

Chris - Could you please ~~send~~  
the first several pages... I'd be  
glad to condense into more easily  
readable form if you think  
that's OK - without changing  
the meat of course -  
B.

↓  
Let me know - ☺

Kathleen (H Cox's sec) has  
done a grand job here -  
do. Two  
Betty, please do shift  
is really grand. Clear

Laycock. Pool

## WILKES UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY

**Christopher Breiseth:** We're here on Tuesday, the 26th of August, 1997, sitting in the old library of what we call Weckesser Hall. I'm by the ever-faithful **Betsy Bell Condron**; also by **Fred Laycock**, and by **Joe Poole**. Fred and Joe were children of the two Weckesser daughters. We expect we'll hear more about the family.

Fred, why don't we start with you saying a little bit about your grandfather: his origins in New York state and how he got involved with the company that eventually became the Kirby/Woolworth Company, and then the Woolworth Company.

**BC:** I said that we were going to start with Joe, so...I think he wasn't ready maybe.

**JP:** That's all right.

**BC:** That's good.

**FL:** Yeah, the only thing if Joe has to leave...?

**BC:** He still has a half an hour.

**CB:** He got time. We'll get him in. I think we should see how...

**BC:** That's right - the beginning.

**CB:** ...how Mr. Weckesser came down to the Wyoming Valley and then what role he played in the corporation.

**FL:** Do you want to start with his father?

**CB:** Sure!

**FL:** It's very interesting that his father is born in Schaffhausen and he was a butcher and among grandfather's papers were his, was his wunderbook from the 1840's in which he used when he became a journeyman butcher in Germany. You can see his height, his eyes; also that



journeyman butcher in Germany. You can see his height, his eyes; also that he was Catholic religion, which is interesting to me.

**CB:** And the color of his face was sound! Did you see this, Joe?

**JP:** No, I haven't seen it.

**BC:** This is obviously a picture. Do you think? Is it a picture?

**FL:** And, uh, that's when he served in the German...

**CB:** It's his official military papers.

**BC:** Okay.

**FL:** ...Army. Schaffhausen is down near the Black Forest area in Germany, and grandfather told me one time, he said, "You know, Fred, our Coat of Arms is really in Basel." So that maybe before his father the family is right on the boarder there. border

**CB:** With Switzerland.

**FL:** So, but he told me, he said we really may be Swiss. But as far as grandfather's immediate father, why he was German.

**CB:** So he was the one that came over?

**FL:** And he went, came over from Liverpool. I have his on his wunderbook all the stamps. I have the original in my safe deposit box. And the old German that was in that wunderbook and in the...this is their, his marriage certificate when grandfather's married Susan Grimm. She also was from Schaffhausen, and they were married here - as you can see - in New York City. And I don't know whether she was Protestant and that's why grandfather changed or what because if they were both Catholic I don't know why grandfather became Presbyterian.

**BC:** Yeah, yeah.

**FL:** But that I haven't...would have no way...

**CB:** People make accommodations for marriage...all through history.

**FL:** But it's interesting to me, yeah, that we have that background. But the old German: I have a doctor friend down in Florida, Dr. Hart McGoethe. He's the father of Maritime Medicine in Germany. He wrote the textbook, it was written up in our journal of the American Medical Association here. He lectures all over the world, and he and Hildigaard are in the same place that we are in Florida. And they couldn't read it! But her mother could evidently, because she knew old the old German dialect. So they took those papers of grandfather's father back to Germany and I got them translated, and that's the first time I was able to read his wunderbook and his wedding and then this letter edged in black when his brother died and it told about all the children and what they were doing there and so on. And one of them was a theological student to become a priest there in St. Peters in the Black Forest. Yeah...

**BC:** Fred, I'm going to copy those, if I may.

**FL:** Oh, yeah...

**BC:** And then we'll have a copy here. So..

**FL:** Yeah, okay, fine. And this is the English, this is the English translation of that letter, but that's the only way we finally got it. When grandfather died...

**CB:** Now they immigrated as individuals not yet married.

**FL:** Evidently so.

**CB:** So they, as far as you know, they met in this country?

**FL:** Evidently so. But he may well have known her cause since they were both from Schaffhausen. And then they were married in New York City and lived, of course, up in Jefferson County there, Watertown.

**CB:** Do you know why they went up there?

**FL:** No, I don't. Nope, I don't...

**CB:** Was he a butcher up there as well?

**FL:** He was a butcher in this country.

**JP:** Grandfather was?

**FL:** No, his father was.

**JP:** His father was.

**FL:** Yeah.

**JP:** Yeah.

**FL:** And I had his bible, grandfather's father's bible, which was German in one column and English on the other. And that unfortunately burned up in...

**BC:** That was in the fire.

**JP:** Fire.

**FL:** ...in my house fire down there, yeah. But then,...

**CB:** So we have them in Watertown, New York,...

**FL:** Yes.

**CB:** ...and your grandfather then is one of how many children?

**FL:** I was just going to come to that and show you a picture of his brother because that is one of the interesting things I think about grandfather.

The difference between what happened - both of them being brought up in the same little town - La Fargeville....and Clayton there, on the river. And this is his brother as you can see, his older brother, John. That's with me and my son, the three generations up there in La Fargeville. And you can see what John...is a typical farmer-looking, with the Kaiser mustache. And when we would go up to La Fargeville the Woolworth Company always had their meetings in Watertown for a great many years.



About thirty, forty years. Why, he would go up, I would go with him and to see grandfather in his nice suit and shiny shoes and had traveled the world and knew everything and he and John sitting in the kitchen there together.

But it was just like they were the two boys again together. And I don't think that grandfather and Wecky ever did change. I think your younger years and the way you're brought up uh stay with you.

**CB:** Set the mold.

**FL:** And the patina and other things you put on around you really don't basically change you. And that was one thing that I could see as the two of them sat there chatting in the kitchen of the farmhouse. So that was his older brother.

And then, Joe, you can help me maybe on this: I, in the back of my mind somewhere I understood there might be a step-son.

**JP:** There was. Joe.

**FL:** And grandfather said Joe, his step-son, could say in the store "It was a dead shot." And he could drive a nail -- they were of course, log -- and he could drive a nail to the other end of the store. He said he was a dead shot.

**JP:** With a bullet?

**FL:** Yeah.

**BC:** How did he, how was the step relationship?

**FL:** I have no idea, I don't know.

**JP:** Marion, Marion really knows a lot of this and the way I should've probably mentioned to have her here because she and Fred have done an awful lot of research but Marion has it all down very....thoroughly.

**BC:** Okay, but...



**JP::** We can, maybe someday you can get a hold of your...

**CB:** We can get that, and...

**JP:** Yeah.

**FL:** There it is. That's what Marion gave us all.

**JP:** Yeah...Marion. Well this is, this is the whole family tree. It's...and Joe -- I don't know whether Joe's mentioned -- he must be mentioned in here somewhere.

**BC:** I don't recall.

**CB:** You've not stayed in touch with his...

**JP:** I, no. None of 'em. John never had any children, for instance.

**FL:** No, John and Carrie never had any children. Fred had two, Gert and \_\_\_\_\_ have none and Joe's mother....

**CB:** No. Your father comes into this picture now. Your grandfather. I mean your father.

**FL:** Not my father, no...

**CB:** No, your grandfather comes into this picture as one of how many children?

**FL:** Two.

**CB:** Just the two.

**JP:** He and John.

**CB:** He and John. All right.

**FL:** He and John. And that's why I showed you this picture, there were just the...and John was the older.

**CB:** Now...now lead us into the relationship with Woolworth and with Kirby up in Watertown.

**FL:** Well...

**CB:** What do you know about that?

**FL:** Grandfather...the Woolworth boys-uh-they were all farm boys, as your know, in Jefferson County and they left the farm. Frank Woolworth, Frank Winfield, and Sumner, and they worked for Moore and Smith on the corner, on that southeast corner of the square in Watertown. And that was the dry goods store. You would work there for two months with no salary to see whether you could be of any help to him. And after that you would work for about a dollar a week. And you would work from seven in the morning occasionally till nine at night unless you had to sleep in the cellar to be night watchman. That was the type of thing that those guys grew up with. So, uh, they knew each other evidently up there. Mr. Woolworth - Frank - was 1852, his brother Sumner was 56, Mr. Kirby was about 63, and grandfather was 1867. So that's the age group they were.

So that Mr. Kirby, after working there at Moore and Smith...one day there was a drummer that came from out in Michigan territory. He'd been out there. And he saw somebody out there put a table out there with a lot of things they couldn't sell...couldn't get rid of and put five or ten cents on this table and they added what they called a couple of chestnuts, a couple of good, good things in there. And they disappeared.

