

Interviewees: Lou and Elsie Litterst (LL and EL)
Interviewer: Trevor Wright, Jr.
Recorded: April 6, 1976 in Metuchen, New Jersey
Transcriber: Janena Benjamin

Interviewer: This is Trevor Wright, Jr. on April 6, 1976, chatting with the Litterst sisters, Lou and Elsie, both of who were born before the turn of the century at their family homestead on Middlesex Avenue and who for the past few years have resided here at the Redfield Village Apartments.

Well, I believe you ladies told me your father came over – your grandfather came over – from Germany around 1850, is that correct?

EL: Yes, 1850.

Interviewer: And where was that in Germany?

LL: In Offenberg, Offenberg in Schwartwald.

Interviewer: It was a long trip on a sailing vessel.

LL: Fifty-five days on the sailing ship.

Interviewer: And he had a friend, is that true, from Germany who had moved down into the Metuchen area.

EL: Well he came, the friend came, after Pop or after Grandpa, but he came about that same time but he located right in Jersey. Pop of course, Grandpa was located in New York and Philadelphia. Then he came back again to New York and had a hand-made file business down there; dental files he made.

Interviewer: Dental files, right. Now how about your father? When was he born?

LL: He was born in '55.

Interviewer: Was that in New York City?

LL: New York City, uh huh.

EL: Hester Street – the worst street in the world I think!

Interviewer: That's a movie or something now, isn't it?

EL: We used to tell Dad, "Don't tell anybody you were born on Hester Street – that's horrible." He said, "It wasn't horrible when I lived there."

LL: Not in those days.

EL: He said we lived in a little cottage right on the street that had a picket fence around it and a peach tree in the front yard and grape arbor in the back where

we used to have our coffee klatches. And a puppy that learned how to open that picket fence, and even turn on the water. It was constantly dripping after he went for a drink.

Interviewer: Smart dog.

EL: The dog couldn't turn it off. But it took a change from those days. Hester Street now – I don't think it's as bad now as it was 30 thirty years ago when we were talking.

LL: No. No, they've been working on it I think in New York City now.

Interviewer: And I understand your Dad as a little boy came here with Grandpa. And that was quite a lengthy trip, right?

LL: Yes, they came here for their holidays from 83rd street in New York walking across the city itself you see.

Interviewer: To get the ferryboat?

LL: To get down to the ferryboat. He took the ferry across and then the train across Staten Island, landed in Perth Amboy. Then came up from Perth Amboy to Metuchen – walking.

Interviewer: On foot – a shank's mare.

EL: On foot – at five years old!

Interviewer: That was a long journey. And you said this friend used to live down about where The Pines is now.

LL: In back of The Pines. He had a nice farm, a berry farm.

Interviewer: A berry farm. I think you told me on one of these visits that they saw something unusual at the Metuchen station or at the railroad station.

EL: Oh, you mean when Lincoln was assassinated.

Interviewer: Right.

LL: In New York this was.

EL: Everything was being draped in black. And Grandpa said, "Something terrible has happened. Run over and get me a paper. I want to see what it was." And the paper was all outlined in black. *Lincoln Assassinated*. That was the Easter holiday you see. They were coming out to Metuchen for the Easter holiday.

Interviewer: Was that in New York they saw that?

LL: In New York, right in the city.

Interviewer: So that was the day, huh?

EL: **Now when we have a pause like that does that use up the battery?**

Interviewer: It doesn't hurt it.

EL: **Or should we keep right on talking?**

Interviewer: No, you can relax. We're just going to chat right? Well, I think you told me you had an interesting letter you got your father to write in the 30's relating his history.

LL: **The 1930's.**

Interviewer: 1930's yes, we have to be careful.

EL: **We wanted him to write his impression of coming to Metuchen and how he happened to decide to locate in this town - here in this outlandish state.**

LL: **Then it was Menlo Park, you see. It wasn't Metuchen yet.**

Interviewer: That's right

LL: **There was a Metuchen but we were not in it. We were on the boundary there.**

Interviewer: So Lou, do you want to read some of that to us and we will see what questions develop from there?

LL: **This?**

Interviewer: Sure. Take your time. We can stop whenever you want if you want to stop and rest. Don't be afraid to speak up.

LL reads: **This is the Menlo Park side of Metuchen in 1882 by Alexander C. Litterst. Looking in 1882 for a place larger than a single lot of 25 x 100 on which we lived in the Yorkville section of New York, which by the way was a section of Manhattan Island lying between Central Park and the East River from about 70th Street, just south of the Harlem section. We were directed to a farm of 90 acres near the Menlo Park station on the Pennsylvania Railroad, then having come into fame as a scene of Thomas A. Edison's wonderful achievement with electricity. This lot we occupied on East 81st Street had been a part of an orchard on a farm in the early 1800s, nearly 150 years ago. And when the horse car was established and Harlem along Third Avenue, a land boom ensued and the land was laid out in streets and a very pretty suburban village made its appearance in the old orchard and each lot had an old peach tree in the front yard. The one we bought had a cherry tree in front and a peach tree in back of it. The largest peach tree I have ever seen with a dull red cheek maturing late in September and early October. A juicy, freestone with a delicious flavor, which I found described in Thomas' Phrenology as the **Morrisiana Peach**.**

Leaving New York one beautiful June morning on the 11 o'clock train and arriving at Menlo Park a few minutes past noon - the same Philadelphia pallidation being still on the schedule of the Pennsylvania Railroad, and as slow as ever - I found myself in the country. There were five houses in sight, besides the station. To the west of the station was the Woodward house and farm, at the head of the stairs leading from the north platform of the station stood on the right a hotel run by one Sawyer.

EL: Imagine back then – a hotel in Menlo Park!

LL: On the left, a structure in which was a country store and a post office, and across Essex and Middlesex turnpike, now the Lincoln Highway, stood on a knoll a house occupied by Frederick Thornall and family, and which, by the way, was the first house wired and lit by electricity, a demonstration of the electric lighting by the Edison system, still standing and owned by the Pines family in 1930. On inquiring at the post office where the Hunt farm was that I wanted to visit, I was directed towards Metuchen on the turnpike. This was a wide country road without any stone covering and dirt rounded up in the middle and no traffic – not the Lincoln Highway now, never without some cars in sight, and at times with 500 or more passing in an hour.

EL: That was in 1930, I don't know how many there are now.

LL: I don't know what they are now, but I bet there are plenty.

LL reads: It was a lovely, sunshine-y, June day, with the roadsides covered with wildflowers, and the birds, and bees, and butterflies singing and buzzing. What a delightful change from the city! To make a long story short and snappy, I was captivated by the scene, saw the Hunt place and farm, and came out the next day with my father and that very afternoon that place became ours. We worked so fast, for fear of somebody snatching the place away before our very noses, and actually paid the price asked for without a haggle as an attempt to beat down the price. I am sure that in that transaction, if we had not been in such a fever to acquire the place, we could have at least saved a thousand dollars. Well, there we were, in what was then called a part of Menlo Park. We had bought the Holloway Hunt home and farm of 90 odd acres with a farmhouse on it occupied by the farmer, Thomas Smith, whose son Oscar Smith lives on Linden Avenue, Metuchen. This is back in 1930. The Reverend Hunt who had retired from the ministry of the Presbyterian church of Metuchen in 1855, whose pastor he had been for a number of years, an unmarried Englishman who had during his ministry married the daughter of a parishioner named Mundy and whose property the daughter and the minister's wife inherited. Our late, beloved Alonzo Hunt was the grandson of the Reverend Hunt.

