

William Franklin Buchanan

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Interviewers: David Heinlein and George Terwilliger
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Abstract: William Franklin Buchanan (1897-1983) was born in Newark, raised in Perth Amboy, and graduated from Rutgers University in 1919 with a degree in civil engineering. Mr. Buchanan worked at Larson & Fox before being appointed as the Middlesex County engineer in 1924. He also concurrently served as borough engineer for Spotswood (1923-1967) and Metuchen (1925-1976). His fifty-one-year tenure as borough engineer of Metuchen is considered the longest tenure of any appointed engineer in the state. Mr. Buchanan married Dolly Prickitt in 1926 and they lived with her parents at 76 Clive Street until moving into their own home at 56 Clive Street.

In this interview, Mr. Buchanan discusses his education background as well as his work as borough engineer in Metuchen through the Depression. He indicates that one of the biggest changes that took place in Metuchen during his tenure was the paving of Main Street, the construction of a sewer system, and the removal of the Toonerville Trolley during the 1920s. The interview also touches upon Mr. Buchanan's work as plant manager of the New Jersey Fulgent Company during World War II. He also briefly discusses local politics, his own private practice, the sewage treatment plant, and the Metuchen Rotary Club.

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D. Heinlein: December 15, 1977, David Heinlein and George Terwilliger interview Mr. Frank Buchanan, formerly borough engineer of Metuchen, about Metuchen. [recording paused]

W. F. Buchanan: My name is William Franklin Buchanan. I have been known as W. Franklin Buchanan, for my own choice. I was born in Newark, New Jersey on September 25, 1897. At about three years of age, I moved to Perth Amboy and went through my early education in Perth Amboy, graduated from the Perth Amboy High School in 1914. At the time that I was in my senior year in high school, I took competitive examinations for a scholarship for Rutgers College [Rutgers University]—as it was known at that time—and successfully passed the examinations and received the scholarship. I entered Rutgers in 1914, with the idea of specializing in electrical engineering since I had been interested in wireless telegraphy for many years.

In order to finance my other expenses when going to college, I secured a position with Larson & Fox, civil engineers and land surveyors in Perth Amboy, and worked for them Saturdays, some Sundays, holidays and some nights. And in that way, [I] earned enough money to put myself through college. After my third year of following the civil engineering course, I decided, based on my experience—sorry, that was wrong—the three years of electrical engineering course, I decided based on my experience in civil engineering and surveying, to change my course to civil engineering. I was successful in having the scholarship extended for another year, and graduated from Rutgers in 1919.

G. Terwilliger: Frank, if we could talk about your summer employment with Larson & Fox in those 1915, 1916, 1917 years. If there was a job outside of Perth Amboy, how did you get to the job?

W. F. Buchanan: By automobile.

G. Terwilliger: What type of automobiles were they?

W. F. Buchanan: Fords.

G. Terwilliger: Fords.

W. F. Buchanan: I can remember going to the Ford Agency, which was owned by Dorsey, in Perth Amboy, and buying two Ford touring cars for \$450 apiece, new.

G. Terwilliger: Hardly the price we'd pay for them now. [laughter]

Now when did you first meet Mrs. [Dolly Prickitt] Buchanan?

W. F. Buchanan: I first met Mrs. Buchanan in 1925, shortly after I was appointed borough engineer. I was appointed in February—I think it was February sixth or February eighth—1925, having moved to Metuchen in September 1924.

G. Terwilliger: Now in 1925, at the time you were appointed borough engineer in Metuchen, you had previously been appointed Middlesex County engineer.

W. F. Buchanan: I was county engineer in Middlesex County, and also borough engineer in Spotswood.

G. Terwilliger: When did you first become the county engineer in Middlesex County?

W. F. Buchanan: Nineteen hundred twenty-four.

G. Terwilliger: And that ran concurrently with your borough engineer's position in Spotswood and Metuchen?

W. F. Buchanan: Yes.

G. Terwilliger: Now you've met Mrs. [Dolly] Buchanan and perhaps you can tell us when the big event took place.

W. F. Buchanan: Well, we became engaged in March of 1926, and we married in October of 1926.

G. Terwilliger: And you lived—after you were married—where in Metuchen?

W. F. Buchanan: Well, we lived with the Prickitt family in the large house on [76] Clive Street.

G. Terwilliger: Which still stands.

W. F. Buchanan: Which still stands, that is correct. And then in 1929, we built the house next to that house, which is 56 Clive Street.