And when he came back to Watertown, he was talking to Moore and Smith about this, and Mr. Woolworth,...or Mr. Kirby was there and interested in it, as was Mr. Woolworth. And they tried it and then they went out on their own to try.

And, of course, the original store of Mr. Woolworth was in 1879 in Utica. On Bleecker Street - an old arcade building. And that lasted just about three months. He had about only a dollar a month.., a dollar a day rent so that's why he was there. But he thought it was not too good, so he closed i t in June of that year. He started around Washington's birthday.

So he looked further, but he did pay off his debt to Moore and Smith who had loaned him the money to buy his supplies and so on. And he looked around and he picked on Lancaster, where the Amish were. And, uh, there's still a plaque down there where he opened his second store. And that was just for a dime, five, I mean, just for five-cent articles when he



opened it. And that was successful, and that was the first successful store.

And then he opened one in Harrisburg and the rent got too high, he closed that. He tried one in York. That didn't go. So then he opened one in Scranton and he called his brother, Sumner, who was now chief clerk at Moore and Smith, to come and run the one in Scranton. And that was five and dime. So the first five and dime in this world was in Scranton because the one in Lancaster he didn't put ten cents in until the following year, when he'd opened it in June.

**JP:** Interesting. I'd never know that.

**FL:** So, that was...then Mr. Kirby became the next one in Moore and Smith there. And after all the work, all the years he spent there he had been able to save five hundred dollars. Now that doesn't seem much, but that's why I told you, you work for a dollar a week and so on. And he asked Moore and Smith if they would supply him with, if he could open a store of his own for five and dime. Well, they didn't, they still didn't like the idea and they didn't like the idea of losing their clerks, their chief clerks so much. But they agreed. So he borrowed another hundred dollars from his father - that was six hundred - and Sumner in Scranton equaled it: gave him six hundred. So he had twelve hundred. And instead of opening, of course, in Scranton where Sumner...he asked, he went to the next biggest town which was Wilkes-Barre. And he was up behind, on East Market Street, right behind where they're doing over the Stegmaier Brewery, right on the left there. There are a couple homes. That was his original store. From there he moved down to where the senior center is now, on Washington and Market. That was the old jail, used to be there, diagonally across from where City Hall is. From there he moved around to the West side of the square where the new bank was put in and I have a postcard I gave to Grace Jesse Kirby showing the Kirby store which was incidental to the bank's postcard, but there was Kirby. And then in 1907 he moved around to 7 South Main where he was until it closed a few years ago. And his portrait was always up there on the sign.

So...he expanded, just like Mr. Woolworth did, and, uh, started other stores. And in 1894 he opened a store in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. And he went back to Watertown to get another farm boy who did not work at Moore and Smith because they had gone bankrupt in the middle eighties. And Frank Woolworth bailed them out and set them up with a Woolworth store.

Grandfather worked down the street Bush, Bull - Bush, Bull and somebody...it was another dry goods store. And, uh, he called on him to come and run his Pawtucket store. And that's why my mother was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island. So he did that, and then, according to Joe's mother, they came to Wilkes-Barre in (18)95 because she was born in Mallery Place, your mother.

**JP:** Yeah, in 1896.

**FL:** Six, yeah. Was born in Mallery,...and they were five years there.

In the mean time, he had run a Baltimore store for Mr. Kirby. Evidently he ran those two stores so well that Mr. Kirby in 1899 brought him to Wilkes-Barre as his buyer, and sort-of general manager of his stores, and they have been here, were here permanently after that. And he built that 101 South...West River Street - that home - where they lived.

**JP:** I think that's where Luther is now.

**FL:** And that's where, that's where they...

**FP:** Luther Kaiser. I think he bought their house, but I'm not sure of that. Question Luther on that.

**FL:** And this is the way they looked down in that house. And that's the way my mother always remembered them. And there was an album with all the pictures down in that house and with the old-fashioned cars out front and so...and I don't know where it went to. I think my mother had it and I think maybe my sister got a hold of it or something. But, uh, that is, that is the way they, uh, looked at that time when they were,...and that's the way mother said she always would remember them as.

To me, you must remember that grandfather was 50 when I was born. He was 57 when Joe was born. So these pictures are something that - just as you look at - they're just as foreign to us.

**CB:** Yes.

**FL:** We nev..., we never saw him at that time.

**BC:** You and Nancy...that's Nancy right there.



**BC:** You and Nancy...that's Nancy right there.

**FL:** Yeah. No, this is,... that's...Nancy...

**BC:** They're just wonderful!

**FL:** Mother i s on the...

**BC:** Yeah, but I meant...yes they do.

**CB:** Family likeness.

**BC:** Yes, the likeness.

**FL:** Hum?

**CB:** Family likeness.

**FL:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**BC:** That i s a wonderful picture!

**FL:** So they, they lived there for about fifteen years. Now why they ever left that lovely home, it's still a beautiful...and built this huge when....

Of course, Mr. Kirby did not build his home. That was Thurlow's home. But one time my grandmother said to me, "The girls were always after grandfather to build a big house." And I don't think my grandmother probably was that enthusiastic.

**JP:** And your mother never lived here, really.

**FL:** Hum?

**JP:** Your mother was married before she, they moved in here.

**FL:** That's right.

**JP:** Yeah.

**FL:** That....mother was married in 1915, so that i t was just about that

time. And they had built the, uh, the, uh, place at Harvey's Lake which was the Girl Scout place.

**JP:** Um-hum.

**FL:** My mother and father were married in that hou...in that cottage. And they each came down the step on the side and were in front. Joe's mother was the maid-of-honor and I have all those pictures of their wedding out there and...

**JP:** I don't remember that at all...

**FL:** And their, and their honeymoon and the pictures. But that's what..., they were mar..., they were married, they were married out there. And then they moved in here. And this is the way we looked when we were here. That picture, my grandmother wrote on the back, "The sun was in our eyes, so we squinted." But you see, uh, Joe's mother is still single and has her German shepherd dog. And, uh, that's my mother and my grandmother and my sister and I. I took a picture on those steps. I took a picture on the same steps of myself with my daughter and my granddaughter, so I have three more generations on the same steps that go with that picture.

So they moved in here around 1915 and, uh, when I moved in here we, uh, my father, was, uh, in Washington when the, uh, in 1917 when the war...we went into the war in the, uh, uh, Custodial, uh, Alien Property Office, so I was in Washington D.C.

And then we lived on South Street in the old row buildings where the Elks Club is now...27 South Street. And then evidently grandfather bought 78 West Northampton which used to be your hall.

**CB:** Yes.

**FL:** For us,...and before we moved there we moved to the third floor here and spent a short time, I think, here. Now I was quite young then. I remember, uh, Joe's father coming to, uh, court his mother. I remember him walking around the side, ducking under the trees, and coming...and we would all be sitting on in the back. There was a big apple tree out there - with a swing - and we had a putting, putting course there and the two quince trees were in the back there and we would be sitting and Hank would come out, uh, to see Marion and so on. And then, of course, they had their wedding here which the, uh, receiving line went from the drawing

room all the way out, all the way up the stairs. I can see the solid people there. And his father, when I came through the receiving line, he took me and picked me up,....waaaayyyy up over his head, and so on.

So there's just a few things that I remember of the house at that age.

**CB:** Uh-hum, uh-hum.

**FL:** And I do remember when we moved. The old Model-T truck was in the porte cochere on Norman, had all this furniture piled up on top and we went around the corner to our house and moved in there. And after that it was simply every Christmas that Joe's family and mine, we would be here for Christmas dinner and I always spent Christmas Eve, we always slept here. So mother and dad could go out to their house and have a few drinks and that type of thing, you know...

**JP:** Let me ask you a question, Fred.

**FL:** Yeah.

**JP:** Uh, I had heard that our, our grandfather - F. J. Weckesser - in the summertime would take five or six months with a, a wagon and a horse and sell dry goods and go from La Fargeville to Baltimore and back. Do you know that story at all?

**FL:** That seems a long distance, Joe.

**JP:** Yeah. It took him six months.

**FL:** For a...oh my God...

**JP:** It took him six months. Now, somebody told me that story. And obviously,...

**FL:** I wonder why he would go all the way to Baltimore to sell...

**JP:** That's where he went, unless he picked up stuff there and went back...I don't know, but that...I had heard that story that took him six months to sell his dry goods on a horse and buggy. Now he might have only done it once or twice.



right, so maybe you want to scratch it there.

**FL:** The old schoolhouse where he went to school - I don't know how many years he had - it wasn't many - was a little stone school...that was still there when we used to go up. Was dilapidated, but we used to go by it. And, of course, he and John, uh, had Mr. Atherton design in the cemetery there...the bench and so on in memory of their parents by the Fred and John Weckesser and then Susan Grimm and Frank are, are buried there in uh, in uh, the, uh, cemetery there.