EL: He wasn't alive when you came here.

Interviewer: No, that would have been too late.

LL reads: Directly opposite our place was the home of the grandfather of the late Dr. Charles Freeman, later owned by R.C. Kennedy. This home was built by the

grandfather to retire to after the active life on his farm that is now covered by a lake in Roosevelt Park, just below the new hospital, which overlooks the valley of the branch of the Rahway River. Now on the hill between our hill and Menlo Park hill there were three houses on Lincoln Highway. The one on the north side with the columns in front was built by a Jersey City merchant to retire to, the grandfather of our fellow citizen, Charles Carman. On the south side of the road two cottages were built and occupied by Theodore Carman and the other by Martin Force.

EL: Theodore Carman is the home of Charlie Carman when he was a boy – that was right opposite the big one.

LL reads: From our house towards Metuchen along the Turnpike, Lincoln Highway, there stood on the north side the house once occupied by Ten Eyck and owned by Cephas Waite. Prior to that it was occupied by Lawyer Browning and his family. Then came the Corbin homestead into which Charles L. Corbin had moved in about 1879. Then came Woodwild Park – it had just been sold by Mr. Strong to the Connor, John M. Connor, a hat manufacturer of New York. Then came the Episcopal Church and Rectory. Then what is now the Metuchen Inn was occupied by the Wilmot family. And there was nothing from there to the corner of Main Street where the Borough Hall now stands and where stood the house occupied by Ross Freeman and family. The house has met with strange doings; first being bought and moved to where the library now stands and then moved up the hill by Charles C. Mook (the owner Upjohn). Coming back from Main Street along the highway there was first at the corner the Country Store run by the fine old gentleman named Clarkson. You could get anything you wanted I guess in that store – to wear, to eat, to work with, except for pajamas for there weren't any in those days. And when you had farm products to sell or trade, this was the place to take them. This old store was moved from the corner and now stands next to Danford's and is occupied by the bicycle shop.

EL: Is that still there? I think they have an antique place there.

LL: It says here in parenthesis "now an antique shop."

Interviewer: That's it.

LL reads: Coming east now on the side of the highway stood the old schoolhouse, the oldest in Metuchen, now the Borough Improvement League and a very attractive clubhouse. This is occupied by the family of Markey, the shoemaker, with three gangly sons. Alongside was an old dwelling, since then modernized and occupied by the Greenwald family, now owned by Van Winkle. There was nothing then until you struck the house now of the Sisters of Africa, opposite Woodwild Gate and then occupied by the lawyer, Browning.

EL: That's gone too now.

Interviewer: That's right.

EL: I guess they put a whole flock of nice houses in there.

Interviewer: That became a development with a lot of houses.

LL reads: Then came open fields again until you struck the house of the shoe manufacturer of New Brunswick, Mr. Peck, and his three sons - Louie, Bert and Fred - at the corner of Grove Avenue then known as Dark Lane.

EL: Is this too long-winded?

Interviewer: No. Take your time; we've got lots of time.

LL reads: A small workman's cottage came next occupied by Tom Anderson – later by the Mundy family. This was later remodeled and owned by architect Fairweather.

EL: That's still standing.

LL: Yes, that's still there.

LL reads: And then the knoll alongside the Reading Railroad which at that time (1882) had not yet been built. Here stood the home of Bruce Crowell, active on the school board and later owned by St. George Kempson. Let me repeat the names of the dwellers along Middlesex and Essex.

Do you want me to?

Interviewer: Sure. I think that's interesting because many people remember these.

LL reads: Now the Lincoln Highway, 90 years ago beginning at the Menlo Station to Main Street, Metuchen. Frederick Thornall, A.B. Cornish, The Company House, where the railroad workmen lived, and then M. Carman, Miss Carman, Martin Force, Mrs. Freeman, A.C. Litterst, Bruce Crowell, Charles L. Corbin, Peck, Browning, Markey and Clarkson. I want to leave the impression with my hearers that the section was really rural farming,

EL: Decidedly rural.

LL reads: Although mostly by this time, 1882, by city farmers. To show that it is farming each place had a horse, or horses, cows, pigs, chickens, flocks of turkeys, each field with corn grain and pastures and with real orchards and vineyards. Adjoining the Litterst farm of 99 acres towards the north and on to Grove Avenue, now facing James Street, was a farm occupied by Mrs. Mundy and family, which was a model farm and perfect picture of a farm – everything in place and a place for everything. I could sit by the hour on our dividing fence talking out possible problems with Innes and enjoy the farmland picture.

Now back to Main Street and Middlesex. Now going along Main Street from Middlesex Avenue towards the railroad and Amboy Avenue, first Clarkson's store and the corner, then a tinsmith and then a drug store, where old Dr.

Andress had his office. Then the hardware store with a porch all across its front run by the man by the name of Ford who sold the business some time after, moved to the south and after some years came back and started a hardware store again in the building at Amboy and Highland Avenue and Main Street. Then the whole block between Highland Avenue and Hillside Avenue was occupied by the fine country home of Nathan Robins, Sr. Then at the corner of Hillside there was a small store later owned by Costa with candy, cigarettes, bananas, papers, beginning in 1900. And next came the general store run by Ma and Pa Frank with the atmosphere all of its own.

EL: This kind of an atmosphere. *laughter*

Interviewer: Is that right, a few smells?

LL reads: Nothing from there to the Pennsylvania Railroad except an old rail fence. Main Street crossed the railroad at grade and at the corner of Woodbridge Avenue was the home of Alexander Ayers – that’s where the post office is now you know – and alongside the wheelwright shop of the same. And by the way, he was also the undertaker of the village at that time, and succeeded later by his son, Clint Ayers. The Fisher house – now an apartment house – came next and then at the corner was the Eggert feed and grain establishment. On the opposite corner was the general country store run by Edgar and on the third corner was a three-story building with a large room on the top story and the fourth corner was the building owned by John Hampton, Esquire, later office of Dr. Gershman.

EL: That’s the one that’s just been remodeled beautifully by Jensen.

Interviewer: That’s the one we had on the house tour last year and I was there – it was beautiful. I spent some time and it was really great. They left the original walls uncovered and the beams and it was a beautiful job.

LL reads: Coming back on Main Street on the west side, all the present buildings were there, the only solidly built-up block in the town.

EL: Of brick, solidly built of brick, all that whole big row.

LL reads: There was a store run by the man by the name of Wayne on the side of the railroad down to the Methodist church. The only brick building was Robins Hall, where all the gala parties were held with minstrel shows and high school dances and the lower building had a grocery (Rogers) followed by a nail store. Then came Ed Kramer’s Department Store and Townsend’s Plumbing, with his three Irish Mikes - Mike O’Brien, Mike Ronan and Mike Green.

EL: That was funny wasn’t it?

Interviewer: Mike, Mike and Mike.

LL: Now there’s something missing there again. Shut that off for a minute.