G. Terwilliger: That is the house that is on the corner of Norris [Avenue] and Clive [Street] at the present time?

W. F. Buchanan: That's correct, the northeast corner.

G. Terwilliger: Northeast corner. Now perhaps if you would, those middle twenties years, Metuchen was quite rural. And is there anything in particular that you think is interesting about the character of the town, we could get it on the tape at this time. I am sure you have a lot you can say, but there must be a few things which you think are particularly interesting.

W. F. Buchanan: Well, do you mean changes that took place?

G. Terwilliger: Yes.

W. F. Buchanan: In 1926 and 1927, they paved Main Street. We paved the business part of Main Street between Middlesex Avenue and Amboy Avenue. And that took out the trolley track, which was in the middle of the street and eliminated what used to be called the Toonerville Trolley of Metuchen. And that was the biggest change to the middle of the town. But [we] also widened the distance between curbs in the business section of Main Street from forty feet to 44.6 feet. But just before that was paved, the sanitary sewer system was put in, in Metuchen. I had nothing to do with the construction of that. That was done entirely by a consulting engineer whose name was W. W. Young, who was from New York. And so after the sewer was put in Main Street, of course, the pavement was constructed.

G. Terwilliger: Now, you mentioned the trolley line. And before we started the tape, we were discussing the extent of that early trolley line. Perhaps you could tell us, from Perth Amboy, how that original trolley line ran throughout this area.

W. F. Buchanan: Well, the trolley started really in Perth Amboy where they had a large car barn and it went through Fords to Metuchen, and when it got to Metuchen—that is to Main Street, Metuchen—it turned to the south and went to Bonhamtown, and then to Highland Park, and then to New Brunswick.

G. Terwilliger: Now it went to Woodbridge Avenue, Bonhamtown and via Woodbridge Avenue into Highland Park, or what is now known as Woodbridge Avenue?

W. F. Buchanan: That's right. And there was another line, which was started from New Brunswick and went up along the Raritan River along the River Road to Bound Brook, and that had a connecting line that went to Plainfield, and then to Rahway. And there was also a connection from Rahway to Perth Amboy, forming a complete circuit.

G. Terwilliger: How often did the trolleys run?

W. F. Buchanan: Approximately every hour during the day.

G. Terwilliger: What were they powered with? Or what was the prime mover on the track?

W. F. Buchanan: They were all electrically operated with overhead wires.

G. Terwilliger: At any point, were there ever horse-drawn trolleys?

W. F. Buchanan: Not to my knowledge.

D. Heinlein: And how many people could the trolley accommodate?

W. F. Buchanan: Well the trolleys on the main line I believe could take care of possibly forty people, thirty-five to forty. Of course we had the short line, as I mentioned before, the Toonerville Trolley—that was a smaller car. And that ran from Main Street and Amboy Avenue through the business part of Main Street and continued up to Christol Street, or the southern end of Clive Street. That was used principally for people using the railroad, and also for people doing shopping in that section to get downtown.

G. Terwilliger: Frank, at the time in 1925 when you became the borough engineer in Metuchen initially, do you recall who the mayor was?

W. F. Buchanan: Frederick L. Clarkson.

G. Terwilliger: And Mr. [Edward Allen] Burroughs was the borough clerk at that time?

W. F. Buchanan: He was borough clerk. And Wesley Benner was the borough attorney.

G. Terwilliger: Where were the meetings held prior to the new [Metuchen] Borough Hall being built?

W. F. Buchanan: They were held in a room at the back of Robins Hall [at 401 Main Street], which is now Metuchen Hardware. It was also police headquarters; it was police court.

