

Interviewee: Mr. Nathan A. Gross
Interviewers: Paula Bruno
Recorded: June 21, 1978 in Edison, New Jersey
Transcriber: Janena Benjamin

P. Bruno: Today is June 21, 1978 and this is Paula Bruno interviewing Mr. Nathan A. Gross who was born September 5 1899, I'm sorry, October 4, 1899, and he is residing right now at 745 Amboy Avenue, Edison, New Jersey.

Mr. Gross, I'd first like to start by asking a little bit about your ancestors and when they first came to settle in this area.

Mr. Gross: My father and my uncle came to Raritan County, which is now Edison Township, I would say about 1889. We ran a grocery business and a general store and in the early 1900s they built a tremendous building and we supplied then the various areas like Metuchen, Menlo Park, Iselin, South Plainfield delivery only by horse and wagon.

P. Bruno: Wow. Could you tell me your father's name and your uncle's name?

Mr. Gross: My father's name was William Gross and my uncle's name was Aaron Gross. They traded as William Gross and Brother.

P. Bruno: Where did they get their supplies from?

Mr. Gross: Their supplies came in mainly by railroad car – railroad freight cars and also meats were brought in by solid wagon loads, team loads.

P. Bruno: Solid wagons?

Mr. Gross: Well yes, wagonloads. They'd bring out a complete wagonload of meats and they would put them into a - they were huge iceboxes in those days.

P. Bruno: So you father and uncle's business supplied other stores in the area?

Mr. Gross: No, mainly private homes and also many boarding houses. They had a lot of boarding houses in those days.

P. Bruno: Oh, any that you remember in Metuchen area, boarding houses?

Mr. Gross: Well, we delivered to Woodbrook Farm. It was out here on the Plainfield Road and that was also in Edison we delivered there. And then in the Bonhamtown area we had possibly eight or ten good-sized boarding houses.

P. Bruno: Okay, getting back to your father's and uncle's business. Did you have one horse and wagon?

Mr. Gross: We ran 17 or 18 wagons.

P. Bruno: Wow!

Mr. Gross: How could you cover all this area?

P. Bruno: I don't know. I was wondering. It must have been a really large business.

Mr. Gross: Oh yes, that is before the days of the chain stores. Oh yes, and we ran I would say offhand 35 or 40 in help.

P. Bruno: That was quite a business I think for that period of time. Did you work in the business when you were younger, helping out?

Mr. Gross: As a child, after school hours and such and possibly on a Saturday. I used to deliver meat orders up here for Sunday's dinners on Saturday. They didn't have refrigeration the way they do today; they had iceboxes. And if you had extremely hot weather the iceman just didn't have enough to supply the area

P. Bruno: So what would happen in those cases? Would it affect you meat orders any if people couldn't get their ice?

Mr. Gross: Well you see, I delivered on Saturdays, mainly for Sunday's dinners.

P. Bruno: So there wasn't much a problem in storage?

Mr. Gross: Well, I mean, they did the best they could.

P. Bruno: Does any one incident that you can remember about your father's business that sticks out in your mind?

Mr. Gross: Well, I believe that we had the best clientele, most of the best clientele, around because we did enough bargaining where we could control things. We made sure that everything was properly stocked and everything was delivered.

P. Bruno: Now did you have an oil business as well?

Mr. Gross: This came. I just sold my business; I think it was November the 23rd of '77.

P. Bruno: So you had an oil business?

Mr. Gross: I had it. It wasn't connected. They sold kerosene oil for your kerosene lamps in those days. But I sold oil for private use at homes and also to some commercial accounts and to apartment houses.

P. Bruno: And how did you come to get into the oil business?

Mr. Gross: Well, I was mechanical, I was always mechanical and this was a challenge to me. And I was in it forty-two years and in those days I never had a salesman. The people that really sold for me were my accounts and we never considered them accounts. We felt that people were our friends and it was up to us to see that they were properly taken care of. Ninety percent of our people became close friend of ours. In fact when we sold out I got, I think it was forty-nine letters from my people. How upset they were; some of them cried over the phone. Because it was never a question, you took care of your friends, that was all.