LL reads: This is rather a prosey paper, but I want to close with the following story. I was a young man, born and brought up in New York City, all my friends and attachments were in the city, and my clubs and choral society there, my returns to the city were frequent and my friends could not get over the wonders that I moved and seemed to like to live in New Jersey. They said, "Anything except New Jersey, the land of the mosquito, malaria, chills and fever, how could you do it, Alexander?" My reply was, "Of course, I made a mistake choosing such a disease and insect-infested part of the country, where the couple that lived in our home celebrated their Golden Wedding two years ago, where the couple directly opposite celebrated their Golden Wedding a year ago, and the couple living on the next hill east of us enjoyed their Golden Wedding a year ago. The Carmans, the Freemans, and the Hunts. So of course, where I live now is a diseased and insect infected place, and a hell of a place for me to have selected."

A.C. Litterst, who wrote this in 1930 at the age of 87 and lived to be 98 years old.

Interviewer: Very good. That's great. Well I think as I mentioned you're very fortunate to have had your father write all these things down and I am sure you treasure those as a good memory... and certainly a good personal view of the town. He tells us of the families and the stories.

EL: **Dolly Buchanan is always at us – "save those precious clippings."**

Interviewer: Oh, you should. You better have these down for the Historical Society, right. They'll take good care of them.

EL: **Well I'm sure we'd just as soon have them have them as we have them in our desk here, especially the ones where we have double.**

Interviewer: From your dad's description, is that the way you first remember Metuchen you think, that few number of houses?

EL: **It had grown considerably. But no it was very country when we little kids.**

LL: **When we first started yes. We had a farm up there you know. We had horses and cows and pigs. We had 80 pigs at one time, can you imagine?**

EL: **My cousin and I used to love to go and open the door and let the little piglets come out and then the farmer would be furious because he had to get them back in again.**

Interviewer: How about horses – did you have horses?

LL: **We had four horses to form a team.**

EL: **A carriage horse and then Uncle George had a riding horse. He was in the Spanish American War and he bought one of the horses that he rode in the war.**

Interviewer: From the Army?

LL: **Yes.**

EL: **A black one, a beautiful black one, a devil. So we weren't allowed to ride that one.**

Interviewer: The army generally picked those kinds of horses, right? They were mean and rugged.

EL: **And then afterward the barn was burned and all the horses burned, all the cows, all the chickens.**

LL: **That was in '98 we had a fire. The man, our help on the place, set the place on fire.**

EL: **In the hayloft right over the horses, and our darling Daisy, the horse that had taught us how to drive. She could go alone without being driven you know, so we were allowed to drive her every place. She broke loose and got to the door but she couldn't get near it because the flames were coming.**

Interviewer: Couldn't get the door open.

EL: **And we didn't have a fire company.**

LL: **Well we were in Menlo Park anyhow.**

EL: **We had a fire company in Metuchen and Arnett Smith was the chief of police – or chief of the fire company - and when he heard the Litterst farm was on fire, he said, "If they send the horses down they can have our truck."**

Interviewer: But you couldn't get the horses out, oh dear.

LL: **The whole thing went – that was in '98.**

Interviewer: Did you lose the rest of the livestock too?

EL: **We had an old, the original farmhouse that stood in back of our house and that got on fire a couple of times and they put that out and then after that fire the house was torn down. They weren't going to take a chance. But the farmer lived in it. The workman on the place you know. So I don't know where he went after that. We didn't have him in the house, did we?**

Interviewer: How about all your pigs and chickens?

LL: **We fixed the shop up. Oh yes, remember, we put an extension on the file shop.**

Interviewer: Was that kind of in the back? That was your grandfather's shop, right?

LL: **Yes.**

EL: That's a picture of it – that's the front of it.

Interviewer: Oh that's your painting that Mrs. Alverson did – Rosalind. That's great.

EL: They made files from a quarter of an inch, dental files. Your father would have been interested.

Interviewer: My father's a dentist, yes.

LL: I bet he would have been interested in that.

Interviewer: Those were all made by hand.

LL: All by hand.

Interviewer: Did he learn that trade in Germany?

EL: In Germany.

Interviewer: Yes, that's a great painting that Rosalind's done.

EL: It's a little rustic building. And when we were selling the place, all of our friends who knew how to paint were sitting there taking sketches.

Interviewer: Doing their sketching and painting, I can see why.

EL: That's the one Rosalind did.

Interviewer: So that finally disappeared?

EL: Oh yes. The people were stealing it. They were handmade bricks, you know.

Interviewer: Oh really?

EL: Yes, handmade bricks and all the paths in the back from the house down to the hop were all these handmade bricks. And the people were just digging them up, pulling them out, you know. And the windowpanes in that thing were that, what do they call those things, it isn't clear glass you know, its grotesque if you look through it.

Interviewer: That's the old glass; it had the wavy lines in them. That's the old hand made glass.

EL: And people tried to buy it but we weren't taking it apart to sell it so they just came and stole it.

Interviewer: Stole it piece-by-piece, right?

EL: Got it cheaper!

And it was fascinating when people began to know that we were leaving the place, a young man by the name of Cusher lived down in one of the houses down along Metuchen just on the hillside. And he used to come in and say, "Please tell me something about that shop. That should go down in history. There aren't any more like that. Tell me about it. What do you know about it?" I said, "All I remember about it was when you went in the front door there was a cabinet there that had a drawer in it and I would go in there and open that drawer because my Grandfather always put some candy in it. That's all I remember."

Interviewer: That was it?

EL: He said, "Oh no, you must remember something!"

Interviewer: You don't remember him working in there at all?

EL: Oh yes, but not so I could tell anybody that really wanted some information.

Interviewer: You didn't pay any attention. You were just children, right. It didn't mean anything.

EL: See, there were four big full-length windows and at each window there was a seat like this that had a leather covering on it and in front of it was a stump. And on the stump was this thing that had a strap where the file was stuck in. Then all the hammers weren't straight like this; they were curved. We still have some somewhere.

Interviewer: Oh, that would be interesting to see.

EL: And they would be like this and that would fascinate me because they played a regular tune, they'd hold this thing and every time they'd hit it, it would hop. And then of course the little things they would do wouldn't be half as fascinating to me as these big, big rasps, I think they call them. And they had rattail.

Interviewer: Those were round.

EL: Yes, those were round. And then they had the big rattail and what was the one that I used to think was such a funny name? Have your any idea, it's like and illegitimate ...

Interviewer: There was a bastard file.

EL: Bastard file, that's it!

Interviewer: That's the one I thought you were thinking of. I was going to let you say it first! Yes, that's a common name and I forget where that came from. That has some history.

EL: What an interesting name for a file!

Interviewer: It's an unusual name.

EL: So this young man would dig and dig and dig and he finally got enough to write up and he took pictures. Are you looking for that Lou, the pictures?

LL: I'm looking for the pictures and I don't

Interviewer: You don't have to worry about it today.

EL: That wooden box up top.

LL: That's what I thought.

Interviewer: So did he have people working for him?

LL: Yes, there were four file men, as a matter of fact.

Interviewer: Did they live around Metuchen?

LL: Oh, they lived all around, yes.