**JP:** La Fargeville.

**FL:** Yeah, La Fargeville.

**CB:** Let me ask a, a... kind of sensitive question. But for those of us who have, are privileged to live in this house and work in it every day, one is impressed with the quality of the workmanship in the grand scale of the design. At what point in the development of the corporation - the Kirby/Woolworth Corporation - did you grandfather really begin accumulating some assets that would allow him even to imagine something as...this is really grandest house in the Valley.

**FL:** You see, the company was formed in 1912. And what it did was combined with Frank Woolworth's and then with Sumner's stores, with Charleson, and they even brought Smith in because he had two they had given him, and Mr. Kirby's. But the, uh, Mr. Kirby had about ninety-two stores at that time, but Frank Woolworth had the largest number. So they named the company after him. And they called it the Woolworth Company.

And at that time grandfather was made a director and a district manager. And, of course, he was a director until the day he died.

**JP:** All right now, let me interrupt one second again. Another story, and again, obviously, I haven't authenticized these things, but...

I had heard that Mr. Kirby, at Christmas or at bonus-time, would give grandfather stock in the company at, at either year-end or something like that, and that's where he accumulated probably quite a bit of the stock.

Now, are you familiar with that story?

**FL:** No, I'm not.

**JP:** Okay. Well, I think that's what happened.

**FL:** I know he never sold any.

**JP:** Instead of giving him money, he got inherited, or he was given stock at the end of each year. And I think that's where some of this was built up.

**CB:** The story I heard - and this is totally unauthenticated - was that, was that he was given a great deal of stock at a point when the, when the company - or companies - was at, were on trouble. And that stock subsequently, of course, became extremely valuable.

**JP:** I don't know that one.

**FL:** I didn't know...

**JP:** I didn't know the companies were in that much trouble.

**CB:** It's also wrong to...

**JP:** I'm not sure...

**FL:** I don't know, uh, what trouble the, uh, company had until recent years. The, uh, the company did very well and, of course, it never missed a dividend from 1912 right on through the Depression and so on.

**CB:** I'll tell you, this would've had to be before that time. I mean, this house was built...

**FL:** Well, the only time it might have been was in the Crash then.

**CB:** Of 1893?

**FL:** Twenty...

**CB:** Twenty-nine.

**FL:** I'm talking about 1929.

**CB:** Well, we're trying to understand how, how he could've had the resources to build this house, which was - according to the records - it cost how much in those dollars? It was over a million dollars, wasn't it?

**FL:** Oh, no. Oh, no.

**BC:** I don't have that.

**JP:** Maybe a hundred thousand.

**FL:** I don't think in those days it cost anywhere near that. Ugh-uh.

**JP:** Ugh-uh.

**BC:** You have that in your mind. I don't remember.

**FL:** No.

**CB:** I think, I think it's up in the book...

**JP:** No, because when he died, Chris, his estate when he died in fifty-one, two...?

**FL:** Fifty-three.

**JP:** Fifty-three. I think his estate was about two and a half million. Am I about right? That was about all he had. Which is not a lot of money today compared to some people.

Of course, in fifty-three it was a lot of money. But it was certainly, this never cost anything like...

**FL:** But you got to remember what your dollar was like then.

**JP:** Yeah, right.

**FL:** Without the inflation, yeah.

**BC:** Your mother, Joe...

**LF:** That's interesting to where he did it. I always assumed that when



they formed the company, just like all of these entrepreneurs today, when they form these, uh, electronic companies and so on. They all have these, uh, the stock originally, and when, when it ends up...when they,...

**BC:** I love your suit, Joe!

**JP:** Oh, I still have that!

**FL:** ...when it ends up they get stock for pennies. And that's where it accumulates. And then, of course, the splits come.

**CB:** Sure, sure.

**FL:** My original stock in the company was 1929. And that was when he gave us, I think, a hundred shares in the, in that room at Christmastime. And my mother spoke to me, and she said, "You don't know what this means, but we'll put it away for you," - something like that. But, uh, I never sold any of mine until - in the 1960's -- I kept it forty, fifty years or whatever, and with the splits and everything, and so on, that's how stocks accumulate.

And it's the same way that dad...you get in...and if you had a Walmart in '70, if you bought Microsoft in '86, whatever. All you had to do is buy a few hundred shares and you sit and you're a millionaire. Just like there are millionaire receptionists in their companies now because they had... and I assume the same thing happened with grandfather with the Woolworth because it was a successful venture for many, many years. And it's only recently that it's had all the trouble since the 1960's, really that it's gotten into the troubles that it has.

**JP:** You were going to ask me something about my mother.

**BC:** I was going to comment that when I first came to Wilkes and started working on the histories of all these marvelous mansions.....uhm...(tape one, side A ends.)

**JP:** Do you remember all the Indian tapestry and paintings they had?

**FL:** Your, your brother has the, uh, teepee and irons, and Wecky has the lamp.

**CB:** The Indian-style house that the Weckessers built...

**JP:** Summer cottage, yeah....

**CB:** Glen Summit. We missed part of this by, uh, not turning the tape, so we've been talking about the music, uh, in this house in Weckesser Hall. The Leuven organ, and Mr. Weckesser's great interest in organs and his, his generosity in providing organs to, uh, several churches including a major church in France.

Uh, I just want to back for one more kind of set of family recollections. Did, did you all get as children...did the two, the two sisters and their families get together here routinely through the years?

**JP:** No often, not often...

**CB:** Or was it just a rare event when you all...

**JP:** Basically, I would think Thanksgiving and Christmas.

**FL:** Thanksgiving I would be at the Laycocks in Kingston, which is the president's house now, 243 North Maple Avenue. You know, next to the, uh, field hockey. And, uh, Christmas we would be here.

**CB:** The cousins were really kind of separated by, from age, so that in terms of Marion and...

**JP:** Marion and Fred we thought were a lot older than us, of course.

**FL:** But up at Glen Summit we were...

**JP:** All together...played tennis.

**FL:** We all knew each other and played tennis,...

**JP:** We were really close up there, cause our house is right across the street and my grandfather's was right across from them.

**FL:** Right, yeah.

**JP:** The only other recollection I can talk about for a quick second here...

we had a very serious flood in 1936. And I, we lived in Kingston and we went to the Harry Hillman down here in the street. And, uh, I think three nights we could not get home because the river was so high that I stayed here with my grandfather and went to school right down the street. And the only thing I can remember about that besides the water -- the water did not get into this building at the time, it came close -- was that school stayed open through the whole flood and he taught me how to tie a tie.

(Laughter)

**BC:** That's delightful!

**JP:** He taught me how to tie a tie, that's the one thing I remember.

**CB:** Crucial...skill.

**BC:** Use that, use that...on September 20th. The flood.

**FL:** Oh, my...

**BC:** Do. It's just something.

**JP:** But I'm gonna, I'm gonna leave ya, and I'll come back, or if you have certain questions you wanna ask me, I....

**BC:** This is great...

**CB:** This is wonderful...

**JP:** And I know that Fred might be here till five, six, seven o'clock tonight...

**FL:** No, I won't keep 'em, I won't keep...

**JP:** (Laughter) Good to see you, my friend, we'll see you soon.

**BC:** Thanks...

**CB:** Thanks, Joe.



**BC:** Thanks very much, very much...

**CB:** Good to see you...

**JP:** Seriously, I'll come back again.

**BC:** Okay.

**FL:** Say "hello" to Marion.

**JP:** I will.

**JP:** Say "hi" to Betty.

**FL:** You bet. You got it.

**JP:** All right.

**FL:** Okay.

**BC:** We'll be in touch.

**CB:** Bye-bye.

**FL:** All right. Thank you.

**CB:** I want to go back...

**FL:** I made a couple of corrections on that, if you want to put them in...

**BC:** Oh, thank you!

**FL:** See the dates are wrong there.

**BC:** Okay.

**CB:** Fred, you're so, you're so up on the, uh, role your grandfather played in the company. Say a little bit more of what his, his actual responsibilities were when he was the, kind-of at the height resp....of his

responsibility.

**FL:** He was district manager.

**CB:** Which meant what?

**FL:** This whole area - - all the stores.

**BC:** Ninety-six, too...

**BC:** So he was in charge of virtually everything that happened in the stores?

**FL:** In this area.

**CB:** At one point I heard he was that he was - - among his other responsibilities -- he was in charge of the construction of new Woolworth stores.

**FL:** Well, he was like...when he was made a director -- which was when the company started -- why, he was on the different committees that the directors had, so I, I imagine that may have been one of the committees.

**CB:** Um-hum, um-hum.

**FL:** But he, he always attended the meetings up in Watertown, and uh, I think probably was the, uh, one that lasted the longest in the company as a director. See, F.M. Kirby died about 1940.