G. Terwilliger: That's the Metuchen Hardware that was on Main Street in Metuchen.

W. F. Buchanan: That is correct.

G. Terwilliger: The three-story brick building?

W. F. Buchanan: Right. At that time, the third quarter of that building was a dance hall.

D. Heinlein: And were there theatrical performances up there as well?

W. F. Buchanan: I don't know whether they were actually theatrical performances, but it was a large meeting room and they had local dances there.

D. Heinlein: So that's the twenties. Let's move on to the next decade if we can, and try and cover that in a few minutes.

W. F. Buchanan: Well, in 1932, when my term expired as county engineer, coincidentally I was also resident engineer for the Port Raritan District Commission, which was a state commission for the improvement of Raritan Bay. I didn't mention that before. But I was appointed full-time position with the [Metuchen] borough as borough engineer, superintendent of public works, superintendent of the sewer system and the disposal plant, superintendent of public buildings, building inspector, and zoning inspector. They were all combined in the one position.

G. Terwilliger: What year was that, Frank?

W. F. Buchanan: Nineteen hundred thirty-two.

G. Terwilliger: So that would have been the origin of our zoning ordinance, around 1932 then?

W. F. Buchanan: No, the first zoning ordinance was passed by the Borough of Metuchen in 1924. I believe that the first map was made by me in 1925. That was shortly after I went in office. Then the next revision of the zoning ordinance was in 1935.

G. Terwilliger: Now let me digress for a moment. You are I'm sure familiar with the Edgar family who formerly resided in Metuchen, who lived in the large house on [335] Middlesex Avenue, with the large white columns on it.

W. F. Buchanan: That was one of the Edgar brothers.

G. Terwilliger: That was one of them?

W. F. Buchanan: That was Harold Edgar.

G. Terwilliger: I see. How many others were there?

W. F. Buchanan: Well there was Raymond Edgar, who lived at that time up at the corner of—next to the corner I should say—of Park Avenue and Plainfield Road. And then there was another one that lived on Graham Avenue near Franklyn Place.

G. Terwilliger: Were they all in the family business together?

W. F. Buchanan: I believe they all were. I wouldn't swear to it.

G. Terwilliger: It particularly intrigues me and I wonder if you could describe a little bit about their clay mining operation and where it was?

W. F. Buchanan: Well, basically their clay mining was done in the southern part of Metuchen going over into what was then Raritan Township, which is now Edison Township. But they had expanded quite a bit and they had plenty of sources all the way down to Georgia, as far as that's concerned.

G. Terwilliger: Was there a plant in Metuchen where it was processed, the clay?

W. F. Buchanan: I don't think so. I think that the clay was sold to other companies who processed it.

G. Terwilliger: I see.

W. F. Buchanan: Or whatever the manufacturing game is, as far as I know.

G. Terwilliger: And the building which stands at the end of Station Place—Pennsylvania Avenue—Station Place, that was their original operating office?

W. F. Buchanan: Well, that is the first office that I can recall in Metuchen. I don't know whether that was the original office or not.

G. Terwilliger: And how long did that mining operation go on for, Frank?

W. F. Buchanan: Oh, I wouldn't want to say when it stopped—a part of their ownings—their mines were sold from time to time, but just when it stopped, I don't know.

G. Terwilliger: Now, Metuchen has been described by a lot of people as having been a town of professionals, business people. Just your own opinion, how did you see lifestyles change much when the Depression hit in 1932, [19]33, [19]34 here in Metuchen? Did it affect this borough greatly?

W. F. Buchanan: Yes, yes it did. Of course, it didn't have as abrupt change or effect as it would in a town that was basically relying on industry for income for families. Because Metuchen was more of a—I don't know how to describe it— but they'd be technical people and—

G. Terwilliger: Educators?

W. F. Buchanan: Yeah. So of course they were not hit as hard as the people in the town who were entirely relying on one or two or three large industries.

G. Terwilliger: I see. Did it affect the municipal government very much as you recall, tightening the budget and holding the line such as we're faced with now? Was the borough government—of course it had improvement programs underway—and how did it affect that type of thing back then?