P. Bruno: I think that is the best kind of business to have.

Mr. Gross: That's right. And I had one customer... Then being friends you knew them so well. You knew they were honest. They got into financial difficulties with people being out of work or sickness in the family or more payables than they had receivables. And I was right most of the time. I did lose a little money but not too much. But most of my people, they came through and realized that they had these bills and they paid them. Some of them were long winded but I never regretted it. I had these letters there and I was going to bring some up but I thought why burden you.

P. Bruno: Oh, you shouldn't feel that way. But I'm sure that they made you feel very good knowing that you provided a service. Was this called the Gross Oil Business?

Mr. Gross: The Gross Oil Company Incorporated.

P. Bruno: And where was it located?

Mr. Gross: We had our office at home and our garage was about two blocks away on Woodbridge Avenue in Edison.

P. Bruno: Let's talk about your uncle, Dr. Herman Gross for a little while. Now he had his office in Metuchen.

Mr. Gross: Right.

P. Bruno: And it was next to the post office on Main Street?

Mr. Gross: That's right.

P. Bruno: What sort of practice did he have?

Mr. Gross: He had a general practice and in those days they worked seven days a week and they worked around the clock.

P. Bruno: In other words, he made house calls?

Mr. Gross: Oh they made house calls and they didn't worry whether they collected for them or not. Those calls had to be made. And ...

P. Bruno: Let's talk about your uncle's practice. What do you remember about it?

Mr. Gross: He had a tremendous practice.

P. Bruno: You mentioned that people from New York and Newark came.

Mr. Gross: And I remember he had one call the other end of Staten Island and he said to these people, "You know, you are just wasting your money. I have to charge you a lot of money to come from Metuchen here." It took him a half a day to go and come and wait for ferries and so on. And they said, "Well Dr. Gross, (I was over there with him) if you're willing - if you'll only come, then we will pay your price", about a \$15 call in those days.

My grandmother, his mother, lived with us and he stopped in there practically everyday and she knew what he liked. He liked his mother's cooking.

P. Bruno: Did his family live in Metuchen?

Mr. Gross: They lived in that house there.

P. Bruno: So his office was in his house?

Mr. Gross: In his house. He had a tremendous office there. In fact the other day I was discussing it. I'm having a louver window put in my attic so I can turn the handle and air that attic out. This way we have to raise windows and it's quite difficult. I have a huge attic fan and I couldn't take full advantage of it until I got the louver windows in it. And that's been in there 25 years or more now. I always wanted to do this and this year I finally did. I was telling my

P. Bruno: Okay, getting back to your uncle and his practice just a little bit more, do you remember how many other doctors were in Metuchen at this time your uncle was practicing?

Mr. Gross: Yes, there was a Dr. Clarence Hofer and a Dr. Lippencott, and they were practicing doctors. And then you had the Manning Freeman Yard who was Dr. Freeman that was also an MD but he never practiced.

P. Bruno: Oh, how come?

Mr. Gross: Well he ran this yard and I suppose he didn't want to the responsibility.

P. Bruno: Were the other doctors as busy as your uncle in town?

Mr. Gross: I didn't think so. I didn't think so. Some of the people I've dealt with in recent years, when we talk they remembered him and he died in 1918 so that's ...

P. Bruno: This is your uncle Herman Gross, Dr. Gross? That's quite a long time ago. Were there any major epidemics or illnesses.

Mr. Gross: Yes, he died of the flu epidemic, mainly from overwork. I remember he got so many calls and he didn't feel well. So he made them and said, "Well, this is the last call I'm going to make." So when he got back and some of his dear friends were sick and he said, "I have to make these, I can't let them down." He made them and he ran until he couldn't go any further, until he collapsed.

P. Bruno: When there was the flu epidemic did they have some sort of a serum that they would inject people with so they didn't get the flu? Or what was his treatment?