**CB:** Um-hum.

**FL:** He was up at Glen Summit, I remember.

**CB:** Yeah, he'd been sick for some time.

**FL:** Well, he had a, uh, attendant there with him. And, uh, Grace Jesse would have dinner with him. When I would go to take her out, why, I'd go up to Graystone and she'd be sitting at one end of this big table and her grandfather at the other table having dinner with him. And Max. There were, there were two, uh, that German fellow, Max, uh, and the other

fellow. I forget what his name was. I forget what...

**BC:** Yeah.

**FL:** ...in attendance there.

**CB:** Say something about the relationship as you perceive it, uh, between Mr. Kirby and your grandfather. Just as, as...

**FL:** I think they were brought up similarly because they were both farm boys and so was Mr. Woolworth -- both Woolworth men -- and so on, which makes it very interesting that from one small area...

And of course, my grandmother was, uh, from the other side of Watertown - Rutland - was a school teacher, and they were married there. So they all grew up in, uh, a very rural, and a very hard climate in the winter. I know grandmother - in letters to me - told me about the old days when the sleigh would turn over in the drifts on the way to her mother and father and so on. She always...in her desk in the, uh, study upstairs, why she always had the picture of her mother and father there. It was George Hammond and Fanny Sawyer,...were her, uh, parents. And that's why my mother's middle name is Fanny, which she never let anybody know. (Laughter) But that's how she got it. Yeah, we used to kid her there. Hank, Uncle Hank, I think used to hold that up to her. But, uh,...

**CB:** Well, what, what...

**FL:** I think that they, uh, they all had that background and, uh, they all decided that they didn't want to stay on the farm, except for John. John stayed. But Sumner and, uh, Frank both came in, some of them took a little commercial course here, and then went to work for, uh, the, uh, dry good store there...Moore and Smith.

**CB:** Was he - - was your grandfather - - in terms of his working relationship, really closer over time to Mr. Kirby than to Mr. Woolworth?

**FL:** Oh, yes, because Mr. Kirby's the one who gave him his first job there. When he was working in Watertown, why, he called him to Pawtucket to run that store. And then he ran his Baltimore store and that's,...where he showed what he could do...and that's why he was brought to Wilkes-Barre and became a buyer and general manager for Mr. Kirby. And, of course,



they, uh, their children, uh, Allen Kirby and my mother grew up together and so on. Like Fred and Grace, uh, grew up with us, so there are three generations. Now the fourth generation we haven't, uh, seen. We know about them and so on, but we haven't had too much contact with them. But he was, uh, undoubtedly very close. They were only about four years apart.

**BC:** That answers my question.

**FL:** I think, as I say, Mr. F. Fred Morgan was born, I think, in think in 1863 and grandfather in 1867. So they weren't far apart, and they undoubtedly had contact up there. You know, they would have the, uh - Watertown was the county seat - would have the fairs and everything, and that's where people would mingle and socialize and so on. And there weren't that many people. And they had to look after each other.

**CB:** Did your grandfather reach a point where he really retired, totally, from the company , or did he remain a director up till his death?

**FL:** He remained a director, but I don't think that, uh - and he always went to the meetings and served on the committees - but as far as running the company, I think that he, uh, he retired fairly early as far as that...around, uh, it may be around the time I was born, actually, around 50.

I don't know, but he was...he remained very active with the company. When you would go up to his office in the old Miner's Bank and that was on the door, was "The La Farge Company." And I had the stock certificate that my mother had in the La Farge Company, and it's signed by F.J. Weckesser, President, and Anna E. Weckesser, who was the Vice President. And she had so many shares...I still have that. And I had some of it framed and gave to my oldest son.

But they formed a company and named it after their home town and that was his office. And you'd go in there and behind the big desk he would have these huge sheaves of paper which were all the Woolworth stores -- which amounted to thousands. And he would continually go over. And then he would almost every year go over on the Breiman, that, uh, fine German liner, which we used as a troop ship in the, uh,...because it was in our harbor when the war broke out. And he would go and inspect the German stores. Now the company still owns those German stores. Mr. Woolworth opened in England not too long after he had a number of stores here, he had the British, but that was sold. But we still have the, uh, German stores. And so he would go over there and inspect those stores and bring back the

report and so on.

And, uh, one trip I made with him on the Breiman - he knew the Captain like an old buddy - and they took us all through the engine room and I have pictures of up in the bridge and all that.

That was a beautiful ship. It could go too fast, you know, for the torpedoes, uh, in the Second World War, so that's why it was such a great troop ship. It was wonderful. It could...

**CB:** What did we call it - during the war? Did we, did it keep the name Breiman?

**FL:** That I don't know. I think it...I think so...it was from...I think it was, uh, stationed in Hamburg, or maybe Bremerhaven, probably Bremerhaven. But, uh...

**CB:** Did your grandfather speak German?

**FL:** No, I don't think so. I never heard him speak any German.

**CB:** So when he'd go over there they...

**FL:** The German background I don't recall anything at all, except the German in the bible of, uh, his father which I had, and the history that I have. But as far as affecting us or anything, I don't remember it at all. And, of course, my grandmother's folks - the Sawyers and the Hammonds - I don't think...I think we're...

Now this was, of course, at their fiftieth wedding anniversary out on the side porch with their two daughters there. That would have been in 1940 about, or '43...or '42.

**CB:** How tall is your grandfather?

**FL:** He would be about five ten. Hank Poole was the tallest. He was about - a good six foot, and everybody else...we had a board from Harvey's Lake. We used to have it out here in the hallway, and from the time that we were little bitsies all our names and everybody were in there. And Hank was up at the top.

**CB:** Hank's all and you.

**FL:** Oh, yeah. Yeah.

**BC:** This is dear!

**FL:** Now this is the way I remember him. This would be my grandfather. Not, not the way, not the way the, uh, early picture was. That would be him. And I was taking pictures of him many times in different places.

And this one I thought you might be interested in was a picture my mother always had. It's a little bit dilapidated now...

**CB:** This is a picture of Mr. Weckesser with golf club in hand, looking prob...65?

**FL:** That would probably be...

**CB:** Sixty-five years old at that point?

**FL:** Probably, probably be down in Pinehurst.

**BC:** That's a man, wow! What a lovely family picture this is, taken on their fiftieth wedding anniversary.

**FL:** Yeah, that was...

**BC:** I wonder if that's the blue dress that Mrs. Weckesser had on in the "lost", uh, portrait that your wife Betty is, uh,...that we've, we've all tried to find, but we can't find it.

**FL:** This is the way, this is the picture my mother always had of him. And this is the way he looked at his prime. And that would be around the turn of the century, probably in his thirties.

But that I never knew of...see, this, this, this, this is him to me, you know...and he never changed. He looked that way from the time I first saw him till practically the time he died. He had his stroke when I was overseas and when I came back he was in the wheelchair upstairs. And, of course, from that time on it was harder for him...that's why he built that back porch...so he could get in the house. See, side steps became too hard for him so he built on to that side part...

**BC:** That came into the sun room?



**FL:** Yes.

**BC:** Is that so?

**FL:** That's why, that's why that was built. See Lamey would drive the car right up to the steps and he had a good solid step and a railing and he could get up and down.

**CB:** So stroke afflicted him and Mr. Kirby as well?

**FL:** I don't know what Mr. Kirby had - Allen Kirby - his son, of course, had a stroke. What Mr. Kirby had, I don't know. I think he had some mental difficulty because he always had a, uh, a man there like, uh, in the white suit and so on up there on the...at Graystone looking after him. And I don't know, uh, uh, you would have to ask Fred, uh, what, about that, but that's what I had always heard. That he...whether it was an Alzheimer's or whatever they called it in those days, but I think he did have...but whether, I don't think it was a stroke because I know he could walk around...I could see him walking around up and he walked into dinner when he'd be eating with Grace and so on. So, uh, I think was more a mental disability that finally got to him. Yeah, yeah.

**BC:** Uh, Fred, yes, I've just been wanting to ask a question about, uhm, your grandfather's choice of architect when they built this house.

**FL:** Yeah.

**BC:** Uh, and it was, it was Mr. Gilbert from New York City. But do you have any idea why or, or...

**FL:** Didn't Mr. B. Gilbert do the...

**BC:** Do the Woolworth building?

**FL:** Do the Woolworth building?

**BC:** How's this...that's what I think I say in my talk.

**FL:** See that.

**BC:** I don't think I have that here.

**FL:** That was lit up in, uh, in 1913.

**BC:** Okay.

**FL:** President Wilson pressed a button in the White House and that lit up the skyline of New York and it was the tallest building in the world and it looked out over...and that was just from 19..., 1879 to 1913 when a guy with no money started out there in Utica in that little back alley and then a President presses the button. And that's why they said the Skyline Queen and the Merchant Prince became part of American history.

