.

G. Costa: I don't know where he lived in Metuchen, but he eventually built a place over here of his own. He had five acres there. I don't know how long he's been gone, but he's been gone a long time. He's been gone at least fifty years.

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you have any other pictures, Marie?

- M. Vajo: This one. [shows picture] Does that ring a bell with you?
- G. Costa: My eyes aren't too good. [long pause] Was this on the corner of Main Street and Hillside Avenue?**
- M. Vajo: No, I think it's further up.
- G. Costa: Further up on South Metuchen, yeah.**
- M. Vajo: What does it say here, 137 Main?
- G. Costa: 137 Main Street**
- M. Vajo: Grocery store.
- P. Boeddinghaus: May I just glance at it? [loud noise] Oh yes, that was on South Main Street. It was like a little neighborhood grocery store, [John] Gubik's United [Service Grocers].
- M. Vajo: Then you had that one. You remember those.
- G. Costa: Yes.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Remember the little girls, the daughters, of this home at that grocery store. I saw the picture downtown when Kenny [phonetic] got copies of it.
- M. Vajo: That's the old--there by the train station.
- G. Costa: Yeah, I see it. There's the Burroughs Drug Store. Burroughs Drug Store on the corner [at 396 Main Street], and the American Express thing was here, the post office was here.**
- P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, that's interesting that the post office moved around Metuchen different places, on Main Street and on Penn Avenue.
- G. Costa: Yeah. I think this is the Eagle's, the Eagle's Fire Company [Eagle Hook and Ladder Company at 398 Main Street] here.**
- M. Vajo: Right.
- G. Costa: They would hang their hoses out here to dry. As little children they would allow us to go in there and I remember looking. They'd allowed us to go upstairs and they had a shaft that went down. We could get on that and slide down [unclear] play there. [laughter]**
- You got the pic, is it? That's not the trolley car there, is it?**
- M. Vajo: Yeah. The trolley is there.
- G. Costa: Yeah, there's the trolley right there.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Many residents have such fond memories of the trolley and the gentleman who ran the trolley. And you mentioned a story too how—

G. Costa: [looks at another picture] **Oh, look at Daniels—oh my gosh!**

P. Boeddinghaus: There's Daniels Hill.

G. Costa: **Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh! So someone still remembers Daniels Hill, don't they? [laughs]**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. And you told us you poured water on the hill to make it nice and icy and slippery.

G. Costa: **Yeah. Oh, gosh. Isn't that nice that you have these pictures here?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, we have wonderful pictures and I'm going to remind you again about coming out to Local History Day on February eleventh.

M. Vajo: That's Clarkson's Store [at 507 Middlesex Avenue] right next to Danford's.

G. Costa: **The hitching posts up and down Main Street. I'm just looking for a hitching post here somewhere. You know where they tied the horses? We had all of them once and awhile.**

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, they were lined up on Main Street?

G. Costa: **On Main Street. There's a wagon there and an old car. Marie, where did you say this was?**

M. Vajo: Clarkson's Store. It's to the left of Danford's. Danford's is on the corner of Main and Middlesex.

G. Costa: **Is this [Route] 27 there?**

M. Vajo: Yeah.

G. Costa: **Isn't that nice? When I was a child, there was no other way to get from New York by car except on [Route] 27. They called it Lincoln Highway. And football was concentrated on people like Princeton [University] and Yale [University] and Harvard [University]. If Yale was playing Princeton, all the "Yalies" would come down. Before the game on Saturday morning, we would go down to Danford's in that area and sit on the curb, sit there and watch these cars go by. But they're all decorated up, and the men had their great big—what do you call those coats they had?**

P. Boeddinghaus: Mackinaws?

M. Vajo: Coonskin? Yeah, I know. Muskrat coats?

P. Boeddinghaus: Raccoon?

G. Costa: Raccoon coats, yes. And the women—oh, they're colorful. They're all young people each week going down. And it was colorful; it was like going to a parade. And they would yell out; they would go not too fast that you couldn't call out to them. They'd all wave going by, going down to Princeton to play football. That's what I thought of when I saw that.

M. Vajo: There's Main Street. I don't know what year that was.

G. Costa: Oh my. This looks like Kramer's here.

P. Boeddinghaus: I'm sure your family dealt with Kramer's Department Store.

G. Costa: [pointing at photograph] Yeah, see here's in front of that—see there no stores here. What is that? This is where the Hillside Avenue was up the hill. Yeah, see there are no stores here.

P. Boeddinghaus: We have some very nice pictures of the Hillside Inn in the archives.

G. Costa: Have you?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes. Yeah, at one point, we had a display in the [Metuchen] Savings and Loan [Bank] window and we selected all of these pictures and had them blown up and it created such interest on Main Street.

G. Costa: This is very interesting, this. Oh my. [long pause; looking at pictures] Oh, [George] Hanemann's [Bakery at 395 Main Street]. Oh my goodness, Hanemann's. I had to go down to Hanemann's every day before dinner to get a loaf of bread for my dad. They had a loaf of bread, which he liked. [long pause] I think this building is still there. I've forgotten the name of the fellow that ran that place.

P. Boeddinghaus: Is there a name on it now?

G. Costa: When [Charles] Lindbergh had crossed the Atlantic [Ocean], I knew exactly where I was. I was walking down this hallway. This is the Robins building [at 401 Main Street] here and that had a store there that ran newspapers and magazines—can't think of his name. I had just heard that Lindbergh had landed in Paris [France] and the whole town was just mystified by anybody who could fly all the way across the ocean by himself. I was down that hallway.

P. Boeddinghaus: By the way, I meant to say this to you. Where were you on Pearl Harbor Day, which was yesterday?

G. Costa: I was right here in this house. I had a radio in that room over there and I was stunned by all, of course.

P. Boeddinghaus: On a Sunday.

G. Costa: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]