EL: And they sat at these windows you know, and I would go in and go pull out the drawer and see what I was going to get. Then you'd go down a flight of steps into where the forge was and you can just see the remains of the old brick chimney there. Way down at the end. And I never could quite understand how..... Is this thing going? Oh my goodness and I'm just talking through my hat.

Interviewer: That's great. Don't worry about it. We have lots of tape.

EL: And the man would stand pumping the pedal you know, and forcing ...

Interviewer: Oh yes, the bellows.

EL: Yes, bellows and there was a big tankard of oil and a big tankard of water and that I liked because you know get it red hot and plunge it in - whew!!

Interviewer: See all the steam come up. Did that business stop then?

EL: Well, Dad never cared very much for it.

Interviewer: Your dad never was in that business at all?

EL: Well he stayed; he was in it for a number of years but then he got into politics. And he was interested in lawmaking of the township, you know, and getting the Building & Loan started and the bank started and he was down in the Assembly and he didn't care about file making. So after his father gave up the business, then Grandpa thought the boys would do it but Uncle George had taken up law and he had gone to Columbia and he didn't care about it.

Interviewer: So the business just closed?

EL: It just folded up.

Interviewer: Nobody bought it or anything?

EL: No, nobody bought it and for years afterwards we got orders from different big file – dental people. White, do you remember White?

Interviewer: Oh yes, S.S. White.

EL: They supplied him with almost all of his files.

Interviewer: That was a big dental ...

LL: I don't know where it is. *(still looking for pictures)*

Interviewer: Well, don't worry about that now.

LL: I'll get it out for next time you come.

Interviewer: Sure. So that was the end of the file business.

EL: That was the end of it.

Interviewer: That's a shame. He said there ought to be a museum today.

EL: That's what this man said. He finally wrote it up and took pictures from the tiny little files to the big rasps.

Interviewer: The great big ones.

EL: And then he went to Trenton; they have a museum down there where they were interested enough to give him a display. And he had a display there and then he went to the World's Fair. That was the last year.

Interviewer: Over in New York or in Chicago?

EL: No, no New York. And he had a place there and he showed the files and gave the history of how it was made. I have one cousin up in Newport who said we should get in touch with Ford because it was the same time that he was interested in Edison and Edison was a friend of Dad's.

Interviewer: Oh really. I was going to ask you, did you girls ever remember...? Well, your Dad probably knew.... Grandpa and your father probably knew.

LL: Somewhere we have a couple of his letters.

EL: Pop and Edison were very good friends, yes. He wasn't very outgoing, Edison.

Interviewer: I gathered he was kind of an eccentric fellow. Was that electric car, or whatever it was, running around then – did you see that?

EL: He had an electric car, yes.

Interviewer: I mean was there a railroad or something out there too? Was that anywhere near your farm?

EL: Down into the copper mine, there's a mine down there. As high school kids we used to go down in the copper mine.

Interviewer: Whereabouts is that?

EL: You know where you go going to Rahway, going in under the culvert?

Interviewer: Yes.

EL: Well, if you turn the other way that takes you into this mine. And it's still there. The old tracks are in there but they're all rusted by now. This was when I was in school; that's about 60 years ago, 70 years ago!

Interviewer: Are the tracks gone?

EL: They were there and the old broken down freight cars that would go in. We'd go snooping into the mine and then we'd be scared and wouldn't go very far.

Interviewer: Which road is this on?

EL: Mine Gully Road, its still there. It runs off - and I can't give you right directions - Lou knows all the directions better than I do. It goes up on the Oak Tree Road, you know.

Interviewer: Oh yes. I know where Oak Tree is. So it was up in that section? There was – actually they had copper up there?

EL: That's where the mine was. I think it must still be there. I don't know whether it's gone or not.

Interviewer: They probably built something on top of it.

EL: They got enough copper to get enough for the filaments in the electricity.

Interviewer: So they used that as a source of copper for Edison, I guess.

EL: And Alfred always said, "That should be connected with Edison's displays because that's..."

Interviewer: Now it's a lost art now probably. They're all done industrially.

EL: That's what this Cusher kept saying, "It's a shame to let this business go to pot and nobody ever know anything about it. Will you let me write about it?"

We said, "Sure, you can write anything you want. We'll give you what information we have, especially my candy finding!"

Interviewer: That's the part you liked the best.

EL: I was only about 7 years old, you see. I was born in '91 and this was '98 that they closed.

Interviewer: Is that when it stopped? A long time ago.

EL: We have the files still the way they were packaged, wrapped up and tied.

Interviewer: Better hang on to those.

EL: We sold a lot of them in our auction.

Interviewer: They'd be collectors' items.

EL: We have some now that are corn files. They are the most wonderful things if you have a callous. Oh, these things take care of it in no time.

Interviewer: I've never heard of those. They must be very fine.

EL: No they were course on top and finer on the side, and then on the side they would sort of file too.

Interviewer: You mentioned Franklin School. That was the original Franklin School; was that a wooden building?

EL: Wooden building and never burned. That was amazing.

Interviewer: You said they had a wooden fire escape.

EL: Wooden fires escape, yes. We used to have our picnic lunches on it.

Interviewer: Doesn't sound like a very safe arrangement. Fortunately you never had a fire.

EL: Fortunately.

Interviewer: And that building you say was dismantled and made into houses?

EL: Yes. Torn, and separated and moved.

Interviewer: Then they built the original building of the present Franklin School. Now in all those days that school was everything wasn't it? From elementary school right through the high school as far as it went.

EL: Oh yes, kindergarten through the end. Well I couldn't make the last year, the last grade, the 12th grade. I graduated from the 11th year - my class - and then presumably we would move either to New Brunswick or to Perth Amboy to finish.

Interviewer: To take your last year.

EL: **And the township would send us. And of course then that year they put the ...**

Interviewer: You lost out – you would have lost out.

EL: **And I felt so badly about it and Pop said, “That’s alright. If you want to go to the school that Lou went to, why I’ll pay that tuition.” So I went. Five of us went out of our class. We went down to Perth Amboy together. We had a lot of fun.**

Interviewer: You’d ride down and catch the little trolley in Metuchen and then go catch the other trolley and get to school on time.

EL: **Oh, was it cold and the awful smell on that trolley car!**

Interviewer: Did they have any heat?

EL: **Well, they had a stove, a pot bellied stove. And the foreigners would be chewing gum.**

Interviewer: They’d spit or else they’d chew tobacco and spit on the furnace. That was a pretty good ride. What did it take - a fair amount of time?

LL: **About three quarters of an hour.**

Interviewer: By the time you made your connection.

LL: **By the time we made it and then walked to the school. It wasn’t very far.**

EL: **But we had a principal and my German class started exactly at 9:00 o’clock. And the principal was our German professor, he was German, and he was so strict. And of course the trolley would be late sometimes. Well he wouldn’t allow that as an excuse. When the school started was 9 o’clock and you were supposed to be in there. And I can see myself yet going into class and it was in progress, you know. And I’d hardly sit down and he’d say, “Miss Litterst, continue.” I wouldn’t know where they were. This one would tell me, and this one would, and they’d whisper and whisper and whisper. “No whispering,” he would say. I could have kicked him.**

Interviewer: He didn’t give you any preference for being German, right? Maybe that made him the other direction.