W. F. Buchanan: Of course during the Depression, we had a lot of projects that the federal government paid for the—well the labor costs, you might say. So, all that the borough had to furnish was the equipment to do work and a part of the cost of supervision. At that time, I remember we bought some forms to build concrete curb and gutter. And we would put concrete curb and gutter in for anybody who would pay fifty cents a foot because that was the estimated cost of the material that the borough had to buy. And there were many, many hundreds of feet of curb and gutter that were constructed, and all it cost was just the fifty cents a foot. While today the same thing would cost possibly \$5.50 a foot.

G. Terwilliger: That's true.

W. F. Buchanan: And I will say one other thing, the first year that I was in charge of the public works program, I was told by the finance committee that the Department of the Streets and Roads appropriation was \$2,500, and they expected to get back \$1,000. [laughter] Of course, you have to keep in mind that the 90 percent of our

labor was actually furnished to us by the government, under the CWA [Civil Works Administration] and WPA [Works Progress Administration] program.

G. Terwilliger: That was a tight budget.

W. F. Buchanan: Yeah.

D. Heinlein: Let's see, [President Franklin] Roosevelt was in office—I just remembered one thing, and this is very small, but maybe it should go on the tape. You mentioned at one point that you sat next to Thomas Edison at a ceremony. Did you and he exchange words at all?

W. F. Buchanan: Yeah, a few words, not too many. That was when I received my civil engineering degree. Because at that time, when you graduated from college, you got a Bachelor of Science degree. And then you had to have three years of experience, and actually work up an estimate based on a project that you had been working on, in order to qualify for your CE [civil engineering] or even your EE [electrical engineering] degree. And, of course, it was CE degree which I was trying to get. And at that time, Thomas Edison sat next to me on the platform and we did exchange a few words.

G. Terwilliger: How old would Mr. Edison been at that time? Very old?

W. F. Buchanan: Well that was in 1922.

D. Heinlein: Was he still working in Menlo Park at that time or up in the Oranges?

W. F. Buchanan: No. He was up in the Oranges. He hadn't been in Menlo Park for many years.

G. Terwilliger: As the thirties progressed and we started to get closer and closer into World War II, were there any changes that were taking place in and around Metuchen in connection with the onset of World War II, such as military facilities being built, [Camp] Kilmer, that type of thing that are worthy or interesting that we might take note of?

W. F. Buchanan: Well, I was not involved in that. I was not involved early in the war effort of World War II. I think, of course, in World War I, I was in the SATC [Student Army Training Corps], which was a part of the Army. But I was at Rutgers at that time. But until about 1940—[19]39 or [19]40—the only military picture around Metuchen was Camp Raritan—the Raritan Arsenal. And that of course was a carry-over from World War I. Now it was expanded, of course, in the pre-World War II period. And then of course Nixon Nitration [Works] expanded, and they were also in the war effort and the New Jersey Fulgent Company, which was Samuel Wiley's plant, expanded greatly.

G. Terwilliger: Let's talk about the New Jersey Fulgent Company because I know you were involved with the New Jersey Fulgent Company. You mentioned Sam Wiley. This is the Sam Wiley who was the grandfather of our present [Metuchen] Councilman John Wiley.

W. F. Buchanan: That's correct.

G. Terwilliger: The Wiley family were neighbors of yours on Clive Street.

W. F. Buchanan: That's correct.

G. Terwilliger: Tell us a little bit, Frank, about what the New Jersey Fulgent Company did and where they were located.

W. F. Buchanan: The New Jersey Fulgent Company was originally in New Brunswick, on a comparatively small, small scale; and it was really the work of Samuel Wiley. But for many of the patents, or the basic patents, were the work of his father who at that time was also connected with the government being [unclear]. But Samuel Wiley went into the actual manufacture of emergency landing flares, and practically every airline in the world, with the exception of the Pan American Airline, used the Wiley emergency landing flare. Well of course when World War II actually developed, they went into the manufacturing of bombardment flares, which were huge, four-foot-long candles, you might say.

