

Richard and Ruth Ziegler

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Interviewers: Phyllis Boeddinghaus

Transcribers: Janena Benjamin and Laura Cabbage-Draper

Abstract: Richard Ziegler (1915-2004) was born in Brooklyn and moved to Metuchen as a child. He served in World War II where he was a POW. Richard married Ruth Betts and he owned a gas station on South Main Street for twenty-six years. Richard discusses his life, and the many people and businesses who lived in Metuchen along South Main Street.

P. Boeddinghaus: This informal oral history is being made under the auspices of the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society. The interview is taking place at the Metuchen Public Library on Friday, July 9, 1993. Richard Ziegler of Charles Street, Metuchen is being interviewed by Phyllis Boeddinghaus, a member of the Historical Society.

Hello Richard, thank you for coming to be interviewed today. Let's start off with your family background.

Mr. Zieger: Okay, Phyllis, whatever you say. I was born in Green Street, Brooklyn and I lived there until I guess I was two or three or four years old or so. My father worked for the transit business, he was a trolley car conductor in New York and his brother was a motorman. So the two of them ran the trolley car.

P. Boeddinghaus: Good combination.

Richard: Well, anyway, he finally got a job at Governor's Island. It was an ordinance part of the U.S. [unclear] and so he got a job, I think, in hardware or something like that. But anyway, he was only there a short time and there was a big lay-off but there was a notice put up that there was another ordinance place opening in Raritan Arsenal in Metuchen. And so he thought that's a good deal. The reason for it was Raritan Arsenal had been strictly 100% Army and then they were turning it over to mostly civilian with just Army supervision. So anyhow he landed a job at Raritan Arsenal and he came out here and found a house for us in New Brunswick, which he rented for a few months, and he found this house at 22 Charles Street in Metuchen. So I guess I was six years old by the time we stepped off the trolley car from New Brunswick. And we stepped off the trolley car right in front of Jack's Flower Shop.

P. Boeddinghaus: Good, what was it then?

Mr. Zieger: It was Fekete's Grocery Store.

P. Boeddinghaus: And what year was that?

Mr. Zieger: That was 1921. I think in December or some where around then. Anyway, we walked down the street and my uncle who lived over in New York, he was with us

at the time and it was a rainy day and Main Street was not paved at that time, and so he renamed the town “Mudtuchen.” [laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, I like that! That’s very good.

Mr. Zieger: I started going to school and Charles Street was only one block long then; it didn’t go past George Street. Our house was number 22 on the right-hand side. There was no electricity on the street, there was gas in there and they had gas lights and gas for cooking and so forth, and there were coal stoves and things like that. No furnaces or anything like that. There were no bathrooms. There was a little toilet sort of off the kitchen. Later on, everybody of course made bathrooms in the room upstairs over the kitchen. Anyway I went to school – I started off in the first grade with Miss Bogle.

P. Boeddinghaus: Edgar School?

Mr. Zieger: At Edgar School. Of course there was only Edgar School and the Franklin School. There were only two schools at that time. Franklin School was a high school and I guess some seventh and eighth grade too. But anyway, Fekete’s grocery store was kind of the center of attraction in this whole neighborhood, you know. And almost immediately there was talk about this White Rose girl that was going to appear at Fekete’s grocery store in the evening on whatever date, I don’t even remember but it was shortly after we got there. And so everybody was outside the store and this White Rose girl, who was only a little girl but all made up and looked very pretty and she was a pretty little girl anyway. So she was there posing and the whole neighborhood was all gathered around and Mr. Fekete was there and Mrs. Fekete and everything and it was in the evening and of course they had the lights on in the store and all that kind of stuff. But anyway ,the White Rose girl was a big success and Mrs. Lamb – I don’t know if you ever heard of Mrs. Lamb. Did you know Mrs. Lamb?

P. Boeddinghaus: From Lincoln Avenue, that Mrs. Lamb?

Mr. Zieger: No, no. This was – her husband’s name was Bill Lamb and he worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad in New York. And they lived out here. A lot of railroad people and New York people that worked in New York lived in Metuchen. So anyway, Mrs. Lamb lived upstairs over Fekete’s Grocery Store. So my mother and Mrs. Lamb became very friendly. And Mrs. Lamb was a real down to earth person and she had one little girl, her name was June. I remember that pretty near as soon as we got there we went to the Baptist Church. And there was snow on the ground, and I was pulling June on the sled and my sister and Mrs. Lamb and my mother walked along and we finally went to the Baptist Church. And we kind of hung out with the Baptist Church for a long time afterward.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes.

Mr. Zieger: So anyway, I have to tell you about Mrs. Lamb because she was really a very strong person, you know, and she would really impress you. She finally later on, I guess maybe four or five years later, she decided that she was going to make more

money. So she started a coal business. So it was known as L.R. Lamb Coal Company and she did *great*; she really did great with this coal business.

P. Boeddinghaus: And where was that located?

Mr. Zieger: She had little offices; she had an office downtown in a building that was torn down where the Commonwealth Bank is, or Morris Stores. There was a row of little stores in there and she rented one of those. And she had one truck and one driver – his name was Howard. And she used to deliver coal and people would order coal from Mrs. Lamb. And she was very well known and very talkative and she was a good sales lady and so she was doing great with this coal business. So much so that Bill quit his job with the railroad, and they bought another house on the corner of Tulsa Avenue and Main Street. And Mrs. Lamb decided one weekend that she was going to go to Lancaster, Pennsylvania – that’s where she was originally from. So Bill was busy and he didn’t have any time to take her. She got on the trolley car and she rode over to Perth Amboy and she saw Mr. ... oh, gosh, I forget his name now ... the guy finally opened up the Commonwealth Bank in Metuchen.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, Mr. Applegate?

Mr. Zieger: Mr. Applegate. He had a Studebaker agency in Perth Amboy so she went in and she bought a Studebaker right there. So she got in that car and she drove it back to Metuchen, right. When she got to Metuchen she kept on going and drove to Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Never had a license or never drove a car, nothing. So when she came home again, everything was fine. She didn’t have a bit of trouble and I guess she didn’t even have a license, but she decided that the car needed some protection so she built a garage in the backyard. She wanted Bill or somebody to build a garage for that car. Nobody would build so she built it herself. And that little garage is in back of that house right now. It’s a little square garage with kind of a flat roof and if you ever looked at it, Mrs. Lamb built that all by herself.

P. Boeddinghaus: Wasn’t she enterprising and very determined.

Mr. Zieger: She was really a great person.

P. Boeddinghaus: I just want to ask you about your neighborhood on Charles Street. Did Mr. Dinnebeil build your original home at 22 Charles Street?

Mr. Zieger: Yes, he built all of those houses down Charles Street. And of course, at that time the houses on the right hand side of the street, he started to build those in around 1918. And so he built those houses; there were about seven or eight or nine all the way down to George Street on the right hand side. He went around the corner on the right-hand side of George Street, and he built that string of houses that are there still to this day. And he built a couple of other houses on the other end of George Street, three or four of them that ended near the cemetery. The other side of the street, on the left-hand side of Charles Street going down, there was only two houses. And that was Walter Bleyer’s house on the left-hand side. And the next house belonged to a family by the name of Carl, C-a-r-l, I think their name was. And that was the only two houses on that side of the street. So later on, Mr.