EL: **Oh no! Stricter.**

Interviewer: A little more tough.

EL: **He was a wonderful teacher though. I learned more in that one year of German than having had it a home. You see my grandfather spoke German**

to us, wouldn't even speak English to us. He wanted us to speak German but he never corrected us. He thought it was cute when we made a mistake.

Interviewer: When you made a mistake?

EL: Yes. He thought it was kind of cute. Which is too bad because I still speak broken German.

Interviewer: You remember your mistakes from childhood. Well the school in Metuchen, How many children do you think were there with all those grades. Still wasn't very big was it?

EL: Oh mercy, I don't know. Our class only had twelve in it.

Interviewer: Your graduating class?

EL: Graduating class. And Lou, when she graduated two years before they were ten.

Interviewer: Golly.

EL: Ten girls and no boys in her class

Interviewer: No boys at all?

EL: No boys, ten girls, and we had twelve in ours.

Interviewer: The school was pretty small. So you'd be talking not much more over 100 or 125.

LL: I wouldn't know. I think the lower grades were fuller.

Interviewer: This may happen because a lot of them didn't have to finish school in those days. Some of the boys would go to work wouldn't they?

EL: I guess so.

Interviewer: They didn't go to the higher grades. So I think you told me sometimes you could sleigh ride down to school in the winter, right?

LL: We always had a big sleigh ride for an evening outing from the school.

Interviewer: Did they?

LL: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Well, why don't we touch on your father's career? I understand he was the second mayor of Metuchen, 1902 to 1904, and the first Republican mayor. What was his political career before that?

LL: Now let's see. He was down in Trenton in the Assembly.

Interviewer: How about Freeholding, did you say he was a Freeholder before that?

LL: **Oh he was a Freeholder. What are some of the offices that people run for? He was in most of them. I don't know what they are.**

EL: **Is that thing on? Is that on? And we're talking so silly?**

Interviewer: That's okay...it's real. Well he got interested in politics at an early age.

EL: **He got interested when he was in New York City, and then he discovered how crooked the Tweed ring was.**

Interviewer: Boss Tweed?

EL: **Boss Tweed. And he was so upset about that that he thought if he could ever get into politics he would like to straighten them out. So, when he got out here and there was a chance for him to get into small offices, he began. And eleven years later Uncle George got up in the voting age and he and Pop, well, he used to boost Pop along... "Alex, why don't you do this, or that, or the other?" I don't know if Uncle George ever had an office, he was on the Tree Commission, I know. But I don't think he ever got into politics at all.**

Interviewer: Didn't you have one [*a relative*] that was a sheriff or something?

LL: **That was a cousin, over in New Brunswick, that was a George, too – cousin George – a Litterst, too.**

Interviewer: And they were opposite parties, right?

LL: **Yes, father was a Republican, and he was a democrat – but they both won, at the same time.**

Interviewer: That was the newspaper you showed me, 1896?

LL: **Right.**

Interviewer: So, he was a Freeholder first and then went to the assembly?

EL: **Yes, right.**

Interviewer: So did you ever visit the assembly?

EL: **Oh yes, when we were kids Papa used to take us down there and say, "Here's the chair, this is the chair, this is where I used to sit when I was in the assembly." So we would have to sit in it, Lou first and then me next.**

Interviewer: Go by seniority.

EL: **That's right.**

Interviewer: Well, how about that campaign, Mr. Thornall was the first mayor, is that right? He was a democrat? In 1900 it would have been I think.

EL: Yes, he was a democrat.

LL: The Borough was formed in 1900.

EL: And the next election, when Pop was running, he ran against Kelly, Ed Kelly, Evelyn Kelly's father. Pop would tell us about, "When I was walking along Main Street with Ed, electioneering, we'd stop in every store and stick our head in, and we'd say 'we're running for Mayor.'" "I'm the Democrat," Ed would say, and Pop would say, "I'm the Republican running, and we'd like to have you come out and vote for one or the other of us." And then they'd go into the next one, all up and down Main Street – arm-in-arm, they'd go up and down doing that.

Interviewer: A little different than the campaigns today?

Laughter

LL: I should think so.

EL: It didn't cost as much!

Interviewer: And they're all good friends, right, arm-in-arm down the street?

LL: They all went to the Metuchen Club, to all the dances together.

Interviewer: Was that a social club?

EL: Oh yes. That's all it was.

LL: That's all it was.

Interviewer: And they held those affairs in Robins Hall?

LL: No, no in that clubhouse on Middlesex Avenue. What is now the Elk's, or rather the Masonic Lodge Building.

EL: There was charming little clubhouse before that caught fire though and burned down. And all that was left was the bowling alleys.

Interviewer: I believe with that club you told me your father helped to design the new one after the old one burned from a fire.

EL: That's right.

Interviewer: When was that?

LL: I can't place that year.

EL: The whole old clubhouse burned to the ground – the darling little old clubhouse, except the bowling alleys. They rescued them and I think those were the ones that they installed in the clubhouse after that.

Interviewer: Now wasn't there a golf course across the street?

EL: Well, the golf course was all around that section. That was all golf course.

Interviewer: In front of St. Luke's?

EL: Opposite St. Luke's – that whole Woodwild Park section. They bought this.... Is this all going on now?

Interviewer: Sure – you're on the air.

LL: This is inappropriate then.

Interviewer: No it's okay.

EL: Well, the Building & Loan bought the whole piece of property across from the - did I tell you this before about Frank Smith and his remark?

Interviewer: No, as matter of fact.

EL: Is that in there? Should I tell it?

Interviewer: Sure.

EL: Well, the Building & Loan bought that whole piece of property that they called Strong. Strong was the owner of the place out there. And the whole thing had to be settled so the Building & Loan got it at a good price and they had visions of making a lot of money on it. And Frank Smith was the Main Street barber that every old-timer in Metuchen knew. He came over to Mr. Litterst and said, "Oh, A.C. I don't think you should develop that place. That's a beautiful place for a 'cemetery'. It's all hills and hollows and if you break it up into building lots it will spoil a nice 'cemetery'."

Laughter

Interviewer: Cemetery, huh? You had a lot of stories about him, right.

LL: Oh yes. Everyone does.

Interviewer: How to murder the King's English, right? Well, we mentioned St. Luke's a bit. What are your early recollections of St. Luke's? Who was the rector – Father Roche? Is he the first man you remember?

EL: He's the first one I remember. I remember him because he had a very attractive assistant. And Uncle George thought she was pretty nice and we thought maybe something would come of it but nothing did. What was her

name, Cecelia? Wasn't she a pretty woman? As a little kid I thought she was such a pretty person.

Interviewer: You had a story on Lou about that when she met the Father...why don't you tell us that one again.

LL: You don't want to hear that, do you?

Interviewer: Sure, let's hear that one again.

EL: Well, the first time I ever remember Father Roche was the first time we went to Sunday School and he was there. And Mama took us in and he met us at the door and greeted Mama, they greeted each other. And Mama turned to Lou and said, "Say good morning to Father Roche." And Lou looked askance at her and she said, "Say good morning to Father Roche, Lou." And Lou said, "He's not my Papa!"