G. Terwilliger: Magnesium.

W. F. Buchanan: Well it was a mixture of—magnesium, barium nitrate, sulfur and four or five other items—and ignited by a black powder fuse. They were principally manufactured in this country by the New Jersey Fulgent Company.

G. Terwilliger: And the location of the Fulgent Company, at this time when they were manufacturing, was no longer in New Brunswick but over in the southern part of Metuchen.

W. F. Buchanan: The southern side of Whitman Avenue at the Bonhamtown branch of the Pennsylvania Railroad.

G. Terwilliger: And at the present time, this is where Whitman Avenue crosses Route 287, right at that location?

W. F. Buchanan: That's correct. Muller Machinery [at 302 Whitman Avenue] is located on a part of the property in the yard.

G. Terwilliger: Right. I just want to stop the tape for a second. [recording paused]

W. F. Buchanan: In 1941, at the request of Mr. Wiley, the owner of the New Jersey Fulgent Company, I went with that company as plant manager and resigned all of my positions with the Borough of Metuchen, except that of borough engineer.

G. Terwilliger: And you remained plant manager for how long, Frank?

W. F. Buchanan: Until the war ended. I believe it was [19]45.

G. Terwilliger: And that would have been about the time that you began your private practice in engineering and surveying?

W. F. Buchanan: I had conducted my private practice ever since Larson & Fox broke up in 1932.

G. Terwilliger: Where did you have your office and where were you practicing from in 1945?

W. F. Buchanan: For a period from 1932 until approximately 1940, my office was on the second floor in the Commonwealth Bank Building [at 407 Main Street]. And in 1941, as I

remember, I moved to the entire second floor of the Schenck building, which was next to the Commonwealth Bank Building on the south side.

G. Terwilliger: And you stayed there until early fifties, wasn't it?

W. F. Buchanan: No, I stayed there until the 495 Main Street building was constructed in 1958 and moved in there as one of the first tenants.

G. Terwilliger: That's where your office is at the present time?

W. F. Buchanan: That's correct. [recording paused]

D. Heinlein: Mr. Buchanan, could you tell us a little bit about the development of the Metuchen Rotary Club, please?

W. F. Buchanan: The Metuchen Rotary Club was organized in 1928 and I was a charter member of the club, and am still a member although now I am considered an honorary member.

G. Terwilliger: Where did they hold the meetings, Frank, in the early years?

W. F. Buchanan: In the early years, we held our meetings at the Metuchen Inn, which is on the corner of Linden Avenue and Middlesex Avenue. That was when Harry Holstein owned it.

G. Terwilliger: Some years ago I saw a film¹—an early motion picture film—that was made to encourage settlement in Metuchen. Have you ever seen that film?

W. F. Buchanan: I have heard of it, but I can't remember seeing it.

G. Terwilliger: I believe a Mrs. [Elsie] Salaki has the film right now.

W. F. Buchanan: Yes, I understand she does.

G. Terwilliger: And it was made back in the—I guess in the twenties, late twenties perhaps, or early thirties?

W. F. Buchanan: I don't know.

D. Heinlein: I think it was made in 1928 or [19]29.

G. Terwilliger: At that time, I thought that the film said that some borough group was meeting at the Metuchen Inn. Have you ever seen that film?

D. Heinlein: No, I haven't. I want to see the film.

W. F. Buchanan: Prior to the Metuchen Rotary Club organizing, there was a club that was known as the Businessmen's Luncheon Club and they used to meet at the Metuchen Inn. I think it was once a week.

¹ The 1929 film titled *Metuchen...THE MOVIE* by Charles Salaki Sr.

G. Terwilliger: Frank, I'm sure your recollection of politics is very clear. Was there anything interesting that happened in politics from 1925, particularly significant that you can think of?

W. F. Buchanan: In Metuchen?

G. Terwilliger: In Metuchen, yes.

W. F. Buchanan: Well, Metuchen has had for a number of years the idea that after one party had been in charge for a few years, the other party should have a chance. [laughs] And it has switched back and forth, although it has followed to one side now for a number of years.