Dinnebeil started to build there – he owned the property already – so he built the left-hand side of Charles Street. And number 31, the one that I live in now, that was bought new by – what was his name - Morris. But anyway, on the right-hand side of Charles Street was a – see I get hung up with names... [laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: That's alright.

Mr. Zieger: But anyway Mr. Dinnebeil built all of those houses and he kept on going right around the block onto the left-hand side going up towards Main Street of Lincoln Avenue. Now he already owned a couple of houses, the one that he lived in and the one his brother lived in. His brother lived in a two-family house which was the first house off Main Street on Lincoln Avenue and Mr. Dinnebeil had the next house. He finally finished all those up and then he bought the property at the end of Charles Street, which ended at that time at George Street, so he opened up a spot between two houses and he built a road in there and he built all those houses down in the lower end of Charles Street, which was all a big meadow at that time. And so after he finished that he started working over around Sylvan Avenue, Park Place and those others.

P. Boeddinghaus: I rode down Charles Street the other day and it's looking very nice. People keep their homes very well landscaped.

Richard: It's been a good little street.

P. Boeddinghaus: So you went to Edgar School until about what – seventh or eighth grade?

Mr. Zieger: Well, it ended at the sixth grade at that time. And then the seventh and eighth grade was in the Franklin School and then high school was still in the Franklin School. That was the high school. And I graduated from there in 1932. And a good friend of mine was Jimmy Schoonover.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember him.

Mr. Zieger: Do you remember Jimmy Schoonover? We used to go together back and forth to school and all that kind of stuff. Jimmy had a 1923 Dodge Coupe and he had gotten it from his brother-in-law and he had it fix it all up; the top was very bad on it and all that stuff. And I had a 1926 Chevrolet Coupe. And so finally when we got to be seniors, we had a driver's license and so we would drive to school. So we were really big shots then. So things went along like that and Jimmy – well the war came along in 1941 and it was looking more like a war coming so Jimmy was inducted into the service sooner than I was. He went to Ireland and then he went with a whole group of guys to North Africa. And he was in the infantry and involved in all that business in North Africa and Sicily to Italy and he ended up in Anzio. And so he got home just a little bit before the war ended. Just before the war ended, he was due for rotation, so they sent him home. So he went back to work; he worked for his uncle or cousin that had a milk business.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, I remember him being the milkman.

Mr. Zieger: He'd done it all his life and he kind of liked that. It was outside and everything so anyway he stuck with that.

P. Boeddinghaus: And where did you go in the service, you said he went in before you.

Mr. Zieger: Yes. He went in before I did.

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you join up? Or were you drafted?

Mr. Zieger: No, they called me up, the same as Jimmy did. So I went in and I ended up at Fort Dix and from there to Atlantic City. I was in Atlantic City for about two months or three months. From there I went to Denver, Colorado - Lowry Field. And from Denver, Colorado I went to gunnery school in Nevada, near Las Vegas. From there back again to the East Coast and I was sent to Tampa, Florida. And I joined a B-17 crew in Tampa, Florida. And then we were scheduled to go overseas in a new airplane, we were going to fly over, but something turned up and squashed that. And we came back again to New York, through Camp Kilmer, and got on the *Queen Elizabeth* and we ended up over in Greenock, Scotland. And they sent us by train down into England. And I was with the 94th Bomber Group in England near Bury St. Edmunds. And our crew flew fifteen missions over Germany in B-17s and then we were transferred to the 15th Air Force. And so there was a little different set-up. The 15th Air Force had to do fifty missions but the 8th Air Force at that time had to do – well when we first got there it was thirty missions and then it went to thirty-five missions. And it was thirty-five when we left there. But our missions in England accounted for about twenty-nine missions down in 15th Air Force in Italy. And so then we got shot down on our 46th mission. After that, I was a guest of the German government for about six months or so. And then they turned us out of the camp for another three months, walking around Germany. And when I finally got out of there I only weighed 130 pounds. I was sent to a hospital in England; I had malnutrition and hepatitis and all kinds of junk. Finally, I guess I got straightened out and I finally got home again.

And I had been working at the Arsenal before. See I'd worked over there. Luckily, I started there just before the war started. I joined up – not joined up – but I was hired over there as an orderly PM in 1940. So that went on and I was lucky enough to be in an engineering department that was working on the experimentation of shop trucks. You know, where they have machine shop trucks and welding trucks and repair trucks and all kinds of stuff. So I ended up as foreman of the whole shop, and it got bigger and bigger and bigger as the war came along. Finally in December, there was the war. So they finally were working three shifts so I ended up having three shift foremen and I would work one shift, 8-4:30. And finally the job was transferred to Philadelphia to a civilian contract. So I went over there with the officer who was running the truck assembly department. Well anyway, I finally was called to go into the Army. I left Philadelphia, came back to the Arsenal and was here a month when they called me and said, "Hey, hit the deck."

P. Boeddinghaus: Had you had any other training in mechanics, like after high school?

Mr. Zieger: Well, I always did fool around with cars and then when I first came out of high school, I went to work for Sheffield Farms. They had a milk delivery system

coming out of Plainfield and so I worked for them for about seven years over there on milk trucks. But it was really a dead-end job. It was about \$16 a week and you got one day off – that was Saturday afternoon to Sunday afternoon. So finally when I got a chance at this Arsenal job in 1940, I took that and that was really much better. Anyhow, where are we here...?

P. Boeddinghaus: Well, let's see. I was going to ask about some of your buddies that you palled around with in high school.

Mr. Zieger: Jimmy Schoonover and I were really, you know, the best of friends. The only other - well, I had other friends, but I mean people that you really considered your best friends, Jimmy Schoonover was one of them, and then Otto Guntz was another one. Do you remember the Guntz family?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Mr. Zieger: They used to live there on Charles Street, on the right-hand side, in the first house. I think it was number 16. Otto, he was a year older than I was and Otto was the greatest guy you ever knew. I never saw that guy do anything mean or lousy, he was always trying to help somebody. But he was always doing something, you know? And so he used to like to read *Boy's Life* and all this kind of stuff. And they had a lot of kids in that family, and they used to get lots of magazines. And there is really a great story about Otto Guntz.

P. Boeddinghaus: We'd like to hear that.

Mr. Zieger: Okay. Well anyway, Otto and I were really great friends, and we were always doing something, and we were always making something. And he was a great one for boats and things like that. So anyhow, we used to make boats out of barrel staves and all that kind of stuff, and cover them with canvas and paint them green and he was a great one for spar varnish. I didn't have any money to buy all this stuff but Otto, he was always – somehow or another, he always had some money. I think what the reason was that he used to work for the Post Office. He used to have a bicycle and he would deliver Special Deliveries for the Post Office. And he got 10 cents a piece or something like that, but people would always give him a tip for delivering it, so he always managed to have money to buy spar varnish and brushes and all that kind of stuff. So anyway, Otto, well you know Mr. Guntz, he was a musician. Actually, he played the piano, he understood the piano and that was his livelihood. And I guess – now I'm not sure of this whole story but the story as I understand it – Mr. Guntz belonged to some family in Denmark who were very well-to-do and I guess they were landowners and I don't know whether they'd had a castle, but it was kind of a royalty arrangement over there. So Mr. Guntz was one of the sons in the family, I guess, and he fell in love with Mrs. Guntz. Well, this was a no-no because she was a commoner, and she didn't belong to a royal family or anything. So they decided to get married and they did. And so they ostracized from the family. Now I'm not sure about this but this is the way I understand the story – so they were thrown out of the family so they came to the United States and I think they settled in Perth Amboy. They later moved to Metuchen and they moved into 16 Charles Street. And he put up a sign ... *Rolf Guntz, Piano Instruction* and he had a little sign on his house and people would