Laughter

Interviewer: Took "Father" literally, right?

LL: Poor Father.

EL: That's the first time we ever had a Father in the church I think.

Interviewer: Now they're all Fathers. You said Father Dunham was about that same time.

EL: Father Dunham came right after that. He was a charming man.

Interviewer: And then Dr. Fenton I guess spent the longest time at St. Luke's.

EL: Well, he was our minister.

LL: I really hardly remember the others.

Interviewer: You were little girls weren't you when those other men were there.

LL: Yes, as we grew older we had Father....

Interviewer: You had Dr. Fenton and Harold Dunne. That covers a pretty good span of years – about 55 years or so. Paul Fenton and his brother and sister were born here in Metuchen when their father was here?

EL: I think Paul and Arnold and Elizabeth were all St. Luke's babies. I can't be sure of that.

LL: Born in the Rectory.

Interviewer: Probably the same with Mr. Dunne.

EL: No, I don't think those children were born here at all.

Interviewer: They were much younger. Yes, they were because when he left none of them were 25 and he had been here for 25 years.

LL: I think so.

EL: Oh really, I didn't realize that.

Interviewer: So that would probably be two St. Luke's rector's families in a row. So you've seen as many rectors since Mr. Dunne left as you saw before.

LL: That's right.

EL: More!

Interviewer: I always remember John Molineux told us when we first met him that he only knew two rectors, Dr. Fenton and Mr. Dunne, until Mr. Fryer came. This is only the third rector I've known in that church and I've been here over 50 years.

EL: And three different men – three people couldn't be more different than those three.

Interviewer: Well I guess that's what keeps us going. You need some variety.

EL: That's right. They're almost opening the Fryer...

LL: Oh, the room.

EL: Dr. Fryer's room. They're going to open it shortly. They're getting it all fixed up very prettily.

Interviewer: That's a lovely portrait. It looks very real.

LL: Yes, a lovely portrait. It's going to be awfully nice.

EL: They got the curtains up today. It's going to be awfully nice. And Walter's so proud of himself, he just goes in there and basks.

Interviewer: It will be a nice addition.

Well, to get back to your home. I guess we didn't discuss before but I remember from previous conversation with you that that home was built as an exact copy of the old Presbyterian manse down on Main Street.

EL: Yes.

Interviewer: Which now is the Catholic sister's house – the Halleluiah House.

EL: Is that what they call it? Really – I never heard that.

Interviewer: So that those were really twin houses.

LL: Same exact time.

EL: Same little porch on the back.

Interviewer: And the man who left that was the retired minister from the Presbyterian Church. So he copied his manse – what had been his manse he copied?

EL: Domini Hunt, Domini Hunt.

LL: That's right.

Interviewer: And his name was what, Reverend Hunt?

EL: Reverend Hunt.

Interviewer: When did he build that house?

EL: When was that built?

LL: In '55, in 1855.

Interviewer: So it was 30 years old.

EL: That was built the same year that Pop was born. Yes, 1855.

Interviewer: So it was fairly new when....

EL: When they bought it in '82.

LL: They bought it in '82 – from '55 to '82.

Interviewer: Right it wasn't 30 years old.

EL: No. And one of the sons was a professor in Princeton and every Christmas he would come to Metuchen to spend Christmas with Dr. Hunt. Did you know the Hunts? Where the Foodtown is now the Hunt House was.

LL: That was the Hunt place.

EL: That was one of the sons who lived there. This old professor would come up to our house first before he'd go to see his nephew and niece.

LL: Every Christmas morning.

EL: We would always have had a big 25-guest dinner the night before and exchange of presents and of course tissue paper and ribbons and everything all around. And when he walked in the place looked a shambles. And we were so ashamed!

Interviewer: Embarrassed?

LL: Oh yes. We were young enough to be embarrassed in those days.

EL: Because as soon as he got in he'd begin looking around, you know, and say, "May I go in here," and he'd get into the dining room and say, "Oh yes, that old fireplace, many a breakfast I've had in front of that fireplace. But we used to eat most of our meals in that big kitchen. May I go in the big kitchen?" Then he'd come out the other way, "And here's the pantry and here's where we'd have our cookies and we'd swipe them in here." Then by golly he'd always want to go upstairs too. The beds weren't made and, oh boy were we ever embarrassed. Didn't bother him any.

Interviewer: Would he come back every year – just to reminisce?

LL: Every year. It was regular.

EL: And then he would write us a nice poem about our gracious hospitality in his old, old home and all this business. He was very charming, a little old man. He wasn't as old as we are now but we thought he was awful old.

Laughter

Interviewer: Sounds like he became an institution on Christmas Day. Only came on Christmas?

EL: Well, I imagine he came to see the Hunt's more often.

Interviewer: But that was the only time he visited your house.

LL: It was an annual visit to the old homestead.

EL: And the same stories he gave - one brother choked to death on a prune pit. "Are those trees still out there, those prune trees?"

Interviewer: Choked on a prune pit?

EL: On a prune pit. "Now this was my bedroom," he said. "There were four beds in here, place for four people, two big double beds. And this was the girls' room and my mother and father had this room." We knew all the history.

Interviewer: You got a repetition every year – it's not hard to forget when you get a repeat every Christmas day.

EL: He was a dear little old man

Interviewer: Well, you ladies became famous in the later years in that house, as the Ramble Inn?

EL: Very famous!

Interviewer: When did it become the Ramble Inn? When did you name it the Ramble Inn, when you went into the business?

EL: 1921. We didn't want them to scramble out; we wanted them to ramble in!

Interviewer: Was this after you had been to Bermuda?

LL: Yes, we got the idea down there. They had a darling tea room down there – they were only open from 3 to 5 in the afternoon, just serving English tea, you know, and well, we came home and of course we were full of it. We wanted to open. Dad said no, but we insisted and we opened the tearoom and we ran it just from 1 o'clock to 5. That was all we were open.

EL: One year, we were only going to have it the one year, just to see how much fun it would be!

Interviewer: This just during the week, or did you do Saturday?

LL: Just during the week. Because, Bishop Freeman, of Washington DC, used to go over the Lincoln Highway – it was the only highway in those days – we didn't have Route 1, or the Turnpike –

EL: The Garden State and all...

And he went by and read our sign "Open Weekday Afternoons". Bishop Freeman said, "This is a place I want to eat." He said, "they revere the Sundays – they don't serve on Sundays," so he came in, and every time he went by he came in.

Interviewer: So he became a regular?

EL: Oh boy, and he used to make his family so mad because he would make them wait no matter what time they were going through Metuchen they would have to wait.

Interviewer: Tea time at the Ramble Inn.

LL: Wait for the Ramble Inn to eat.

EL: And they would want to eat lunch around 12 o'clock, not in the afternoon.

Interviewer: Not after 1. So you became famous in the early days then?

EL: He had a daughter Elsie, too. He was very well known in Washington.

Interviewer: Now you said that was just for fun, in the 20s, 1921? How many years did you stay?

LL: Three years.

EL: Well, we had it the one year.

LL: Then it got so big, we said, oh!

Interviewer: You dropped it?

LL: **Society girls running a tearoom, you know, just for afternoon tea.**

Interviewer: Just for something to do...