Mr. Gross: I don't remember. The flu epidemic was something like the movies and people burned up with fever. I had one of my school chums from public school and I worked with the Red Cross and I went home and I took the ice out of our icebox and I cracked it and put it on his head and he said, "That feels fine, that feels fine." That's the last words that he ever spoke.

P. Bruno: And he would sometimes take you with him to make house calls or visits, your uncle?

Mr. Gross: Not during the epidemic. During the epidemic I worked with the Red Cross.

P. Bruno: What did you do with the Red Cross?

Mr. Gross: Well, I drove and I would help wherever I could, moving patients and something like that.

P. Bruno: Did your uncle have any children?

Mr. Gross: Yes, he had three daughters and a son.

P. Bruno: Are any of them in the area?

Mr. Gross: In New York.

P. Bruno: Okay, why don't we talk about your uncle who owned and operated the Hillside Inn? This was David Gross. Did he build the inn himself?

Mr. Gross: No, no.

P. Bruno: The Inn was already there?

Mr. Gross: The Inn was there, right. That was the entire block from Hillside to Highland Avenue with a small exception, possibly 30-40 feet was a small building. I think it was the original movie theater that they had in Metuchen, just a small place, before they built the bigger one on outer Main.

P. Bruno: How did your uncle come to acquire the Inn?

Mr. Gross: My father had quite a position in Metuchen and my uncle wanted something to do, he had to have something to do. So my father bought the Inn and my uncle ran it.

P. Bruno: I see.

Mr. Gross: And in the early days, the doctor and my aunt lived there.

P. Bruno: Can you describe the building a little bit? How it looked.

Mr. Gross: There was quite an incline there and there was a walkway where you could walk off Main Street and walk up quite a few steps to walk towards the inn and then you had a circular drive where you cut in on Main Street and came out on Highland Avenue. Also a drive in the back where you went in on Hillside Avenue and you would come out on Highland. It was a huge building and people would take and live there on a weekly or a monthly basis. They had beautiful rooms there.

P. Bruno: Were these people who came to stay there, were they local people or were they mostly out-of-towners who were passing through?

Mr. Gross: Very often it was someone that worked in the area, you see. And if they didn't have their family or if they were single, why they had all kinds of accommodations there. They had excellent food and they had everything you would want.

P. Bruno: Who did the cooking?

Mr. Gross: They had a couple chefs there.

P. Bruno: And how many rooms or how large was the Inn? About how many people could they accommodate at one time?

Mr. Gross: I believe the Inn must have had 30 or 35 rooms.

P. Bruno: Did people also stay at the Inn that were just traveling through Metuchen?

Mr. Gross: At times, yes.

P. Bruno: And sometimes they were people just in town who had local jobs?

Mr. Gross: Right.

P. Bruno: How long did you uncle have the Metuchen Inn?

Mr. Gross: I'm not quite sure. But I think that it was a period of 25 to 35 years.

P. Bruno: Did he sell the Inn to somebody else afterwards?

Mr. Gross: My father sold the Inn.

P. Bruno: Your father sold the Inn.

Mr. Gross: And that entire block, if my memory serves me right, went for about \$35,000 or \$38,000.

P. Bruno: Oh my.

Mr. Gross: The price of a garage today.

P. Bruno: Yes, it's amazing what land value – how land value has gone up so tremendously.

Mr. Gross: You don't realize that at my age, I don't know whether I lived in five or ten different world in the same area. I lived about a mile from where I was born and I lived in the area my entire life. And I would like to say this. We had a lot of poverty in those days. People didn't even know they were poor because the fellow next door and the fellow across the street were in the same fix. And we had all nationalities there and they got along as if they were one close family. A fellow would dig his garden the neighbors would come in and pitch in and give him a hand. And if they were sawing and chopping wood they would do the same thing. In those days, the laborer worked for 10 cents an hour, he worked 10 hours for a dollar. We had six cottages in those days and they were new and the rental was \$5 a month. They had a bucket well, they had an outhouse and I remember many happy families came out of those houses. And three of them are still standing out of those six.