**BC:** Ohhhh...

**FL:** And there's a book on it which I have...I sent for it one time, which is on the Merchant Prince. The story was written up. And he paid for it in cash. There was no mortgage, just like he did everything else. It had its own fire department, its own police department, everything...

**CB:** Well, it really opened up the era of skyscrapers. It was the...in our...early, early art deco.

**BC:** Yes!

**CB:** I mean, it was the classic. Still is...a classic building. In any architecture history, uh, you've got to deal with Woolworth building. There's great paintings of it, and we've just getting to this because...

**FL:** Well, I think, I think, that, uh. I think that's the, uh, that he may have been, that may have been the reason that he had the, uh...Gilbert...

**CB:** Gilbert as the architect of his house.

**FL:** Yeah.

**BC:** Yes.

**FL:** This was a, uh, tribute to Fred. You know he contributed to the Irem

Temple mosque here when they built it and put the swimming pool in out at Irem Temple when he put a nine-hole golf course in out there, which is no longer in use. But they had a dinner for him, a tribute, and that gives you something in the, uh, background and so on of it.

And this was given, this was given to my, uh, grandmother on the time of his death. You might be interested to read the letter and take a glance at that.

**CB:** What do you remember about his sense of humor?

**FL:** Well, he wrote me a letter and he said, "Fred, I was down..." - he was a great one in different clubs. He was down at the Honda Club in Maryland - duck shooting - and he went out with the guide early in the morning and they were in the blind and there was nothing doing. And the sun came up, it warmed up, and the guide fell asleep. And when he slept he started to snore, he said. And when he snored, he whistled. And in came all these ducks, and grandfather had this great shoot. These ducks came in and that was the only...and that was it. And then he said, "For the rest of the morning I could not get him to go back to sleep and we didn't have any more shooting."

Now that's his sense of humor.

**BC:** That's his sense of humor. That's delightful.

**FL:** He wrote me that in his letter.

**BC:** This is wonderful.

**CB:** Yes.

**BC:** What I'd love to do is...all these marvelous things you brought in today, Fred, that, this is...is to copy each of them before you go.

**FL:** Oh, fine, yeah, whatever you like.

**BC:** And then we'll have a copy.

**FL:** Whatever you like.

**BC:** And we'll, at our own leisure, be able to read it more, and, and



straighten thing out.

**FL:** Would you care to put that in here anywhere, have it properly framed?

**CB:** Oh, I'd love to have that...in this office.

**FL:** Because it was what mother always liked. And this, I think is his...

**CB:** Watch?

**FL:** Uh, thirty-third degree Mason, or whatever.

**CB:** It's a watch fob of some kind.

**FL:** Yeah. But, uh, I thought that, uh, it could, uh, we could take it over to the gallery.

**BC:** Oh, yes, Marquis would, would do a beautiful job...

**FL:** See, I'll take it over and, uh, talk to Gil. Gilley, uh, Gil's son, Bronson.

**BC:** Oh,...okay.

**FL:** You know Gibbey.

**BC:** Yes.

**FL:** You know Gibbey.

**BC:** But I didn't realize he ran it...

**FL:** Oh, yeah, Gibbey runs the gallery.

**CB:** Uh huh.

**FL:** Yeah, that he did Momma Wecky's...for us.

**BC:** Okay, which we loved...that one there.

**CB:** Did he, did he do all the, the photographs of the house that were spared the fire?

**FL:** Oh, no, nooooo...this, that was long ago.

**BC:** That would've been before his time.

**FL:** That was done when the house was built...that's why you see it looks so empty.

**CB:** But I'm saying the framing of those...were those frames done...

**FL:** That was done down in Florida by a friend of ours whose a very good,...has a gallery down there.

**BC:** He's done such a beautiful job.

**FL:** Yes, he does beautiful work.

**BC:** He's done things in your apartment, too.

**FL:** Used to be a forester.

**CB:** Really?

**FL:** He used to be up in the tower out in Washington, looking for forest fires and so on and he, and he didn't get into this until recently.  
I will go over to Gibbey and have him properly frame this.

**CB:** That would be lovely. Be lovely.

**BC:** Oh, yes!

**FL:** That would be great. I'd be glad to. You would...

**BC:** Fred, you took...you had made some corrections on the, uh,...

**FL:** Yeah, there were just a....

**BC:** Did you just take them, or did I...I had them here, maybe.

**FL:** Yeah.

**CB:** Here are your notes. Do you want your notes?

**BC:** Those are Joe's and I'm going to have to send them to him. He forgot them.

**FL:** Yeah, the date of her death and other things weren't right there, so I...

**BC:** I guess, yes,...all right. Well, I will copy,...be sure to copy these.

**FL:** ...correct them.

**CB:** He was how old when he died, Fred?

**FL:** Well, he was...he died in '53 and he was 33 to that...he was 86.

**CB:** Eighty-six? And grand...

**FL:** And my grandma was, uh, uhh, uhhh, 19..., 1817 and she died in '63... she was 93.

**CB:** Ninety-three?

**FL:** Yeah.

**BC:** Those were good years.

**CB:** Good genes.

**BC:** Yes.

**CB:** Good genes.

**BC:** Yes.



**FL:** Yeah, she was 93; my Grandma Laycock was 94. Grandfather Weckesse...Laycock was, uh, 1856 and he died in 1940, so he was 84.

**CB:** One thing your wife, Betty, said to me when she came for an event here, uh, aft...shortly after you moved back to the area, uh,...for the summers, was that she'd never seen this front door opened, until...

**FL:** We always walked right in the side.

**CB:** In the side door...

**FL:** However, when we would go to church on Sunday, when I'd go to church - I always went with grandfather and Wecky - my mother and dad would sit in the rear. Mother didn't like to get too far down. I don't know whether she had was claustrophobia,...what, but I...his pew was about the fifth or sixth one on the right there and I always sat between my grand... and we would go out the front door to church. Now whether that was...he would go in there and pick up a cane or whatever the way they did and we'd go down the steps and walk out.

We would go out occasionally that way, but most of the time the car would come in and we would just walk in that side door.

**CB:** Do you remember the Stegmaiers next door...as the family living in the home?

**FL:** Yes, yes.

**CB:** Tell us about that.

**FL:** I don't remember that much about 'em. But out at Harvey's Lake, grandfather's was here, our cottage was next to it, and the Stegmaiers were next to us out there. And he had a pony cart out there which I can remember as a kid, he used to drive. But I don't remember him here and I don't know which Stegmaier this was because the Stegmaier I know was Fred Stegmaier and that was all with his sisters and so on. They lived down there on Ross and Franklin, and he went to the Academy with us and that, and he had a birthday party and so on down there, I remember, and I think...but I never was in this house. I used to jump the fence and go through that and out the alley to the main street. And then we would also go in that alley because behind us was the Orpheum and the Poli, and the Poli had all of the vaudeville. And in the warm summer evenings all the

midgets and all the acts...everybody would be out in that alley and we'd be out there with 'em. And then we'd be looking' in the doors and all the people were there...the vaudeville would be going over there...that was a great thrill for us.

**BC:** Wonderful.

**FL:** But we'd all jump the fence and go through the back gate and we'd be right in the alley there.

**CB:** What do you remember about the vaudeville shows themselves?

**FL:** Ohhh...they all...I don't know...the, uh, they had the, uh, vaudeville at the Poli and they had the Earl Carole Vanities at the, uh, Irving, which was down the next block, just below the, uh, the church there. And, uh, you would go in and they would have the huge screen would be down with the background of Wilkes-Barre and the Martz plane which used to come in and bank over the tower of the Presbyterian church at noon every day. The old Balanka, you know, with the first - the first airlines from Wilkes-Barre, Wyoming Valley Airport to New York. At that would be on the screen there, and then you would first, uh, you would have the, uh, three or four different acts, different animal acts and other things. Some of 'em, I suppose, were, uh, they had, uh, some women that were dressed, but...it didn't matter too much to us as kids.

**CB:** Uh huh.

**FL:** But, uh, they would have those and then the, uh, they would have the, uh, the cartoon, they would have the ears and eyes of the world that would come around - the newsreel. And then your feature film, all for your dime.

We'd go in the Orpheum, Tom Slattery and I, and the we'd walk out and walk into Poli. We'd have spend our Saturday afternoon...twenty cents.

**CB:** A lot to do in Wilkes-Barre.

**FL:** Oh, i t was...well, they had the Capitol up there, the Comerford, the Poli, the Orpheum, and the Irving, all within those blocks. And it was always crowded, always, cause we used to roller skate up through there and through the Woolworth store and come out the back and so on. And we would be ducking in around the legs of all these people and so on. But

there was al...and, of course, the trolley cars were always circling around and you could get on a trolley and go anywhere. We could walk out with out sled in the winter and get on the trolley and they'd let us ride off at the Wyoming Valley, at the bottom of the hill...up we'd walk.