G. Terwilliger: In 1925, when you were appointed as borough engineer, which party was in power in Metuchen at the time?

W. F. Buchanan: The Republicans took over the first of January of 1925. When I was appointed, two of the newly appointed Republicans—or the newly elected Republicans I should say—rather than vote, got up and left the room. So that meant of course it was not a tie vote, so the mayor could not vote. So I was not appointed, actually, until February the eighth, because one month had to expire before the mayor could make the appointment. So that was interesting.

G. Terwilliger: Are you saying that these two gentlemen, who left the room, did not want to vote for you to be appointed as borough engineer at that time?

W. F. Buchanan: Well, they were Republicans, but thought that I had too many Democratic friends too. [laughter]

G. Terwilliger: That's interesting.

W. F. Buchanan: I think that I had been appointed as often by Republican councils as I have by Democratic councils.

G. Terwilliger: I think it's interesting that we should put on this tape that Mr. Buchanan was the borough engineer for fifty-one consecutive years.

W. F. Buchanan: That's right.

G. Terwilliger: To my knowledge, that's the longest tenure of appointed engineers I think in the State of New Jersey ever, and I doubt if it will ever be equaled or exceeded.

W. F. Buchanan: According to the [New Jersey] State League of Municipalities representative, who was at the meeting, that is true.

G. Terwilliger: And Mr. Buchanan has seen much happen over his tenure over the years. When the Democrats took control of the country under Roosevelt, did that affect our local political scene at all? Did the Democrats take over Metuchen at that time?

W. F. Buchanan: Yes.

G. Terwilliger: They did?

W. F. Buchanan: In 1929-1930, the Democrats took over. So in 1932, it was not unanimously Democratic, but it was close to it.

G. Terwilliger: At that time, Frank—1930, 1932—were there many dirt streets in Metuchen that had not been paved yet?

W. F. Buchanan: Very few streets had been paved. Amboy Avenue was paved by the county while I was county engineer in 1928, and Main Street was paved in [19]26 and [19]27, and then of course Middlesex Avenue was paved originally in about 1911 or 1912 as a state highway and using convict labor from Rahway Reformatory. And at the time, Alvin Fox, who was a partner of Larson & Fox in Perth Amboy, was county engineer and it was a procedure then due to the fact that the State Highway Department did not have their own engineering departments, that the county engineer would do the engineering work for the state on any job within their county. And so this road was improved, the original concrete road, but the work was handled, from an engineering standpoint, by the county engineer.

G. Terwilliger: Speaking of roads, there wasn't always a Route 1. Can you tell us a little bit about when that was constructed?

W. F. Buchanan: Well Route 1—the route of Route 1, a good part of that—was originally acquired by Public Service Electric [and Gas Company]. And they wanted to have that for the main electrical transmission lines. Incidentally, Larson & Fox did the work for Public Service Electric on the branch of that all the way from Route 1 and Amboy Avenue, all the way up to Mount Saint Mary's [Academy in Watchung Borough]. They did all the surveying work there—that's just incidental.

G. Terwilliger: That's the line which crosses Middlesex Avenue near the Edison line up there, yeah?

W. F. Buchanan: Right. And then the state decided that they had to have a cross-state route, connecting up Trenton and well, actually it went to New York. And so they chose that because Public Service only wanted the right to have their towers along that line and so the state could use the ground surface for roadwork.

G. Terwilliger: Now I've seen drawings which refer to something called the Fast Line.

W. F. Buchanan: That was the route of it.

G. Terwilliger: And what was the Fast Line?

W. F. Buchanan: That was the line that ran from Newark to Trenton.

G. Terwilliger: A railroad?

W. F. Buchanan: A trolley.

G. Terwilliger: A trolley line?

W. F. Buchanan: And they also had a branch that went from Newark to Perth Amboy.

G. Terwilliger: And this ran along or very close to where Route 1 runs now?

W. F. Buchanan: Their right-of-way is a part of what is now Route 1.

G. Terwilliger: I see. [recording paused]

Mr. Buchanan at one time, Metuchen had its own sewage treatment plant. I wonder if you could describe to us when it was built and where, and what is on that site now.