take lessons from him. It was a dollar for a half an hour. [laughter] So anyway Mr. Guntz always made a living in the realm of music, like pianos and he played the organ. He played in some churches in Perth Amboy, he played the organ for some churches and in some of the bigger theaters in Perth Amboy there were organs and pianos. He was always working. In those days it was silent movies, and he would sit there and look at the picture and he'd fill in, make when the thunder came, and the shots rang out. He'd get all this in with the piano as it went along. It was a common thing, it happened in all movie theaters at that time. Mr. & Mrs. Guntz had a whole bunch of kids. There was Henry and Olive, and I don't know, there must have been about five or six of them. But Otto was the guy I knew. We were always doing something, building a shed in the backyard with a fireplace in it and roasting potatoes and all that kind of stuff. Otto finally was inducted in the Army. I don't know whether he joined them or whether he was inducted but anyway he applied for OCS, that's Officer Candidate School, and I guess he was accepted. I was kind of losing track of him by then.

P. Boeddinghaus: You were a little older.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, and I was working in Plainfield, and I used to work long hours and all. But anyway, Otto finally got through OCS, and he was commissioned as a second lieutenant. Then he was in the thick of World War II, all through the – I don't know whether he went in through South Africa or North Africa, if he started there or where he actually started but I know he fought all over Europe. He started off as second lieutenant and by the time the war was kind of simmering down a little bit, Otto was a Major. He had some time, and he got a jeep. Of course Denmark at that time had been liberated, so he got in the jeep and he went to the old homestead. Now I don't know what happened, but it seems to me that, here's the American grandson coming back after he helped liberate his grandparents who threw his mother and father out. And it seems to me that there ought to be a nice story in that somehow, you know. But of course, that's all I know about it. I don't know if I got the whole thing straight or not, but that's the way I understand it. I always thought Otto was a great guy and I haven't seen him in twenty or thirty years or maybe more.

P. Boeddinghaus: You lost track of him?

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, yeah. I don't know where he is now. But they were a nice family.

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you see him after he got out of the service; did you have any type of reunion?

Mr. Zieger: No, I don't know whether he stayed in the service maybe for a little while, but when I got out of the service, I got home and I was on furlough for a while and I wasn't feeling so good. And so I went back to the Arsenal again. Because you know, you're entitled to go back to your job. I worked there for about two months, and I couldn't do it, I just couldn't do it. Before I went in the service, I used to run that place and had maybe 700 people, or 600 people or something like that, working three shifts and working on tanks and trucks and all that stuff. When I came back, I just couldn't do it. So I got a job in Scott's in Plainfield. They made printing press machinery. So I got that job over there but I only lasted a year there because their whole business revolved around orders. If they had orders for

printing presses, they were busy; if they didn't, they were slow. So being the last guy on the totem pole I got left out and that was the end of me. But it taught me that I could work by myself. So after I was laid off the gas station was for rent up on Main Street and I rented the gas station and I just worked there by myself. So it worked out okay. And there were a lot of nice people in Metuchen. Mrs. Eby was one of them.

P. Boeddinghaus: I went to see her the other day. She's really doing good, and I had a letter from her today. She's doing very good; she was pleased to see me. Another lady took me up there and the other lady took wedding pictures from her daughter's wedding and of course she knew this girl. And all of the storm damage on Rector Street and she could identify with all of that. I took her some cream cheese and crackers which she was very happy about, but she hasn't had much appetite. But she always sends you a hello and says you took good care of her car. How about some of your other buddies like Danny Rodden? Do you ever hear from him?

Mr. Zieger: Yes, we still hear from him. He moved to Murray, Kentucky and the reason, I guess everybody knows, that he moved there was because of the younger daughter. The one daughter stayed in this area in Edison; she married some fellow in this area who worked here so they stayed here. Every once in a while, Danny and Carolyn would come and he'd stop and see me and we'd chew the fat and all that kind of stuff. But Carolyn is crippled up with arthritis pretty bad and the house that they had in Murray was out in the country, so they moved into the town to be closer – well, things were more handy to get to there, and medical assistance was more available. But he still lives out there and so does the younger daughter. I can't remember her name.

P. Boeddinghaus: Jeanette.

Mr. Zieger: Jeanette, that's right. Jeanette started the whole family out there because when she was going to school, she was a great one for the 4-H club. And her lambs always won the first prize. So Danny said that Jeanette really puts everything into anything she does. Her goal in life was to be a veterinarian and she wanted to go to this school that took care of all kinds of farm animals, and it was located out in Murray, Kentucky. So Danny took her out there – he closed up the store – and he took her out there and got her all set up and came back. But he liked it out there. So whenever Jeanette would be ready to come home for summer vacation, Danny would go out there, load up his station wagon with all her junk and bring her home to Metuchen again, back and forth. So he really liked it out there and he finally bought a house out there. And when he finally closed up his store, he just packed up everything and went to Murray, Kentucky.

P. Boeddinghaus: He was a butcher in Metuchen on Main Street. But did his family live on Lincoln Avenue, his homestead was there too?

Mr. Zieger: Yes, yeah.

P. Boeddinghaus: Did he live on Charles Street first? [someone else answered quietly in the background]

Mr. Zieger: Danny and his mother and his father lived on Lincoln Avenue. George Dinnebeil lived in the first house of the double homes. The next house was Mr. Dinnebeil; he lived there with Mrs. Dinnebeil alone. The next house was another double house. Danny Roddin and his mother and father lived – looking at the house – they lived on the right hand side and Billman’s lived on the left hand side.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, I remember that name too.

Mr. Zieger: I used to go over to Danny’s house, and he would come over to my house and all that stuff. So Danny’s father, he was sort of a contractor, he was always doing jobs on railroad cars and heavy stuff. He would have ... at one time he brought home these big timbers, you know. Gosh, they were maybe twelve feet wide and eighteen inches high and they were about twenty feet long. He had two of them and he set them up in the yard because he to find a use for them later on, I guess. So he set these two timbers up. And Danny and I tacked sticks on the side and we strung a string around it and we made a boat out of it. We had a mast stuck down between the two pieces of timber and we traveled all over the world in that boat.

P. Boeddinghaus: You were very imaginative!

Mr. Zieger: We always had a good time doing that.

P. Boeddinghaus: Making up your own games to occupy your time.

Mr. Zieger: Sure. And when I first knew Danny some of those houses on the right-hand side hadn’t been done yet by Mr. Dinnebeil and he finally got around to it before he started on Sylvan Avenue and Park Place.

P. Boeddinghaus: I have some old pictures of Charles Street under construction and there’s a big tree in front of the flower shop, a huge tree that’s not there now. And the road was all dirt.

Mr. Zieger: On Main Street?

P. Boeddinghaus: Main and Charles. And we have old pictures of Lincoln Avenue too under construction. It was very rural. I’ll have to show you those sometime. There are some women standing around in the street talking.

Mr. Zieger: There is another little story about Gorman’s Candy Store.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yeah, now where was that again?