P. Bruno: These were cottages that your father owned?

Mr. Gross: He owned them and he rented them. And when they were new they were rented for \$5 a month. This goes back 70 or 75 years.

P. Bruno: Where are these three remaining cottages located?

Mr. Gross: Well, about a half, I would say less than a mile from where I live, the Sand Hill section of Edison.

P. Bruno: That's really hard to believe.

Mr. Gross: As I told you, I don't know how many worlds I lived in, in the same area.

P. Bruno: The patrons at the Hillside Inn, were they mostly wealthier people?

Mr. Gross: Yes, the better class people.

P. Bruno: Were there any other inns in the area? Did your uncle have any competition of any kind?

Mr. Gross: They usually had their constant trade and that's about it. I wouldn't know. I think there was a Metuchen Inn too, on Amboy Avenue.

P. Bruno: Would that be the same one that is now located on Middlesex, about a block down from the library?

Mr. Gross: They had no connections at all.

P. Bruno: A different Metuchen Inn. Did you ever help out your uncle at the Hillside Inn?

Mr. Gross: Just a few rare occasions.

P. Bruno: But it was a nice place to stay.

Mr. Gross: Oh yes, it was outstanding.

P. Bruno: Did your father have any other brothers?

Mr. Gross: There was my Uncle Aaron, my Uncle Dave, the doctor and himself, that's four boys. And then he had three sisters.

P. Bruno: Your Uncle Aaron was in the grocery business with your father?

Mr. Gross: Yes.

P. Bruno: Okay, that's about all. Did I cover your family well enough? Did I leave anybody out?

Mr. Gross: *I believe you did cover everyone.*

P. Bruno: Let's talk about some Metuchen town remembrances that you mentioned to me on the phone. One was the livery stable?

Mr. Gross: Yes, I have that on my sheet here. *(referring to notes)*

P. Bruno: Can you tell me where it was in Metuchen?

Mr. Gross: One was on Middlesex Avenue. Some of my names there may be misspelled.

P. Bruno: That's okay.

Mr. Gross: There was a Rule (R-u-l-e) Livery stable, Flaherty had one, and then we had a cabbie – what was the name down there? *(referring to notes)*

P. Bruno: You can probably find it quicker than I could.

Mr. Gross: It was Dempsey.

P. Bruno: Dempsey, right.

Mr. Gross: Horse and wagon. And then A.C. Litterst, he managed the bank. I don't know what his official capacity was.

P. Bruno: He was the second mayor of Metuchen, Alexander Litterst.

Mr. Gross: Well I know he used to have his lunch up at the Inn, I remember that.

P. Bruno: Oh, so people could come to the Hillside Inn to dine only.

Mr. Gross: That's right. Did you know there was a needle works factory in Metuchen, on Middlesex Avenue?

P. Bruno: No, what sort of needle works?

Mr. Gross: They used to make straight needles, make them there. They were there for years. I remember them there for 20 or 30 years.

P. Bruno: They used to manufacture needles – like sewing needles? I don't really know what kind?

Mr. Gross: They were machine needles or sewing machine or hand sewing, I don't know. And then you had two drug stores in town. One was Hahn's, where Wernik is now and the other was Burrough's Drug store and the family died off. And here is something that may be of interest to you. Out of Metuchen, out of St. Francis Church, I think there was a Father Foley. I may be wrong with the name but he was one of the priests they had here. He would come out in an old horse and wagon and the first Mass was served up here. This was the meeting hall. And most of these people here came to a meeting you see. And it was up to the Catholics that worked for us to see that the pot stove was going and also that the place was kept clean.

P. Bruno: So their meeting hall was in your father's store?

Mr. Gross: In the original store, right. And I was born in this place here. (referring to photo).

P. Bruno: Was that your home next door or was that connected - I can't really see?

Mr. Gross: No, no.