**BC:** Fred, what about across the street, across Franklin Street?

**FL:** That was the Weavers.

**BC:** The Weavers. Do you remember them...

**FL:** And that was the United Mine Workers.

**BC:** Later?

**FL:** Yes.

**BC:** Right?

**FL:** Because when the United Mine Workers were, uh, moved in across from Fred Weckesser the Westmoreland Club had a lot of discussion...there ...about the contrast. That was very interesting.

But I've always admired the placard there, I have pictures of it. I don't say it to too many of my friends 'cause they were in the coal business, like Margie and Bill Butler and so on, but I do admire it. And I often when I'm walking by and read it over again.

**CB:** I, I take every guest to read it. I took Senator Paul Simon to read it.

**FL:** I'm glad you left it up. I was afraid you might take it down, but I think it is great. You know, very good.

**CB:** It's great Welsh rhetoric, too.

**FL:** Yes, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah...the Weavers...uh, there was a boy, but I don't remember him, he didn't go the Academy. I remember the Barbers, Amy and Molly Barber.

**BC:** Okay.



**FL:** Well then, of course, next store was Countess,...

**BC:** Oh, yes...

**FL:** And then dau...and then Fred Hillman.

**BC:** Well, first the, was the, did the Countess live where, uh, Anne...

**FL:** She lived in the...

**BC:** ...Anne...

**CB:** Now who's the Countess?

**FL:** She was...I don't know...but they said she was some sort of royalty.

**BC:** My mother...my mother always questioned it.

**FL:** Yeah, I suppose. But that was a double house, and the Hillmans were in the, uh, upper part, the one toward the center of town, and the, the Countess was in the other.

**BC:** What about the Taggerts?

**FL:** The Slattery's were next.

**BC:** Okay.

**FL:** And they had the big yard, and the maypole which you finally took down. I didn't know whether you might finally leave that maypole or not, and that,...and they had the, uh, uh, back to the brick wall. They had a big yard. And then the Slat... the Taggerts were next door. That was May Post and Mrs. Taggert, the two sisters.

**BC:** Two sisters?

**FL:** Yeah. And then next to them was the, uh, the Hardings, and they were related to President Harding.

**BC:** Yes.

**FL:** And then next to that Koc...Dr. Kochen who delivered a good many of the people around. And then there was Dr. Morris Albrent, in the double house, and the Sturdevants on the other side. And the Sturdevants - Mrs. Sturdevant - I think was a granddaughter of Charles Minor. I believe so...

**CB:** Humm...

**FL:** I believe so.

**BC:** Did you know that...

**FL:** And then next to that is that house that's still there.

**BC:** Yes.

**FL:** Kauffman, or whatever. And then next to that was, was, uh, Howard. Alice, you know, Jule Air's wife.

**CB:** Yes, yes.

**FL:** And before that in that house, Charles Miner lived, his father, mother, and younger...and then Guthries was on the corner, Dr. Guthrie. And that,...and going the other way, after, uh, Barbers, was Dr. Mengle...no Turner, which you tore down for the parking lot.

**CB:** Uh hum.

**FL:** And that Turner was an original, uh, wife of Mr. Will Conyngham, Bill's father.

**BC:** The one who died at childbirth?

**CB:** Yes.

**FL:** She...that was a...and then she married Jesse Guthrie, her second, and then next to the Turners was Dr. Mengle...

**CB:** So both his wives were right from the neighborhood?

**BC:** Yes.

**CB:** Humph.

**FL:** And then after Dr. Mengles there were was the long walk back to the Christian Science, which you had...and then there was the little hou...gray house there next to it and I read that name of that the other day. I forget what that is..Sta...I forget what the name of that...Stock..it began with S, I think.

**BC:** Where are you around...

**FL:** When you go into the Christian Science and continue down there was a house there on the left.

**BC:** Oh.

**FL:** And then the corner property was empty because the Baptist church had burned down.

**BC:** Church...

**FL:** That's right...

**CB:** Now have you seen our atlas...

**FL:** Yes.

**CB:** ...Fred? Okay. Cause that would probably have that in.

**FL:** Yeah.

**BC:** I think i t probably did.

**FL:** The atlas church originally was where 78 West Northampton was, next to the Woodward house. And then they moved to that corner and, uh, John Butler Woodward built that house because his father, Stanley, was still in the big house.

**BC:** Oh, dear, yes...okay.



**FL:** That's why Bucky and Monty were brought up in that house. And that's why when Bucky would have too many he'd be trying to get in our house at night, and dad would leave him next...(Laughter) (tape ends)

**CB:** Um...

**BC:** The doctor's...

**CB:** This is, this is the second tape, uh, of our discussion with Fred Laycock on the twenty-sixth of August, 1997. Uh, Joe Poole has left for another appointment. Uh,...just so we, we do not lose, uh, Fred, what you just were saying about the many doctors' practices, could you go over again, uh, thinking as you go up and down the street who the different doctors were, and to get that whole list again. I just like to make sure we don't miss that.

**FL:** I'm just wondering if there was any, uh, whether, uh, Dr. Guthrie's brother was up there. Well, I think that they...Dr. Rodgers would have been the one, uh, and then...let's see, what the heck...humph, I'm trying to think of that one.

Yeah, Dr. Rodgers would've been the first one up there.

**BC:** Starting where, Fred?

**FL:** Up on North Franklin.

**BC:** Starting on North Franklin.

**FL:** Yeah...I think so. And at one time I believe he had his X-ray equipment on Northampton Street there, on that home that was next to the church. Because I know with my crystal set when I was trying to get WBRE and adjust the cap, whenever Dr. Rodgers equipment went on, the ear...it was nothing but static in the earphones, and I knew when he was...the old X-ray machines, you know, they, I guess they put out an awful lot of static. I,...so I think he was there one time, but then I think he was up there on North Franklin Street.

And then there was Dr. Carr, do you remember Dr. Carr?

**BC:** I know who he was, I don't know...

**FL:** Well, he, uh, Dr., uh, Carr was, uh, on, uh, Franklin Street there, almost across from the Westmoreland Club.

**BC:** So now we're about seventy...in the seventies...

**FL:** And then there was, uh, Dr. Buckman who was the fa...the father of, uh, Lewis and Sam Buckman. He was the ENT fellow, he did my sister's mastoid and I can still remember him...going in there...a little kid...that kind, big kindly old face with the mirror reflecting and so on. He was...wonderful.

**BC:** He did that?

**FL:** Hum?

**BC:** He did that to you?

**FL:** Yeah. And he was, the next one down next to the church was Dr. Taylor. And they were, uh, related. See, Dr. Buckman was the nephew of Dr. Taylor, and that's why, uh, Lewis Taylor Buckman and Samuel that were named after him.

**CB:** Um-hum.

**FL:** And then there was Dr., uh, Gibbey, and then Dr. Stewart on the corner across from the YMCA and Dr. Matlack I think was a little bit up the street on Northampton there, toward Main. And Dr. Guthrie was diagonally across the street.

**BC:** Now we're down on this side.

**FL:** And then next to Dr. Guthrie was, uh, uh, uh, Jule Air's wife's, uh, father, Dr., uh...

**BC:** H.

**FL:** Uh, Gib...uh, Howard.

**BC:** Howard.

**FL:** Dr. Howard. And then, uh, across the street from him was that doctor that, uh, built that Laurel Hospital. And a couple doors down from him was, uh, Dr. Tishler. And across from Tishler was Dr. Fred, uh, Morris Alburn. And next to him was Dr. Koshen. And then following down beyond Barbers was Dr. Mengle. And then down on the corner on the left was Dr. Hayden Phillips and across the street was Dr. Freeman.

**BC:** And now were in the next block of South Franklin Street.

**FL:** And then Dr. Wolfe and Dr. Minor and Dr. Bixby.

**BC:** Now, the property that we took down over here was...the time that we...well, he'd long since died, but it was Dr. McNellis. Does that name mean...this is the house next to George Fenner's.

**BC:** There was also a Dr. Mengle next. I don't know much else.

**BC:** Mengle would be in the lot next to the library?

**BC:** Yup

**CB:** Okay.

**FL:** Well, between where, you....

**CB:** McNellis had a, McNellis had a practice in that building.

**BC:** Right, okay.

**FL:** That was later, after my time. I don't remember him. Mengle was the only doc...cause Mengle used to come across the street.

**CB:** This is before your time, but as a doctor...but, do you no no, do you have any sense as to why this area became a medical practice street?