Mr. Zieger: You know where Johnny Shersick’s gas station was, it was directly across the street from my gas station. But before any of those gas stations were there, that was all fields; Gorman’s had a candy store there. All it was, was a two-story house and the Gormans were two families. The two Gorman brothers married two sisters and so the four of them lived together in this house. And they had plenty of room I guess because they lived in the back of the store, and they lived upstairs.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember that building. It had like a store front on it eventually.

Mr. Zieger: That's right. But you know that building was moved. It originally was right down on the edge of Main Street but then Main Street was still all mud and they decided they were going to widen Main Street and Gorman's house was in the way. So they took and built a foundation back off Main Street and further away from High Street. And they set up a winch there that was run by a horse, and they lifted the building off its foundation, and they put these huge planks and timbers down and they slid the whole building over and set it down on a new foundation. So it was really a nice little store. They used to sell Castle's ice cream and you'd go in there and you'd get a banana split for 10 cents, if you had 10 cents.

[some speaking in the background]

But you know in Gorman's there was one window that faced sideways out on to High Street, towards High Street. And Gorman's had put shelves in the window and in the afternoon the sun would shine in that window, and they had bottles of soda in the window, all different colors, so it was like a stained-glass window actually. So Mrs. Dinnebeil, she used to like ice cream, she would come in there and she couldn't see very well and she would order an ice cream cone and then she's hold that nickel right up against her eye glasses because that was the only way she would know whether she had a nickel or a quarter.

P. Boeddinghaus: Those are neat stories that you remember from the neighborhood. What other businesses were down there in South End? You know there isn't much in the files here about the South End. Mrs. Eby told me there was a lot of open land and a lot of fields and it wasn't very built up.

Mr. Zieger: You know where Torio's Tavern is? Well, before Torio's Tavern was there, there was a house that sat catty-corner. That was right on the corner of Walnut Street and Main Street, so this house sat kind of catty-corner to that. And it was owned by Hefner. Mr. & Mrs. Hefner owned that building and they had a little grocery store in there. They sold kerosene and potatoes and all that kind of stuff. Finally, I guess they sold the property to maybe Torio, but of course prohibition was on so there were no saloons. The only saloon actually was McGuinness' which was downtown, but that was closed. As soon as prohibition came along, they closed that.

P. Boeddinghaus: And then there was the motorcycle shop.

Mr. Zieger: Tagliaboschi had the motorcycle shop.

P. Boeddinghaus: Joe the shoemaker used to be down that end. And the A&P was along in there.

Mr. Zieger: But Hefner finally moved that house off that corner and they moved the house over to – you know where that frame shop is now?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Mr. Zieger: At the corner of Walnut Street and Main Street. Well before that building was there, they took that house – that was a store – and they moved it over there to that building that is one house away from the frame shop. They fixed it all up, put

an upstairs in it and lived in it. Then they built that big building on the corner where the frame shop is, and they had a grocery store in there. That was the only store that was around until you got to Brody's. Brody's was ...

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, that building appears like it was once a business.

Mr. Zieger: They had a little store in there ... Mr. & Mrs. Brody ran that. It was mainly a little candy store and kids used to come in there and get crackers and candy and maybe sodas once in a while, on the way to school because you had the school right up the street from there.

P. Boeddinghaus: Do you remember Gubik's grocery store? We have pictures of that in the files.

Mr. Zieger: Yes, yes. Actually, you know where the frame shop is? That became Hefner's grocery store, and they had a meat department there [unclear] but they kind of gave it up and I think Mr. Gubik moved in there and he had a meat shop in there. And then there was some kind of a falling out and he moved out and moved across the street. And now there is a little shop in there in his old store now. I don't know if it's a real estate office or some sort of little office in there. For a while I think there was a fire extinguisher place or something.

Then Van Vechtin opened up the print shop. He was a really great guy, Mr. Van Vechtin, I liked him. Of course he had a real tragic end there, but he opened up that print shop right on the corner of Walnut Street. Now before it was a print shop it was a garage, it started off as a garage, some guy had a garage in there. But he went out of business finally in the depression and Van Vechtin came along and put in some presses and started printing there. And he was a very good printer. In fact, there is a book that he printed for somebody that had written it, I don't know who, but the book is now in the Vatican. But Van Vechtin had the knack of doing very fine printing and he was known for that.

P. Boeddinghaus: And you can appreciate that from having worked in Plainfield, right?

Mr. Zieger: But of course it was newspaper machinery I worked on and I only worked there for a year.

When Bill Pettacollis came out of the service, he was in the Navy, when he came out of the service he was anxious to get into some kind of business so he went in with Van Vechtin in the printing business. But I guess Bill was more of an outside man than he was a printer so I guess he would go out selling the printing and so forth.

That was about the only thing that was down in that area. Unless, years ago before the highway went through ... well you know where Route 1 is, that originally started out as Route 25. [a man speaking in the background] It started off as 25 and then it was changed to US 1, it was a state highway. It had been three lanes wide and finally they jacked one lane over sideways, the concrete, they just slid it over sideways and they added another lane to it and put an island in the middle and they made a four-lane highway out of it. But it was running right down along side, you know where the high-line is where the public service's high-line goes

through, before the high-line was there that was a fast line run through there. It was a railroad. Route 25 wasn't even there then. It just ran from Newark right down to Trenton. They had green cards and they would go like the devil with those cars, right through the woods and everything. But you could ride from Newark to Trenton or Trenton to Newark on the green line, that fast line.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now was the trolley before your time? A lot of people talk about the trolley on Main Street.

Mr. Zieger: No, I rode on that trolley. That was a double arrangement there. There was a trolley that came from New Brunswick, well I guess it came from Trenton and it came through New Brunswick, then it wound around through Woodbridge Avenue, came pass the Arsenal and then it turned onto Main Street and then it came up Main Street and then it turned right on Amboy Avenue and went to Perth Amboy. But there was this little dinky trolley with only four wheels on it and he had a little stove inside. This guy would run – now down about where 287 starts there was a switch and he would get the signal from the track and he would have to pull into this switch and stay there until the trolley came from New Brunswick, went by him, kept on going and then turned right for Perth Amboy. But he ran between that switch there and way down the end of Main Street. He went straight down under the railroad bridge.

P. Boeddinghaus: What we call Clive now?

Mr. Zieger: All the way to Clive, yeah. But down there was a lumber yard.

P. Boeddinghaus: Was that Wilbur's? Is that who it was?

Mr. Zieger: Manny Freeman's, I think that's what it was.

Mr. Zieger: There was a Freeman involved in it; I think it was Manny Freeman. They had quite a big lumber yard and I guess they just went out of business. But on the trolley car, there was a guy by the name of O'Hare that used to run it and he would run that thing all day long, back and forth.

P. Boeddinghaus: They say he was so nice to the housewives. If they needed a loaf of bread or some emergency item, he would pick it up and deliver it to the house.

Mr. Zieger: You see, there was an A&P down in Metuchen, and there was no A&P in the south end of Metuchen, not at least in the beginning. But anyway, he would come up on his run and they would come out to the track, the people off the different streets; they'd come out and they'd give him a note and he would take the note and when he got to the A&P, he'd take all these notes and hand them to the guy in the A&P. o the guy would make up orders of all this stuff.