W. F. Buchanan: Well in about 1922, there was a movement started to have standard sewer lines and a treatment plant constructed in Metuchen. And it was put up for referendum and it was beaten. And after about a year's time, it was put up again and it went through, and the first work started on the sewer lines and the plant, which were two different contracts, in 1925. And that covered the installation of sewers and possibly 30 percent to 40 percent of the streets that were fairly well built-up. And it included the construction of a primary treatment plant at the end of what is now Jersey Avenue, very close to where the Department of Public Works main buildings are, and very close to where the present sewage pumping station is, and the secondary treatment plant, on the west side of the Lehigh Valley Railroad, a continuation of Forrest Street. In addition to that, in order to take care of the southerly part of the borough because there is a ridge really that separates the borough into two sections—the northerly section and the southerly section—it was necessary to build a pumping station on Orchard Avenue. And from there, the sewage was pumped from that pumping station up to Main Street and High Street where it could be discharged into the gravity mine and actually run over to the treatment plant at Jersey Avenue.

G. Terwilliger: And how long was that treatment plant in use?

W. F. Buchanan: The treatment plant was in use until 1958, at which time the—in 1956 and 1957, we were building a pumping station on Jersey Avenue to handle the existing flow, plus the estimated flow of twenty-five years from that date, and also a force main from there over to Tommy's Road where it discharged into a sewer that was being built by Edison Township to convey it from there over to the new system sewage [unclear] at the Raritan River. And the old treatment plant was used until the switches were thrown in 1958 and the new pumping station started up.

G. Terwilliger: Now, until the sewage treatment plant was built and the initial collector system installed, all of Metuchen then operated on private sewage individual disposal systems such as septic tanks.

W. F. Buchanan: Cesspools, um-hm.

G. Terwilliger: Did that create problems as far as health problems in much of Metuchen, do you recall?

W. F. Buchanan: Well, it was creating problems. Of course, originally it didn't create problems, because there was enough vacant land, houses were farther apart, and there was enough area that the ground would handle the average sewage from the house. But of course with the increase in the number of buildings, and the decrease in the amount of vacant land for subsoil disposal, it was becoming a problem.

G. Terwilliger: When you were the superintendent of public works in the twenties, how many men were in the department at that time?

W. F. Buchanan: Well, that was in the thirties.

G. Terwilliger: I'm sorry, in the thirties, yes.

W. F. Buchanan: Well, there was one general foreman, and we had about six men to start in with, and then of course when CWA and WPA came in, we had other men who could do other jobs for the department.

G. Terwilliger: Who was your general foreman, Frank, at that time?

W. F. Buchanan: His name was Mick Adams [Mark Adams].

G. Terwilliger: There was I recall an old gentleman Sam Reid who worked for many years for the borough. About when did he start working for the Borough of Metuchen?

W. F. Buchanan: He started working for the borough shortly after the original treatment plant was built. In fact, he took his examinations and he got the state plant operator's license. And he continued to be in charge of the operation of the treatment plant up until they put that job on me in the combination of offices in 1932. And so for a few years, Mr. Reid was working under me, but he finally [unclear] retired.

G. Terwilliger: I understand he just died a few years ago.

W. F. Buchanan: That's right.

G. Terwilliger: If one were to ask you, in all your years in Metuchen, I know it's a difficult question now, and I don't know what you're going to say. But two things—if you could name a person that you remember most significantly about something—not necessarily to do with politics or engineering—but one person that comes to mind if you think back about one individual, and one event, what would you say? Any one person in all your years in Metuchen that stands out in your mind, be it for notorious reasons or reasons of merit?

W. F. Buchanan: Well I think that I had to be possibly influenced by the fact that Lewis Compton was an old friend of mine from Perth Amboy. And we were very close; our families were close ... [recording ends]

[END OF INTERVIEW]