**FL:** No.

**CB:** Or who was the first doctor that started this, uh, trend?



**FL:** I think Dr., uh, Dr. Guthrie and Taylor were two of the earlier ones...prominent ones in the town. Yeah...

**CB:** What else do you remember about this street, just as a place to play as a kid, besides going over to the...

**FL:** Well, I remember when they paved it for the Centennial. Susque-Centennial. And the Sordoni, uh, trucks were out there. And those black men had all this, all these, uh, burlap bags wrapped around their feet because they were walking in that hot asphalt. And of course they didn't have machines to do it. And the trucks would dump it and these guys with the rakes and so on like that,...and then real steamroller, a stream...

**BC:** Roller.

**FL:** Made by stream - made it go - would come up and down and we would be riding our tricycles, watching that and can watch that going on. And they always had the horse troughs were still there for water and where you could attach, you know, the, uh, pillar to, uh, those little iron pillars with a ring to attach your horse to it. Yeah.

We used to, uh, start down on Ross Street and, uh, when the, uh, they had the buses finally - Franklin Street Bus - and, uh, in our roller skates and we would, uh, flip to see who would be, uh, behind the exhaust pipe, and we each one would hang on to that rear bumper and we would come all the way up Franklin Street right by the house here. And we would get a great ride all the way up. Yep.

Fortunately in those days there were not as many cars, but if something had slipped in our skates or something why we would've been spread-eagle all over the streets. But, uh, we, had nice rides that way.

**CB:** Who were your closest...

**FL:** Tom Slattery over here and John Taggert. They lived next door. One forty-seven was Taggerts and Slatterys were next door. Slattery's had, uh...

**CB:** Now he...the mayor was...your generation?

**FL:** Frank was, uh, was of the first wife. Mr. Slattery was our district attorney here. He married Ann Rutledge. He had ten children by her. When

she died, he married Gertrude Quinn from Johnstown, and they had three children: Gertrude, Tom and Duhart, who lives down on Ross Street.

**CB:** Duhart...very close to Duhart.

**FL:** He's the youngest. Yeah. So that was the thirteen in that family.

And, of course, the first group of kids were already in Princeton...Ruddy and so on, and had the old cars when we were little bitty kids playing in the back. But the two back yards joined and the Taggerts had a nice barn, with a good upstairs full of horse chestnuts where we used to play as kids and so on. So those two yards...and they had swings and everything...and they had grape, grape vines and arbors and so on for great fights and that type of thing. So we had a lot of, uh, fun there.

And then the Bixby house down on the corner in the winter would have the...a big slide put up with the uh, water poured to make it ice. And we would get a real good ride on the sleigh down there.

But most of my friends all lived within...from Union Street to Ross Street. All of us, uh, grew up together. There was, uh,...

**CB:** And you went to school...

**FL:** We all went to the Academy and the girls went to the Institute. And, uh, we, uh, our parents all belonged to the Club, and that's where we had our parties...and to the Wyoming Valley Country Club. And that's we would, uh, go for our...we'd play tennis and golf and, uh, in the winter we had hockey on the little pond down there and we sleigh rided.

**CB:** Where, where were the different places the boys went to college?

**FL:** I think, uh, they, uh, scattered pretty much. Uh, there were, uh, I know Dr. Bixby, uh, went to, uh, Princeton. And, uh, Sam and Louis...Louis Buckman went up to Massachusetts,...agriculture school. Actually he was thinking of going into agriculture, originally. And not following his father's footsteps, but he did later.

And I think Lafayette had a, uh, large contingent from here. That's why Allen Kirby was interested in and built that chateau and gave money. And then Fred, of course, went there. Fred and Dewitt Smith and Red Morgan...they grew up here...they all went to Lafayette. But there was a fair contingent from Wilkes-Barre in, in, uh, Princeton. Uh, the group of Kean Mitchell and, uh, Andy Horrigan, and, uh, that crowd, they all...Ned

Williams...they were all in Princeton a few years ahead of me...as they were at the Academy.

**CB:** And you went to Princeton class of what?

**FL:** Thirty-nine. I went thirty-five to thirty-nine. Yeah.

**BC:** ...I'm thinking of a Yale gang, too.

**FL:** Yes! There's quite few that would, uh,...the Conynghams and all the Schooley's and all those would be, uh, going...

**CB:** I taught at Williams, uh, my first teaching job and the class of thirty-nine at Williams was by far the most famous class.

**FL:** Well, you had Dick Hand in your class.

**CB:** Right...and, well, and James McGreagor Burns was in that class.

**FL:** And you had Larry Durell.

**CB:** Yes.

**FL:** You know...remember Larry?

**CB:** I met, I met him, uh, many times.

**FL:** He was a Flying Tiger, you know.

**CB:** Yep. Yep.

**FL:** He was one of the, uh, real heroes out there in the Air Corps. Well, he went to Hill School and I knew him down there.

**CB:** Well, now,...did you know Fred and Dick Rudolph?

**FL:** The name's familiar,...I don't...

**CB:** Well, their dad, their dad was the manager,...

**BC:** I'm going to copy these while you're talking.



**CB:** The manager, the manager of the local Woolworth store.

**FL:** Oh, I see.

**CB:** Fred, Fred went off to Williams' class of forty. They lived...I think they lived over in Kingston.

**FL:** Yeah.

**CB:** Uhm...

**BC:** Marion,..Marilyn Coughlin

**CB:** Marium Marilyn Coughlin.

**BC:** ...and Dick Rudolph.

**CB:** And went to Wyoming Seminary?

**FL:** Yeah, a lot of the people went to Sem here. I should've gone to Sem because my great grandmother was there, my grandmother was the oldest living graduate - 1880 - grandfather Laycock graduated 1880 in the Commercial, and my dad went there, my uncles went there. But I,... grandfather had made money, so when it came to me...no, he's going to go away to Hill School. And that made a big difference, I think, in my life. Because if I had stayed here after the Academy and kept my roots here, and also I would've gone to school with girls, which would've been a great good for my development. Because from the time I was in kindergarten until I finished medical school I went to, to school with a total of four girls. And that was the four that were allowed in med...in Cornell Medical School. And I...

**CB:** It's amazing!

**FL:** It is, it is amazing, but it seemed natural to me...

**CB:** Sure, at the time.

**FL:** ...because that's the way we were.

Now at the Hill School beginning next year will go co-educational. I

think they're the last one of the hold-outs.

**CB:** Uh-hum, uh, hum.

**FL:** And it certainly is much better to, uh, be able to tap half of our brain power in the country.

**CB:** Absolutely.

**FL:** But I do feel there is something lost in the type of almost monastic, uh, way we lived, but the way we studied and worked and so on as a unit, which will be lost. Because I cannot see myself sitting in class with all those short-skirted women, girls...at that age...and keeping my mind on my work...as the same as I would the way we did...which is the weekend or dances or so on.

**CB:** Yes.

**FL:** I, uh, I suppose after a while it's like a nudist beach: you don't even start to look around and I think if you've used to it and so on then that passes. But the way I was brought up, to me, it would've been such a shocking change, that I'm sure I would've been distracted. And I think that the, uh, there, there are a lot of, uh, things that, uh, you may get a little bit less of the devotion to sch...scholastic thing when you have that, but you do certainly get a better preparation for life and for every other reason.

**CB:** Yes.

**FL:** And, so I, I certainly go along with it, yeah.

**CB:** What abo.., what about the girls in the neighborhood, including your own sister? What kind of kind of education did they get?

**FL:** Well, we, uh, they all went pretty much to the Institute. See, there was Margie Townend and Clair Bennet - lived up in Union Street - and, uh, at one time Bonnie Paine lived up there before they moved to River Street. And then, uh, Hestor Christman and, uh, lived on Ross Street there, and Lois Smith of, uh, Ernest Smith - the editor - his daughter was in our crowd and Clair Haddock was next door, number ten, there on Riverside

Drive. And then Grace Jesse Kirby was in the...next to the Waller Hall, in that double house there. So that, uh, we pretty much had them, uh, uh...the Rickets twins were over across from what's the day school now...that was their home. And Joni Blackman was out at Hightown, with\_\_\_\_\_. But that was pretty much the, uh, the crowd that I grew up with and, uh, uh, all our parents knew each other and most of the time our grandparents and so on.

**CB:** Where did your own sister...did she go on to college?

**FL:** She went to Sarah Lawrence.

**CB:** Did she?!

**FL:** With Margie Towend. Margie was there when my sister was there. Yes. She went to Sarah Lawrence. Yeah.

She was brighter than I was and I have some of her books and so on yet. She was, she was a bright gal. She was brighter than I...I had to plug for what I got. It came easier to her. Yeah.