P. Boeddinghaus: Isn't that accommodating!

Mr. Zieger: So he would take care of all this stuff. I don't know how the money came out. I don't know how that worked out.

P. Boeddinghaus: But you had ridden on the trolley yourself?

Mr. Zieger: Yes, I had gone down. I think it used to cost 10 cents.

Interviewer: [unclear] had Jimmy Wallace and Crow?

Mr. Zieger: Oh yeah, the trolley ...

P. Boeddinghaus: I think we're just about finished with this side, forty-five minutes. Let me turn it over ... [recording stops and starts]

So you were saying about Jim Wallace and Crow?

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, Jim Wallace and Henry Crow, they were old time buddies you know. When they were kids the trolley would come from downtown and come under the Metuchen railroad or the Pennsylvania Railroad bridge and start up the hill there. And these guys would take grease and put in the on the track. So when the motorman is on the hill and the wheels were going around – of course they carried sand anyway I guess. So he would have to get out and throw sand on the track so he could get up the hill and keep on going. But I guess Henry and Jim Wallace, they were real characters. I guess they were hiding in the bushes laughing. You should interview Jim Wallace.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes, you had mentioned that, and I've put him on my list to get to talk to him about his memories.

Mr. Zieger: He's a good guy for that. He's an old timer.

Interviewer: Is he a native?

Mr. Zieger: Oh sure, I guess so.

P. Boeddinghaus: The Wallace family has been in town a long time.

Mr. Zieger: There were two or three boys there I think. And you know who you should talk to - Eddie Leis.

P. Boeddinghaus: I have, yes. He was interviewed in the 70s and then again earlier in the year, talking about how he got into being Police Chief. That was interesting.

Mr. Zieger: Well, he was very involved with that murder of McGuinness, the tavern guy on Main Street.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now what was that story?

Mr. Zieger: That was always a saloon for years and years and then Prohibition came along so the saloons were closed. So they closed the saloon but they just left it there.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now where was it located on Main Street?

Mr. Zieger: It was right around, I guess, somewhere where Morris Stores is now or the Commonwealth Bank; somewhere along in there. But you'd walk by there and all the doors and everything were closed but there were two small doors on each side of the store. They were alleyways that went back to a house in the back that the McGuinness' lived in. That's the way I understood it. Well, anyway, one time they found McGuinness dead in one of those alleys. And of course, it was the big mystery of Metuchen and I guess it was never solved. But Eddie Leis was really involved in that. He was a detective or something at the time [unclear] and of course it was his job to solve the mystery. So I guess he spent a lot of his time scouting down leads and all that kind of stuff. But anyway I don't think they ever found out who did it but Eddie Leis might know something more.

P. Boeddinghaus: Was it that he was not robbed? Do I kind of remember that?

Mr. Zieger: He may have been robbed.

P. Boeddinghaus: I thought he had not been robbed; I thought he still had the money on him. They never knew when he was murdered. It was such a mystery.

Mr. Zieger: Well see, the tavern was already closed. Of course, he might have worked somewhere else and had money. I really don't know because I was only a kid then. But that was a big mystery.

And then there was John Leis' Hardware Store.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now where was that?

Mr. Zieger: John Leis started off in a hardware store that he opened where the liquor store is right there on Main Street.

P. Boeddinghaus: Perry's?

Mr. Zieger: Perry's Liquor Store. John Leis started off there and he opened up this hardware store and, of course, this was right in the middle of the depression. But anyhow, he was a hard worker; he was there all the time. I guess he couldn't afford any help and he just worked constantly at it. He had all kinds of stuff and he would run sales, but how much could a little town that had no money to start with buy, you know? John Leis stayed there but he had dreams of a big hardware store. John Leis' brother was a builder. In fact he built that building where Perry's Liquor Store is. So he built that big store where the Garden State was and I guess now it's a Chinese restaurant.

P. Boeddinghaus: Some kind of groceries.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, but anyway when it was first built, that was built expressly for John Leis as a hardware store. He had all of his ideas; his whole life was wrapped up in that store. He had the most beautiful fixtures there. He'd come in the store, and he'd have all these oak shelves and all kinds of little pockets in them with everything that was for sale all the way around the whole store. And then he had these beautiful glass doors all along on cabinets on the wall. And whatever was for sale

he'd have mounted on green felt behind these glass doors. And then you could open these doors and everything that was for sale on the green felt was right behind it. He had all this stuff – all kinds of screws and bolts and tools and chisels and rulers and he had everything in that place. The only trouble was he was about thirty years too soon. If he'd been a little later, he would have probably done well. But John Leis was doing better money wise I guess in his little bitty store over where Perry's is than he was in this great big store.

P. Boeddinghaus: More overhead.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, and I guess he owed a lot of money on all this stuff that he had there. And all his dreams were all in that store and so I guess he lost the whole thing. It was finally cleared out and it was empty for a long time. Then it became a Chevrolet agency. I think it was HOB and I think they were in Plainfield, and I think they might have been in Perth Amboy at the same time. I'll tell you when it was – it was 1932 because I remember seeing that 1932 Chevy and can still see it.

P. Boeddinghaus: And you're going to graduate from high school and buy one.

Mr. Zieger: That's right – some chance! [laughter] I had to be satisfied with a 1926 Chevrolet.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now is this the John Leis that lived on Main Street and had all the daughters?

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, same one. So anyway, poor John Leis had to move out of there. He was left with some small stuff, so he took it all and he opened up a store up near ... I guess there's a glass place now on the left-hand side just before you get to Amboy Avenue there is a row of stores there ... and he opened one of those stores there as a hardware store. He used to run sales and everything and I remember one sale he had one time I went up there and I bought some things. But he would sell things for ridiculous prices. I remember he had buckets for nine cents. So here was a galvanized bucket and it was nine cents! And I remember I bought one and [unclear]. But later on after the war and we got married and he bought our house over on [unclear] on the other side of the street, we got there and boy the house needed a lot of cleaning up. So I said to Ruth, "Go downtown and get us a bucket and get us some sponges." So she comes back and here's this bucket. The thing is built like a battleship! [laughter] I said, "How much was this bucket?" I think it was \$3.00, right?

Mrs. Zieger: \$2.00.

Mr. Zieger: \$2.00 for this bucket! I said you got to be out of your mind to spend \$2.00.

Mrs. Zieger: Oh, I got hollered at.

Mr. Zieger: You know, in those days nobody had any money. So she buys this bucket for \$2.00 and she said, "It will probably last a long time." And I was right, it didn't last. Just lately it sprung a hole in it and that's only forty-six years ago. [laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: So then what was after the Chevrolet place on that corner, do you remember what went in after that?

Mr. Zieger: After that it was the Garden Center.

Mrs. Zieger: Mr. Fekete.

P. Boeddinghaus: The Fekete's were in there too, weren't they?

Mr. Zieger: See, Mr. Fekete was across the street after he left your store on Main Street there. You know that used to be two stores and Jack took it out of there, took the wall between them. But when Mr. Fekete was in there, there was a butcher next door by the name of Aaron, he had a butcher shop. He finally gave up I guess, and I don't know whatever happened to him. But Mr. Fekete left there, and he went next door to John Leis at Perry's Liquor Store. The two of them were side by side there. And Mr. Fekete and Mrs. Fekete were in that store for years. It was an improvement over your store because he had a little more room. And I remember he had a big, long oak cabinet and if you gave him a half a dollar, he would take that, and he'd always throw it on the cabinet, and it would go up in the air and he'd catch and it would ring at the same time. If it didn't ring it was no good – it was lead. [laughter] So he was checking it out to see if it was any good. But he stayed there and finally, I can remember – of course they used to take down all the stuff and put it in a bag, in those days.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes. You'd shop daily.