P. Bruno: It was one building?

Mr. Gross: No, it was separated. See the name on the wagon?

P. Bruno: Yes.

Mr. Gross: This might be a little crude but the Salomone family is still here.

P. Bruno: They had a tailor shop?

Mr. Gross: There was a tailor shop and then there was a shoe repair, Salomone, another brother.

P. Bruno: Both on Main Street.

Mr. Gross: Both on Main.

P. Bruno: Now just so I can get a period of time, was this early 1900s that were talking about?

Mr. Gross: I would say so yes. And then Kramer Department Store - Kramer worked for Tom Edison and he's the one that started him in the department store because they had to have a place to buy.

P. Bruno: And that really grew into a large business.

Mr. Gross: Yes. Well in those days we didn't have the type businesses that we have today. Now here are your tavern owners - Dan Whalen, there's a McGuinness, and a Lawless. And Mollick, he also worked for Edison, he was an electrician. And Daniel LaForge had a grocery store. Dave Powers, he ran the harness shop and a fellow by the name of Eubank, Harry Eubank, worked for him. And John

P. Bruno: Just some more town remembrances. There was a feed store also in town?

Mr. Gross: Yes, Thomas Eggert had a feed store on a corner of Main Street in Metuchen where the gas station is now.

P. Bruno: And did you supply him with some feed, your father's business?

Mr. Gross: I believe they did some business. We ran more than any feed store did. We bought direct on everything. I remember at one time my father bought 11 carloads of baking flour.

P, Bruno: Oh my!

Mr. Gross: Approximately 30 ton to a car. He heard that flour was going to skyrocket and in those days bakeries were few and far between. And most of these boarding houses would buy 200 or 300 pounds of flour. They didn't go in with a 4 or 5 pound sack the way they do today. We sold flour and I remember flour did skyrocket. It doubled in price. We had a fellow come out with a wagon from Perth Amboy and he said, "Do you have Gold Medal flour?" And my father said, "Oh yes, we have a lot more than you can possibly use." Well he said, "How much is it a barrel?" So my father quoted a price and he

said, "I'd like to have two barrels." In those days I think it was 196 pounds to a barrel. So my father said, "Mr. Knudson, we'll deliver the flour for you."

"Oh no I have my team out here. Will you mind having your men put it on my wagon?" He was afraid he wasn't going to get it at that price.

So after he got it and paid for it he said "How is it they want so much more for it downtown?" So my father said, "I don't know but I made a day's pay on each barrel of flour and that's enough for me." I stood right there.

P. Bruno: Your father seemed like he had a good head for business.

Mr. Gross: Yes, my father was a good businessman. My father made three or four fortunes and he went through them.

P. Bruno: What about some of the prominent people in town, in Metuchen, any of the families do you remember?

Mr. Gross: I have a few listed there.

P. Bruno: Oh, the Carman family and the Robins family. We have a tape of Mr. Carman.

Mr. Gross: I know him well. He isn't too well now. I've known him most of my life.

P. Bruno: What about Judge Weber, Judge and Colonel. I haven't really heard of him. He was a colonel?

Mr. Gross: An ex-colonel and then he became judge. He's the fellow I went to that gave me my custody.

P. Bruno: Oh.

Mr. Gross: And the Robins Building, for several years they had a sewing factory there. Did anyone tell you about that?

P. Bruno: No. They didn't. What did they produce?

Mr. Gross: Shirtwaist, high-class shirtwaist.

P. Bruno: And who ran the factory? Do you remember?

Mr. Gross: I can't think of his name....he... it was two men running it. It was high-class shirtwaist.

P. Bruno: You also mentioned to me a little bit about you were good friends with Mary Wilkins Freeman's husband?

Mr. Gross: My father was in the coal business at the time. We delivered coal and he was also in the coal business. It was friendly competition. He had a fellow ...you've heard of the Breen family?

P. Bruno: Yes.

Mr. Gross: Well John Breen, I think was his name; he ran the office for Freeman.