LL: **That's it, just something to do.**

EL: **You know, that first year, and this was a story that Pop always interfered with my telling, that first year we made enough money to take a trip, down through –on the Kalimaris, that was the name of the boat – through the Caribbean, and what was it, a four week tour, a three week tour.**

LL: **We went to Cuba.**

EL: **Well we took three weeks, and we ended up in Panama and oh that was delightful.**

LL: **We had the time of our lives.**

Interviewer: That was the profits from one year's operation?

EL: **From one year. The way they got the profits, though – Pop would say – he would interfere with this story – he would say “I had a garden, and they reaped all my garden produce in their lettuce and tomato and cucumbers and pickles and all this business. And all the rest of the stuff bought at the groceries, I paid the bills! So, their profits were what they took in – that was all profits!”**

Interviewer: Did he go on the trip with you?

LL: **No.**

Interviewer: You didn't even take him? Using all his garden products?

EL: **No, we used his money, but we didn't take him along!**

LL: **This friend, who was also a friend of Grimstead's you know, she went with us. The three of us went down.**

EL: **Molly Campbell. She wasn't such a friend of Grimstead as she was of Pearl.**

LL: **Well, I know, but he knows Grimstead, he doesn't know Pearl.**

Interviewer: So then in '23, that was the end of it?

EL: **Yes, that was the end of that, it had grown so big we couldn't keep it the way we wanted it – informal.**

LL: **They wanted lunch; they didn't want to come in for a cup of tea.**

Interviewer: So you just still stuck with the tea in those days then?

LL: **Yes, that is all we served, until the Blue Plate.**

Interviewer: Well, then you had another chapter after the depression came, right? That wasn't operating for fun, then?

EL: **Oh, no, well, that was different. That was for real.**

LL: **But we did this, we did break down to this much of a change of our plans. When these people would come in, you know, say from Philadelphia, they would come in, and then they would want something to eat. With their chauffeurs, and everything else, you know, it was high hat in the 20s – 20, 21, 22...**

Interviewer: It was a long long drive. It wasn't an easy trip.

EL: **So this would go on, and they would say, "Don't you have something, something you could make a hearty sandwich with?" or something like that, so we finally said 'Lets plan a nice dinner for ourselves, and anybody who wants something hearty, we'll serve dinner.' And that would be the meal, and we'd call it the Blue Plate Special.**

LL: **That was ours.**

EL: **Which we did. And at the same time that we opened, the Metuchen Inn opened, which is still the Metuchen Inn, but it isn't open like that. And Mr. – what was his name? – Holstein, Mr. Holstein, used to get so annoyed of people coming in telling him that they had been up at Ramble Inn, and he couldn't see why they couldn't come to him. And so he wanted to come up to see what we did that was different from his. So, he came up one day, and said "Are you serving?" and we said, "Yes, we have afternoon refreshments." "Oh, don't you serve anything else?" and we said, "If anybody insists on having a real substantial meal, we'll serve our Blue Plate Special." "Well, what is that?" and we said "it changes every day," and he said, "That is what I'd like to have." So, he did. And he was very polite and very complimentary. And the next thing we knew, Aunt Molly and Uncle George, who lived right next to there, who built a little house – the inn was their home, but when they sold that, they built a little house and lived in the next one on Linden Avenue – and they would go in there for dinner almost every night. And they came up to us that Sunday.**

LL: **In those days, dinners were 50 and 75 cents, you know.**

EL: **85 cents was high for a dinner! And, they came up to us that Sunday, and said, "Well, Mr. Holstein said he'd been up here and said had a nice dinner," and we said "Yes, he came up, had a lunch," and they said "Well, he's taken the idea from you, he's serving a Blue Plate dinner down there." We said, "He is? What a color plates is he having?" And Aunt Molly says, "on a green service!"**

Laughter

Interviewer: And you had real blue plates? You had blue china you bought didn't you?

LL: Yes, we had blue Canton china.

Interviewer: Yours really was a Blue Plate Special.

EL: So he thought that was what was selling it!

Interviewer: So the Blue Plate Special at the Metuchen Inn was on green china. So that developed, how many years did you say you were in that? My goodness.

LL: It was three years.

Interviewer: I mean when you got into the real business – you had to go in because of financial problems with the depression.

EL: That's right, the bank closed.

Interviewer: Well, your father was in the Building and Loan and the banks, and everything was in pretty sad straits at that time right.

LL: We lost everything. But fortunately he had put the house in our name. That's all that saved it.

EL: In the 20's he did that, in '23. He put the house in our name in the 20's.

Interviewer: Good thing he did that.

LL: That's another story.

EL: Yes, a friend of ours had a I don't know if he wants that in there.

LL: No, you don't want that on there

Interviewer: Sure.

EL: Can you cut it out if you don't want it in?

Interviewer: Don't worry.

EL: Well anyway, "How we got the house turned over to us."

Interviewer: That's important!

EL We were visiting some friends in Brooklyn and they were very upset because their friend's father had just remarried. She was his second wife and Etta was up in her 30's when her father married this very nice lady and Etta and she were very good friends and they made a very nice family group and always enjoyed the opera seats and all the business together the three of

them. And Mr. Arbuckle up and died leaving a lot of money – the Arbuckle coffee people you know – and in the will he left it all to his second wife and didn't leave anything to Etta, his daughter who had been a very devoted daughter to her mother and father. And these Brooklyn friends of ours were furious.

LL Terribly upset as you can imagine.

EL So when we came home and we told this to Pop and he said, "He's a damn fool. How could he have done such a thing to his daughter?" Well we said he didn't think – he thought Etta would marry and have a lot of money. I don't know how he did it.

Well he said, "I can't imagine a father doing a thing like that. So the next morning he went down to the bank.

Interviewer: Make a will?

EL: And went upstairs - Uncle George had his offices, the lawyer's office, upstairs and Pop went up and said, "George, I want you to draw up a" what do you call it?

Interviewer: A will?

EL: It wasn't a will; he was turning the property over...transferring... a "transfer of the property to Lou and Elsie." He said, "What today? It's Saturday. You want me to do it today?" "Now!" Pop said. "I don't want to wait another minute. I want it done right away." "What's the rush?"

Interviewer: Bless his heart.

EL: And Pop told him the story and said, "I don't want that thing to happen to me. I might go out of my head and not let the girls have anything."

Interviewer: It was very fortunate.

LL: Wasn't that lucky?

Interviewer: Yes, because look how your lives would have changed if that hadn't happened. You had what, 35 years with the tearoom? Almost, from 33 to 65.

EL: Thirty-two years.

LL: Pop died in 53. But we kept the tearoom, oh yes.

Interviewer: I remember eating there - well we first came to Metuchen late in 53 - I remember eating there in 54 and 55. Didn't know you then, but my wife Nancy may have known you. Yeah, I can remember being at the Ramble Inn. You were quite an institution.

LL: Well, we loved it. Of course it was our home and we tried to have it like guests. We didn't like to have a business arrangement. When people came in they were our houseguests you know.

Interviewer: I think that really was the atmosphere.

LL: Oh surely.

Interviewer: You never thought of it as a commercial place really.

LL: We really closed in the right time you know because we would have had to have liquor.

Interviewer: Yes, the competition would have driven you out.