Mr. Zieger: Everything went in the bag but here it is all on the counter. So they would take this big bag and they would go "dip-dip-dip" ...

P. Boeddinghaus: Write the prices on the bag.

Mr. Zieger: And then they would go "zzzz" – bingo! And they'd have the answer right down at the bottom. And I remember all of a sudden, they got an adding machine. So they would punch in the numbers and pull the lever and Mrs. Fekete didn't trust the adding machine. [laughter] After she got the answer on the adding machine, she'd go "dip-dip-dip" – she had the answer on the paper bag. Then she put the stuff in the paper bag and away you went. But he always had that store. And then from there he went over and went into where the Garden State was. This was before World War II.

P. Boeddinghaus: That was a nice big building; that was lovely.

Mr. Zieger: Then Tony opened the meat department in there; there was a fellow by the name of Tony.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember him.

Mr. Zieger: So Fekete and Tony ran that place. So as soon as the United States got into the war with Germany, Fekete turned around and sold that place, just like that. Because, I guess he learned from World War I. He was worried about the German people from World War I and having people throwing rocks at their windows and all kinds of stuff. So he learned that and I guess he expected the same thing to happen

which it never did. But he immediately sold the business to Stanley Jacobson. And Stanley ran the whole thing and I guess he hired Tony to run the meat department.

P. Boeddinghaus: They were there a long time. It was a nice store. I used to shop there and did all my main shopping there.

Mrs. Zieger: Me too. It was nice.

Mr. Zieger: They were the biggest store in Metuchen until the Grand Union started over where the Foodtown is now. Remember when that opened up, it opened as a Grand Union, and it just flattened them right out. I remember Ed Popovich's wife, Anne Popovich, she was a checker there. She and her sister Tillie, they were checkers, and they would check out the stuff.

P. Boeddinghaus: Well the Dessel's had a big grocery store there on Lake Avenue after they moved off Main Street.

Mr. Zieger: They started downtown as a fruit stand, I think.

P. Boeddinghaus: Fruit and vegetables. And the Morris Store men they had produce in the California Market. About where Marmax is now.

Mr. Zieger: Right in there somewhere.

P. Boeddinghaus: So you always stayed around Metuchen then after you moved here when you were a child, except for being in the service?

Mr. Zieger: Yes, came out of the service, bought a house in Metuchen and we stayed right there. Then I ran that gas station. I guess that worked okay for me.

P. Boeddinghaus: Yeah, that was great. How long were you in that business at the gas station?

Mrs. Zieger: Twenty-five years.

Mr. Zieger: Well, from December of 1948 – Jack started about the same time, right?

Mrs. Zieger: Danny too, started the same time. Danny started the butcher shop about the same time.

Mr. Zieger: Danny came in right after us, yes. Danny opened that store up, there had been a guy in there running a dry goods business. His name was Lindquist or something. I think he was from Perth Amboy. And he used to sell dry goods, you know, you could buy cloth by the yard and all that. And somehow Betty Berkow got involved in that; she worked there for a while.

And then Birdsall, who lived across the street – do you know where Birdsall lived – he lived in that first house along side the parking lot. And I don't know how

Mrs. Zieger: Mrs. Blair.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, Mrs. Blair got into Metuchen through the Hurado's who bought that first house.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember the Hurado's

Mr. Zieger: They bought that first house on the left-hand side which was a new house built by two old people. They built it all themselves. A Hungarian couple.

Mrs. Zieger: They were elderly too.

Mr. Zieger: They were an elderly couple, and they built that thing from scratch. Well he was a carpenter or something but he could do brickwork and all that stuff. So he laid all the block and did everything. And she was right there working, mixing cement for him. And they weren't young; they were pretty old. But they built that house and finally they sold it to John Hurado who had the used car lot next to the gas station.

P. Boeddinghaus: And his wife had the dry goods next to our flower shop.

Mrs. Zieger: Yeah.

Mr. Zieger: And so her mother's name was ...

Mrs. Zieger: Blair.

Mr. Zieger: Mrs. Blair. And she...

Mrs. Zieger: ... was helping the daughter.

Mr. Zieger: ... she was helping her daughter along with and Betty Berkow.

Mrs. Zieger: And Mrs. Blair married Birdsall.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah. Mr. Birdsall's wife died and so he married Mrs. Blair and then they finally moved out to the shore somewhere, right?

Mrs. Zieger: I think so.

P. Boeddinghaus: Now at one point Dinnebeil's sister had a dry goods shop next to our flower shop. Just for a short time. Aunt Julia. He helped her get it set up. She sold fabric and thread and buttons and so on. Just for a short time. She wasn't in good health. That store next to us was wallpaper and paint shop, it was the dry goods and then the shoemaker moved in there. Then after the shoemaker moved out then we took over the whole downstairs.

So you've seen a lot of changes in the neighborhood?

Mr. Zieger: When all the stores burned out there on Main Street.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh, remember that fire?

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, that was a big fire.

P. Boeddinghaus: That was bad.

Mr. Zieger: There was a big fire down in Torio's. It started at eleven o'clock one night and I went to work at about quarter to eight in the morning and the fire trucks were all there. Hoses were all over the street and the firemen were down in the cellar of the saloon. And there was all kinds of liquor down there and they were all stewed! [laughter] All the liquor was paid for, I guess, by the insurance.

Mrs. Zieger: You didn't mention Schwalje's.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, Schwalje's the plumber. The plumbing business was along in there.

Mr. Zieger: See, Nick Schwalje, was a plumber and he just had a little truck and that was his business. He'd go around fixing people's plumbing. And then the war started so Nick Schwalje got into Camp Kilmer.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh boy.

Mr. Zieger: They started building Camp Kilmer and there were jobs in there for plumbers, so Nick got in as a plumber. And the next thing he was bidding on equipping all these places with showers and toilets and all this kind of stuff. So Nick just went over the moon. Next thing you know he had four or five trucks and he had a bunch of guys working for him.

P. Boeddinghaus: And then his sons probably got in on the business with him too.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah. Well, George was like an office guy, but Phil was a real hands-on guy, you know what I mean. He was running the shop and all the guys, and they had jobs all over the place in the end. And Nick – by that time Nick was way out of his element. He'd come running in the gas station and say, "Just put a dollar's worth in, put in fifty cents. I gotta go. I'm supposed to be on the job right away." I'd say, "Listen, Nick, you're going to run out of gas." He'd say, "No, no, don't clean the windshield, just, just...." So I'd give him a dollar's worth of gas and off he'd go. And he'd run out of gas. Tommy O'Brien would come, "Have you got a gas can? I got to go put it in Nick's car. Nick ran out of gas." [laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: Tom worked for the Schwaljes.

Mrs. Zieger: A nice man.

Mr. Zieger: Well, his father was a plumber; Tom's father was a plumber. And they lived in the house right next where Gray's live now on High Street. That was Tommy O'Brien and Kenny O'Brien and their mother and father were in the plumbing business all their life.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember Nick Schwalje when he used to install stoves and water heaters and furnaces and then he went, as you say, and got a good start after the war.