P. Bruno: Did you know Mary Wilkins Freeman?

Mr. Gross: I knew her, but I knew who she was and that s all.

P. Bruno: Did you ever read any of her books?

Mr. Gross: I saw them but I never took the time to read them.

P. Bruno: What about holidays? Did people dress up for Halloween?

Mr. Gross: Oh yes. And I knew all your churches in town. I didn't mention that.

P. Bruno: There are quite a few churches still in Metuchen today.

Mr. Gross: The same churches are still here, the Presbyterian Church and then the Methodist Church and then the church on Middlesex Avenue. What is that, the Reformed Church?

P. Bruno: On Middlesex Avenue? I think the Reformed Church is up by Tommy's Pond.

Mr. Gross: That's right. That burned, the original church burned down. And then this one on Middlesex Avenue, which church is that?

P. Bruno: The one that Venture Theater is now? I think that was a Methodist Church.

Mr. Gross: I know the Methodist; that I remember. But that's the corner of Middlesex. But there's one up...

P. Bruno: Oh, the Baptist Church.

Mr. Gross: I think so yes. We delivered coal there.

P. Bruno: To the Baptist Church?

Mr. Gross: To the Baptist Church. My father and my brother went up with the men to show them where it was. My father said, "Make sure the men watch their language and see that you behave too." So when he got back he said, "Dad I learned a lot of new curse words up there from the minister's son. He damned everything."

P. Bruno: What was a typical Thanksgiving like?

Mr. Gross: Well I think they were a lot more sacred than they are today. People want to run out and grab a meal but everything was done at home.

P. Bruno: Did you have a large family gathering?

Mr. Gross: Yes we did. We had aunts and uncles. My grandmother lived with us and she had two daughters in Perth Amboy and they were quite close. And she would say, "Well I'm going to spend one week with Molly and another week with Terry so be a good boy and take me down." So I took her down in the horse and carriage and in two days I got an SOS to go down and get her. She couldn't live with her daughters; she lived with her daughter in law. She told my father (it was his mother) "I'm not living with you, she's living with me." (the daughter in law)

P. Bruno: How about Halloween or any other holidays in town?

Mr. Gross: With Halloween we like other kids turned over outhouses and things like that.

P. Bruno: This was Mischief Night!

Mr. Gross: Mischief Night. We did our share of mischief, sure. No different. It hasn't changed.

P. Bruno: And young children used to dress up in costumes and Trick or Treat?

Mr. Gross: Oh yes.

P. Bruno: Well, I think maybe we will end with just ... you knew Metuchen in its very early age and Metuchen has really grown a lot but it still has maintained its small town image. And I wonder if you can just talk about some of the changes and the growth that you've seen?

Mr. Gross: Yes, there has been a tremendous growth. I'm sure in my early days the population of Metuchen was way under 2000. But I think I would like to go back part way to the early days of Metuchen for the simple reason that we had fresh air, we never heard of air pollution and there was practically no tension. What are those three items worth to a person living today? How would you weigh anything like that?

P. Bruno: It would be hard to.

Mr. Gross: We had to respect our elders. You hear kids talking back to their parents today and you feel like smacking them. And sometimes the parents are not much better.

P. Bruno: I can't think of anything else to ask you. Do you have anything else to add?

Mr. Gross: Just let me just look at this sheet that I have here.

P. Bruno: Okay, if I left out anything really important on the list.

Mr. Gross: next to Hanneman's Bakery and the last time I saw Mr. LaForge, his daughter was an account of mine on the corner where my uncle's house is. What is that? How long have you been in Metuchen?

P. Bruno: I'm from New Brunswick; I haven't been in Metuchen very long. But where your uncle's was that's Main Street and Station Place is it?

Mr. Gross: No, his original office was on Station Place.

P. Bruno: Oh.

Mr. Gross: Where the first Baptist Church was before they moved.

P. Bruno: I don't know.

Mr. Gross: It wasn't a Baptist church that we were talking about. Because the Baptist church, they were an account of mine for over 35 years and they moved from....