EL: Competition was too great in '65.

LL: So it really was very fortunate that this man came in and said I want to buy your place – just out of the blue.

Interviewer: You had quite an experience when you had an auction, didn't you?

EL: Oh yes, we had to have an auction. We had to get rid of everything.

Interviewer: The barn was full, the house was full, everything was full.

EL: The attic was full, the cellar. And finally the apartment is still too full.

Interviewer: Well, you have some lovely things here.

EL: Open any of our closets and it's like...

Interviewer: Fibber McGee?

EL: Fibber McGee! Everything falls out! Well when the auctioneer was there and we had shown him the shop and the garage and he'd been up in the attic and we had a beautiful old antique wardrobe – what do they call them? They have a fancy name for them now. He said, "Why do you have this up here?" Well we said, "We can't get it in the ceilings of the rooms downstairs!"

Interviewer: It was too tall.

LL: Where the heck would we put it downstairs!

EL: Then he thought he had seen everything and he said, "Do you have anything in the cellar for sale?" And we said, "No." Well, we have files down there because Tex had thought that it wasn't safe to leave down them in the shop, the ones that were nicely wrapped. So we had made shelves in the cellar and had brought them and put them there. "Oh," he said, "well of course you want to sell those – the handmade files." So we said, "Okay come on, we'll

show you.” And when we got down there, here was a whole row of wine barrels, about 6 or 8 of them. And he said, “What are those?” “Wine barrels”, we said. “Any wine in them?” We said, “No, its vinegar is in them.” “Vinegar! Then they are still sound?” We said, “As sound as we know anything about it.” “That’s a find and you weren’t even going to tell me about it”, the auctioneer said. So he found these old wine bottles and said, “Oh my, they’ll be popular but they haven’t been advertised. That’s a shame they should have been in the advertisement.” They sold.

Interviewer: You sold an awful lot of things then.

LL: Oh boy, we did.

EL: He said he’d take a day but by the end of the afternoon....

LL: By 4 o’clock, we weren’t nearly sold.

EL: He said, “I’ll have to come back another day.”

LL: Which was too bad because it hadn’t been advertised or anything you know, so we didn’t get what we should have.

EL: You know all of our curtains, drapes, fixtures in the whole house he sold in one lump. He sold them all for \$19.

Interviewer: Really, oh dear.

EL: Some of them didn’t amount to much but some of them, the older drapes were very, very nice.

Interviewer: You saved several lovely pieces for your apartment.

EL: Yes, we saved and picked out the things that were the most comfortable for the apartment.

LL: We took the apartment in May and didn’t come in until August because we thought we would move gradually, bringing the things down.

EL: We had all the rugs cleaned and sent to the Ramble Inn...or to Redfield. And we had the furniture done over and returned here so it didn’t go back to the house afterward. It looked like somebody’s old barn that we were living in for about a month. Well I guess that’s about all we have to tell.

Interviewer: That must be a strange feeling to just see an empty place. There was a bank building there, the drive-in bank. Wasn’t that where your home was? Is that exactly where your house was?

LL: That was where the parlor, or the sitting room, was and the drive-in bank is where the kitchen was.

Interviewer: I would think that would be rather a sad thing to see.

LL: We didn't let it affect us at all. We didn't allow it.

Interviewer: I think you were wise. You moved out, you're here, you're settled.

LL: We got out before it happened though.

EL: We drove by there the minute that bulldozer came

Interviewer: I wouldn't want to see that, I don't think I could stand that.

EL: It was terrible.

Interviewer: I'm sure.

EL: And then when they came and leveled the whole hill off.

LL: We didn't know it was going to happen, but it just happened as we were driving by.

EL: Then they took the whole hill off you know and those beautiful trees, they were 100 years old, 150 years old.

Interviewer: Just to make it open for a driveway and a parking lot. That's a shame.

EL: The only thing that's there now - because the barn was made into a nursing home and the nursing home was absolutely demolished just a couple of years ago - the only thing that's left up there now of the Litterst's is the old well. That's still standing there.

Interviewer: Where is that?

EL: And that is still standing there. That was the most marvelous well water.

Interviewer: I see that in the picture. Where is that in relation to the bank - the well?

LL: Right along side of it almost.

Interviewer: I was going to say it's fairly close.

EL: Just beyond the front of where the nursing home was - it was still on the nursing home property. So they had to take and close it all off and they put a big cement thing there because it wasn't safe with the old people, you know. They might have drowned in the well.

Interviewer: Would your property have gone on down where the diner is now?

EL: Yes.

Interviewer: So that is there and of course the hospital, JFK hospital, now would have been part of your property also.

LL: That was in our woodland, right in the middle of our 20 acres of woodland.

EL: That's the part that we lost.

Interviewer: Good heavens, that was the part lost in the depression, right?

LL: For the taxes. Elsie and I couldn't swing that too.

Interviewer: Is that right – it was just the price of the taxes? Just the price of the taxes that you lost that on really wasn't it?

LL: They got it for taxes so they could easily give it to the*unfinished*

Interviewer: Think what that's worth today.

LL: They value it now for \$500,000 – just the property.

EL: Just the hospital not all the rest of it. Ninety-seven acres we had and they have twenty of it – something like that – no, fifty – oh, I don't know.

Interviewer: Didn't you say that James Street used to be Alexander Avenue?

EL: Alexander Avenue, when we laid it out.

Interviewer: Now is that Grandpa or Pa – which Alexander?

EL: They were both Alexander. Both. The honor could go to the one who wanted it.

Interviewer: The one that had seniority maybe, right? And you said the new mayor or somebody out there changed it because it didn't mean anything?

LL: Yes, Jimmy Forgione, James Forgione.

Interviewer: So is that James, is that his name. He's the James

LL: The property only went through to a certain place and then the Forgione property was beyond that so when he became mayor they cut this road through.

Interviewer: Oh they made the street? So when it became a complete street Alexander became James Street.

LL: Alexander went to the end of our property and James Street, you see, connected Grove Avenue with Alexander and then they eliminated Alexander and continued James Street out to Middlesex Avenue again.

EL: Is this running all the time?

Interviewer: We're on the home stretch now, right. Now, I did seriously want to thank you very much. You've been most helpful to me. This is my first experience and I have certainly enjoyed it. Both chatting with you and seeing the pictures and seeing the items, and I hope you have.

EL: It's fun going back over all the things that we've almost forgotten ourselves.

LL: It's funny how one little thing brings and recalls another.

Interviewer: And it's the beauty of a tape recorder really

EL: I hope we haven't gotten into too many personal things.

LL: And sometime I might like to hear that tape recorder.

Interviewer: Well you may hear a little bit tonight.

LL: Okay.

Interviewer: Well I think particularly that you got your father to write and realizing now that it will be saved should be a thrill to you – or a comfort to you really.

EL: You mean the transfer of the property?

Interviewer: Well, where he wrote the first article about - remember you got him to write in his later years about Metuchen and his recollections.

EL: Oh yes.

Interviewer: Because that is tremendous. So thank you very much again.

LL: Well thank you. We've enjoyed it.

Interviewer: It was my pleasure. Very good.

EL: We've enjoyed it, yes.

LL: Now let's hear some of it.

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