Mr. Zieger: As soon as the war started Camp Kilmer put him together. Sure, he really got going like gang-busters.

P. Boeddinghaus: And what was the fire there at South Main Street? Was it the A&P and there was apartments upstairs.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, there was apartments. It didn't get into Schwalje's but there was an A&P and then there was a drug store and I think one other store.

P. Boeddinghaus: What about that confectionary store, Mrs. Oakes?

Mrs. Zieger: I was thinking about that.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah. Mrs. Oakes' store and there were apartments up above it. The guy that was manager in the A&P downstairs, his name was Leff, L-e-f-f. And he had kid whose name was Teddy Leff and he used to play ball with us all the time. But anyhow, it burned down all their apartments up there and took out the A&P and all the way down to Schwalje's, I guess. Schwalje's was saved but not the other stores – Dinnebeil built all those.

P. Boeddinghaus: I remember that. I think at the time of the fire Bill Berkow had been left that property and they were very distraught when that burned down.

Mr. Zieger: But Mr. Dinnebeil was still alive when at that time.

P. Boeddinghaus: I can't remember. So you've seen a lot of changes all along in there.

Mrs. Zieger: What about Mr. Muha?

Mr. Zieger: Mike Muha lived on Walnut Street, and he started in the photography business. He always was a photographer. Then he got into taking kids' pictures in schools and so his brother George got into it with him. So they would go out and they finally worked out an arrangement where they could do it very cheaply. So they set up their shop so they could process all this film in long rolls and things like that. And Emily was Mike's sister, and she was crippled. She had polio when she was a kid and she worked there processing film.

P. Boeddinghaus: They did that in their home, or did they have a shop on Main Street?

Mr. Zieger: Well, I think they started off in their house or in their garage, but they finally built quite a big shop in back and the shop actually went out on to Myrtle Avenue, the next street down. Mike did alright in that business. He developed that to a real high degree with developing those pictures and he could sell them cheap, and he could bid on stuff. And somehow or other he kept all those kids sorted out. I don't know how he did it because he had to cut up all the pictures but somehow he did it.

P. Boeddinghaus: The boys still come in the flower shop to visit us, Mike Jr. and George. And Mrs. Muha is still living. I meet her in Foodtown once in a while.

Mrs. Zieger: That's nice.

Mr. Zieger: No kidding? She lives around here?

P. Boeddinghaus: She moved to Piscataway but she comes in to Metuchen to shop. And they had a daughter too.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, Carol. She was a great kid and then when she got her license, she bought a Chevrolet. She bought a Chevrolet convertible, and she kept that thing just so. So she had a Chevrolet but she wants a better car. So I said, "Carol, do yourself a favor and keep the Chevrolet. It's a great little car and it's only six cylinders. You don't have much money and it don't cost much to run and the gas is cheap enough." And so finally, here she comes driving in one day. What has she got – a great big Bonneville Pontiac. And a Bonneville Pontiac wouldn't go past a gas station. So anyway, here she comes with it. "How do you like my car?" I said, "I hope you didn't sell the Chevrolet." "Yes," she says, "I turned it in on this Pontiac." So about a week later she said, "Is there anything I can do with this car so it doesn't use so much gas?" I said, "Yes." She said, "What?" I said, "Leave it home in the yard!" [laughter]

P. Boeddinghaus: You're known for your droll philosophy like that. [laughter]

Mr. Zieger: Of course that went over like a lead balloon. She didn't want to know nothing about that. But she had that Pontiac quite a long time.

P. Boeddinghaus: And you always remembered the different kinds of cars that people had. You always told me about the different models that you remember.

Mr. Zieger: Then you could remember. Today they all look alike. But in those days you could remember all the different customers and what kind of cars they had.

P. Boeddinghaus: What was that story you told me about that little building that was next to your gas station? Where that little building had come from?

Mr. Zieger: That's how the gas station started. The gas station actually started over in Jack's store. You know there was a row of garages; I guess you remember the row of garages?

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, that's our workroom now.

Mr. Zieger: That's your workroom now. But originally there was about three or four garages there and there was a guy by the name of Herrick. And Herrick was from Massachusetts. And he came down here because there was absolutely no money in Massachusetts and there wasn't much more around here but he came here. And I don't know what he ever did up there, but he decided he was going to be an automobile mechanic. So he decided to work on cars. And he was always busy; you'd see him out there in the middle of the night with a light working on cars and he'd have them backed into one of those garages. He lived upstairs over your shop. And so he would work away there and he'd never charge enough for what he did. Johnny Gehrum even worked for him for a while – I don't know if he ever

got paid or not. But anyhow, Herrick, he'd start on anything. He'd take everything all apart and he'd just work himself to a frazzle trying to put everything back together. And sometimes – in fact one of Charlie Boeddinghaus's cars was a Studebaker that Herrick had. Herrick had rebuilt that whole thing and after he got all done with it, it wasn't timed right or something and it run terrible. [unclear] But anyway Charlie bought it. And Herrick by that time decided maybe it would be a good idea to have a gas station. So he looked around and he saw Dinnebeil and Dinnebeil rented him that piece of property where the radiator shop is now, and that little house which is up towards Lincoln Avenue from where everything is located now. And so there was two big trees stood right out there in the middle there so Herrick comes along and he gets Atlantic Gasoline, Atlantic Oil Company or something and they agreed to put him in three pumps and put three tanks down, 550 tanks. So he puts all that stuff in. And he had the tanks all set up right between the trees. And it was a nice set-up, but he needed someplace to get in out of the rain. So there was over in Highland Park, I guess – remember when they had miniature golf years ago back in the depression, miniature golf was great for a while. There was a miniature golf course over in Highland Park or Raritan Township or what's Edison now. So Herrick went and asked about the building and so they sold him the building because the thing was out of business anyhow. And he moved it on a truck and set it down there right down in between the two trees. And the pumps were right out in front, and it was a nice shady place. So he dug a pit down along side of it and the pit went out into the field in the back but it was high enough so that you could just walk into the pit when you went down a couple of steps. So he worked in there. Johnny Gehrum worked for him for a while.

P. Boeddinghaus: And what did he do in the pit? You drive the car over it, and he could work underneath the car?

Mr. Zieger: Yes, you could change oil and grease it. Of course, they were starting to get hydraulic lifts where you raise the car up. But they cost a lot of money and he didn't have that kind of money. And it took a lot to get a compressor and he didn't have that either. So anyway, Johnny Gehrum got involved in it and finally Herrick went back to Massachusetts and he sold it to Johnny. I don't know what Johnny paid for it or what the story was but then Johnny ran it for a while. And I'd go there and I'd buy my gas from Johnny because Johnny and I were good friends. So Johnny worked at that for quite a long time and finally I don't know whether wanted to close and Johnny gave it up or what but there was a guy in there by the name of Learn.

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes, Jack Learn.

Mr. Zieger: Jack Learn. He bought it or got into it somehow, I don't know all the particulars of that one. But he got into it and he did pretty good. Are we getting near the time?

P. Boeddinghaus: No, we have fifteen minutes more and then I'm going to serve you a cold drink.

Mr. Zieger: I don't know whether there is anything else.

P. Boeddinghaus: Did you take the business over from Jack Learn?

Mr. Zieger: No, no, no. Jack Learn had that little building. So Charlie Goforth – you remember Charlie Goforth?