P. Bruno: Maybe the Episcopal Church?

Mr. Gross: Possibly. Even towards the end, until last November, they were an account of mine. And I let you get away with it.

P. Bruno: I didn't know.

Mr. Gross: And the Moss family, he is in his 90s now, Irving Moss. His father was friendly with my father and he was an account of mine until I sold my business.

P. Bruno: What was the Moss' family business? Did they have a business?

Mr. Gross: I really didn't know but the father seemed quite prominent.

P. Bruno: Is that who one of the schools is named after?

Mr. Gross: After my friend's wife.

P. Bruno: I see.

Mr. Gross: And not only that, but where the Edgar School is, I have an idea that the Edgar family donated that property to the Borough of Metuchen. I remember that, it's filed away up there.

P. Bruno: Well you certainly have remembered a lot about Metuchen.

Mr. Gross: I believe that I know as much as the top 5 or 6 percent do. The two drug stores here and St. Francis Church there, they would drive down there to Mass.

P. Bruno: That's interesting that St. Francis has their Mass off the top of your father's grocery store.

Mr. Gross: Yes and then when we moved to our larger quarters, they still went back. That's until they built ... do you know anything about our area?

P. Bruno: No.

Mr. Gross: Our Lady of Peace in Fords. Are you Catholic or..?

P. Bruno: I'm a Catholic.

Mr. Gross: You'd be surprised how devoted these people were to their religion. And that's a fact. They'd go to their confession and they made sure they didn't do too much out of the way.

P. Bruno: What about Christmas? Were Christmases big?

Mr. Gross: Oh yes, yes. People paid more attention to religion than they do today. You know I don't believe ...

P. Bruno: People in the stores were courteous?

Mr. Gross: Right.

P. Bruno: You had personalized service when you walked in?

Mr. Gross: Yes, you always did. And they did their level best to see that you were properly accommodated and it was a pleasure shopping in those days. Today your shopping is practically mechanical.

P. Bruno: And I think one of the nice things too shopping way back in the early 1900s was that the shopkeeper knew you and you knew him and it personalized service.

Mr. Gross: It was and that never left me, even in the future years in my business. I still get calls. I haven't been in business since November of '77 and there isn't a week that I don't get several calls from my people. What should I do here and what should I do? One customer called me and she had a hot water problem so they came and changed a lot of pipes and everything else and ran up a tremendous bill. And after they ran this bill up they said this furnace is in bad shape, you need another furnace. Well the way I would do, I would handle the situation like that and look at things and say, "Now here, don't spend any money on this thing. This thing has seen better days and you're never going to be happy with it. Lets get a price on a new furnace and you'll have it in 3 or 4 days." Now

the bill there was close to a \$100, \$97 or \$98 dollars, just thrown right down the drain and that would upset me.

P. Bruno: So you maintained that personalized service with your customers through the years in your business?

Mr. Gross: I did. I have people that cried when I quit.

P. Bruno: So just walking down Main Street you can visualize all the shops and the people on the street?

Mr. Gross: Burrough's Drug Store, the Eagle Firehouse and then a few doors away was a bank and then on the corner Hillside was old man Costa.

P. Bruno: Who had the best ice cream!

Mr. Gross: He had the best ice cream. That is right. They came from all over, New Brunswick and Perth Amboy to eat his ice cream. And I rode into New York with him several times. He was an Italian. A personal friend of the family's and he said, "Mr. Gross, I don't need no chemist. I buy the best stuff and give them the best ice cream." And that was a fact.

P. Bruno: And everybody knew it too.

Mr. Gross: Oh sure. But the sad part of it was here in recent months they went under – went under financially.

P. Bruno: Yes.

Mr. Gross: And I was deeply saddened by it because people at home would buy a half gallon on ice cream and throw it in the freezer and it's sad.

So..... alright.

P. Bruno: I'd like to thank you very much for stopping in and sharing some of your memories.

Mr. Gross: Well, I hope it will be of interest to someone.

-end-