P. Boeddinghaus: Oh yes. I remember him too.

Mr. Zieger: See Charlie Goforth started off in Raritan Arsenal. I guess everything revolved around Raritan Arsenal. Charlie Goforth was a guard down at Raritan Arsenal and he used to ride horseback all around the place, because the whole thing was Army. Finally, when it changed over to civilian some of those guys got out of the Army and they joined up as a civilian and got a job at the Arsenal. Well Charlie, I guess he worked down there for a while, but anyhow he finally decided that up on Amboy Avenue here were a couple of guys that ran a little Gulf station on the corner where the movies is. That was a Gulf station and there were a couple of guys from New York who that ran that thing. They came from New York on the train everyday and run that Gulf Station. Charlie Goforth worked for them. Well Charlie Goforth is looking while he's working for them at this Richfield station across the street that's empty. So he goes to Perth Amboy and sees the guy who owns the Richfield station. And the guy says, "Yeah, I'll rent it to you, Charlie." So Charlie goes over there and in the meantime he takes all his customers that he knew. And these guys are fit to be tied, but they had plenty of business anyhow. And Charlie started that Richfield station where now there is a real estate office.

P. Boeddinghaus: McPherson Real Estate.

Mr. Zieger: McPherson has a real estate office. But that little tiny building was all that Charlie had. He had a couple of pits too out along side where the bigger part of their office is now. So Charlie ran that place for quite a few years. But the more business he was doing, the guy in Perth Amboy is putting the heat on him for more rent all the time. So Charlie thinks to himself, "I gotta get out from under this guy." So Mr. Dinnebeil could no longer support the gas station and that piece of property along Main Street. So he couldn't pay the taxes and it was going up for a tax sale. So Charlie Goforth went down on the tax sale and Jack Learn went down on the tax sale. Now the building wasn't up – just the little wooden office, the little wooden building that was the golf club thing. But anyhow, Charlie Goforth went down to the Borough Hall and he bid something like \$1800 he told me for that whole block. Jack Learn had bid \$1900 before that. So Charlie went to the Borough Hall meeting and he said, "I'm putting cash money on the table." Jack Learn wanted credit. So the town was so strapped for money that they took Charlie's \$1800 rather than Jack Learn's credit. So Jack Learn was ready to shoot Charlie Goforth. So Jack Learn stayed there and Charlie charged him so much rent. So Charlie comes along and he puts up that little concrete building that was an office and one bay. And that's where I started from. But Charlie put that building up and he went to Jack Learn and he said, "Now listen..." Of course by now the guy who was jacking up his rent on Amboy Avenue was not so ready to do it because Charlie had a place to take all his customers, right. So he left Charlie alone. Charlie would rather stay there anyway. So he told Jack Learn, "You can stay here as long as you want." But Jack said, "You put up this building and all this stuff. I thought you were going to move in here and put me out of business."

He said no, I was just doing this to get out from under the guy in Perth Amboy that was giving him a hard time. They were pretty shrewd you know, Mrs. Goforth and Charlie.

Charlie didn't actually like the gasoline business anyway, he actually liked the liquor business. Charlie was a great drinker and Mrs. Goforth was a teetotaler. She did not want ...

P. Boeddinghaus: That was his mother?

Mr. Zieger: No, his wife. They were originally from North Carolina. But she would have nothing to do with liquor and Charlie, he was a great drinker. You know he was an Army guy, right? So Charlie rents the place to Learn and so Learn is there all through World War II. In the meantime, Charlie Goforth hears that there is a tavern for sale on Route 27 so he goes over there and he looks at it. I don't know who was running the tavern. You know where Knox's Tavern is?

P. Boeddinghaus: Yes.

Mr. Zieger: Well before it was Knox's Tavern there was a little bitty bar stuck out right near the sidewalk and Knox's Tavern wasn't even there. Anyhow, Charlie Goforth used to sell Nick Knox gasoline and stuff. Nick Knox worked for the WPA, he had a dump truck and he used to rent his truck to the WPA. So he used to come in and buy gas from Charlie and if he didn't have enough money, Charlie trusted him. So anyhow, this liquor place, this gin mill, was for sale on Route 27. Charlie went and looked at it and he said there was absolutely nothing in it except a half bottle of liquor. He said the place was completely empty – but there was a liquor license and Charlie wanted that in the worst way.

So he says to Nick Knox, listen, I'll put up the money on the quiet – his own money that he had – without letting his wife know. He was going to help Nick open that business. But Nick had the express understanding that if he folded up, it became Charlie's liquor store or Charlie's saloon, which was Charlie's lifetime dream, see? [laughter] Anyhow Nick said, "Yeah, sounds like a good idea." So Nick opened up the tavern. Well immediately, instead of Nick going broke the way he was supposed to, because Nick was an easy-going guy and everybody would probably hang him up and all that kind of stuff, instead of that happening along came World War II and immediately liquor stores blossomed out like a Japanese cherry tree. So Nick started making money like gang-busters in the place and there goes Charlie's dream of his whole life down the drain. So it's still Nick Knox's Tavern. Of course, Nick Knox died and now Gracie runs it.

P. Boeddinghaus: I was thinking of interviewing her also, Grace Knox.

Mr. Zieger: That would be good.

P. Boeddinghaus: So getting back to the gas station, you bought the building from Charlie Goforth?

Mr. Zieger: No I never bought it. I rented it. I didn't have any money.

Mrs. Zieger: We leased it.

Mr. Zieger: But there was a guy in there by the name of [unclear]. Not Learn. Learn sold it to a young kid that just got out of the Navy by the name of Dunham. I forget what his first name was. But he was a happy go lucky kid. In the Navy he had a big dream he was going to open up a gas station. So he did that but once he had it he didn't want it. So he used to be out playing football and ...

Mrs. Zieger: Football in the gas station!

Mr. Zieger: Football in the gas station and riding the customer's cars around and all this stuff. He starting slipping downhill and somebody told me – just at the same time that I got laid off in Plainfield from the place that made the newspaper machinery – that this gas station was for sale.

Mrs. Zieger: For rent, for rent.

Mr. Zieger: And I said I knew I could work by myself so I'll do that. So I went to work there and opened a gas station. I think I paid him \$1000 for all the stock and the gasoline that was left and all. Of course it had the concrete building and the little house too at that time. Charlie had built that. So is stayed there. I opened that I guess right after Jack.

P. Boeddinghaus: We opened up in September of '48 and you opened right after that.

Mr. Zieger: Yeah, around December or so. I stayed there until 1974. By then my heart was stopping all the time so I had to quit.

P. Boeddinghaus: But you have enjoyed living in Metuchen?

Mrs. Zieger: Oh I love it! I came from Bloomfield, and I love Metuchen.

P. Boeddinghaus: It gave you a good livelihood and you had a lot of nice customers.

Mrs. Zieger: Yeah.

Mr. Zieger: She knows more people than I do, I guess, actually.

Mrs. Zieger: Oh no, I don't think so.

P. Boeddinghaus: Thank you Ruth for filling in a few things and remembering some of the people that we had kind of forgotten.

Mrs. Zieger: I enjoyed it.

P. Boeddinghaus: This was very great, very good, and I thank you very much Richard for sharing your memories.

Mr. Zieger: Okay.