**CB:** What would her class have been at Sarah Lawrence?

**FL:** She was a year and three months older than I was.

**CB:** She'd have been there in '38.

**FL:** Yeah.

**CB:** She was there just after the start of it.

**FL:** That's right. It was somewhat liberal, I think, in the thinking at the time.

**CB:** Yes. Yes, very.

**FL:** Yes.

**CB:** My uncle taught there and he was one in his...good friend was the charter, charter faculty member at Sarah Lawrence and founded the music department there.



**FL:** Yes.

**CB:** And I knew him extremely well, I really called him "uncle" and we got to know a lot of those early Sarah Lawrence people. So, I wonder if, uh...

**FL:** I think it's co-ed now, isn't it?

**CB:** It's co-ed?

**FL:** Yeah.

**CB:** Although heavily, uh, female.

**FL:** It is.

**CB:** Been on the campus, so...know the woman who's just, who's just turning over the Presidency to become head of the Andrew Mellon Foundation.

**FL:** Oh, really?

**CB:** Ah, she's been president there a long time and we, we, she and her husband and my wife and I lived in the same dwelling at Williams where we were young faculty together.

**FL:** Oh, yeah.

**CB:** Alice Hillstrum, she's a, quite, quite a person.  
How is your sister's health, by the way?

**FL:** Well, it seems fairly good. She fin...sold her home and, uh...

**CB:** In Hawaii.

**FL:** Out in Hawaii and moved into a retirement, uh, place in, near Portland, Oregon, and her child...her two, Sam and Pam - her two children by Sam Cres - see her there. I had a note...I've had sev...couple notes from her and I've talked to her and when Austie Howard died - whom she was very friendly with - when I sent her the clipping from the paper.

She's had, uh, trouble with her shoulder and different things and so on, but, uh, otherwise I think she's done pretty well, but it's quite a change. She had thirty some years out there in that lovely climate in her own home and so on. And now to be in a just a home, or condo or apartment and, uh, living alone with no husband or anything, why, has been a little bit difficult. She said, "It's not something I would chose", and she said, "I told my children I would try it for a year." But I don't know what she would plan. I don't think she'll ever go back.

**BC:** Um-Hum.

**FL:** I don't think she's up to it, and...

**BC:** Are you talking about Marianna?

**FL:** Yeah, and it's not fair to her kids. They all,...somebody always had to be running out to Hawaii to see about this or that because her husband had been very ill. And, uh, she had a number of things. Yeah.

**CB:** Say a little about your own, uh,...how, how you chose to go into medicine.

**FL:** Oh, I, I don't know. I suppose, uh, it was, uh, when I was going back to Hill after one Christmas - it was in, uh, '33: I came around a corner where a stream had, uh, flo...uh, gone across the road and frozen. And it flipped us. It flipped us over and onto...up there was a convertible. And, uh, I had concussion and so I was in the infirmary there and while I was still in that I developed acute appendicitis. And they took me down to Philly - I can still see bouncing over those car tracks - like if somebody going with a knife. And when I was in the Pennsylvania Hospital there I used to walk around with a nurse and watch Dr. Frasier operate. He was the neurosurgeon, and that got me interested at the time.

And my mother, I think, was quite enthusiastic about it. Her, her, uh, best friends were Dr. Hayden Phillips and Annie Joyce, uh, Phillips. And, uh, a good many of her friends were doctors and so on, and she always thought that it would be a fine thing for me and so on. So I took the, uh, pre-med course when I went to college and it was still a toss up.

I don't know, uh, that summer I took my Model-A Ford and drove around the country and when I was sitting in the Big Horn Mountains I - tan and healthy and so on - I debated whether, whether to go back and start

me sitting there that night above the ranch there debating that. But I decided that you had been given a lot, maybe you should try it. So that's what I started and that's what I went into.

**CB:** Well, where, what medical school did you go into?

**FL:** Cornell.

**CB:** Your went to Cornell?

**FL:** New York Hospital, yeah. They had moved from Ithaca down there in '32. They built the new hospital. So they had the four years there.

**CB:** And your specialty was?

**FL:** Then I went into...I was in pathology each summer I worked in the hospital down in Belleville in the medical/legal office. And then I was up in with Dr. Whipple in pathology in Rochester - Strong Memorial, and then they sent us off on the LST's in the war. And after the war I took a, uh, I was at the General for a, uh, general internship in order to take the state boards. And then I took three years down at Abington in general surgery and came back to the Rumbard Clinic and practiced with them. And then I, we went down the shore where my wife was from.

I f I done what Andy Sloan - Dr. Sloan - used to have the practice up in the Heights, and he had a place....do you remember Andy Sloan?

**BC:** Yes, I do. Um-hum.

**FL:** Yeah. He said, "Fred, you pick, you pick yourself a house up on Wyoming Avenue and open up," and he said, "I think you'll do just fine."

And i f I'd listened to him I think i t would've been fine...though I don't really regret going to the Rumbard Clinic. But instead of trying to be at Glen Summit...we'd been up there for so many years and we liked it so much...but it was no way to try to, uh, take a practice of surgery from up there. But with the clinic I could do it cause we alternated weekends. And that way I could do it.

But the ice and snow was tough: we had single-track cars. There was one lane up there, that's the...the old coal trucks would go five miles an hour, the ice flying would be a sixteen hundred, skid over, putting the chains on...



chains on...

So after four years, why, we decided to go to one shore or the other. I went to California and got my license to practice out there. And I, I liked Santa Barbara very much and I was saying that, but we decided we go down the shore where Betty's folks were. Her mother was there, all her cousins, and her, her, uncle was mayor of Asbury. And Momma Wecky and my mother were still here and we would never of seen them if we'd gone. So, uh, we went down there and spent our twenty years or so, raising the kids and practicing.

**FL:** So you practiced for what, twenty years down there?

**CB:** Yeah, yeah.

**CB:** And then retired, or did you?

**FL:** Then we, then we sold our home and, uh, bought down in Florida, you know. And had a travel trailer for many years. We camped for many years in the travel trailer and then finally I fell asleep on the interstate and wrecked my pick-up. And, uh, we decided well, we'll buy back at the Valley in '87.

**BC:** And we're glad you did.

**FL:** So that's how I...

**CB:** Well, I must say - and I think we have to draw this to a close now - but I must say that, uh, I'm struck of all the people that we've talked to - and we've probably talked to twenty-five or thirty - I don't think I have any, talked to anyone who has a sense of the roots of this place. And of the dynamic among the families and, uh, that you have, Fred. It really, uh, this....the Valley.

**FL:** Well, I had thirty-four years I was away. That's why I still feel, even though I spent the first thirty-six years here, that other was when the kids all grew up...

**CB:** Sure, sure.

**FL:** ...And so on and I missed all that.

See, if I'd gone to Sem and I'd stayed down on Wyoming Ave and my kids gone to day school in Sem, everything would've been different, just like Bill Conyngham did and so on. That's why I reckon he has a, a, uh, background and a view that I, I don't have.

On the other hand, sometimes when you're a little bit off from the forest maybe you can see it a little better.

**CB:** And I think, that's what, that's probably what I'm grappling to say, is that you...there's a vividness to your portrait of this place.

**FL:** I have spent a lot of time on the Historical Society proceedings...I have the complete set. I had one set burn up and I had to get another set out of the cellar and from the Hermit Bookshop. But that's a treasure trove for this area, it's in the Oliver Jewel, Harvey and the miner history.

But this Valley, I think there's, it's hard to bet the history. You can delve into it for a long while. There's so much.

**BC:** Well, I think you've added to it.

**FL:** Oh, I haven't added anything.

**BC:** Yes, you have.

**FL:** There's nothing original with me. But it is, it is a...there's so many wonderful stories, so many wonderful stories here. Do you know the story of George Washington Woodward?

**CB:** No.

**FL:** Well then you have a treat in front of you. I'm not going to bother you with it. It could go a long...someday, uh, someday you remember that name.

His house was 78 South Franklin Street. That's the one he built. And that became the Wilkes-Barre Institute and that's where our kindergarten picture is and all our mothers' pictures and so on.

But he has a biography written by his son, George, and that is down in the Harrisburg Library - they don't have it here - and there is a book in the Bishop Library called "The Constitution." Go look at it sometime. You ask for that. It will be there cause I had it re-bound. Every page was re-sewn by that bookbinder up in Wyoming. It, it was published in eighteen-



forties, and it was endorsed by Mifflin Dallas, the Vice-President of the United States to George Washington Woodward. And it has the whole thing on the Constitution and our states and everything in the background of this country.

See, he was nominated to the Supreme Court of the United States by President Polk when he was 37 years old. And he was blackballed in the Senate for his Democratic views, one of which was that women should have the same education as men.

So he wrote the Constitution of this state, he served in the Supreme Court of the State, he was its Chief Justice. His oldest son was Stanley, who was one of the four founders of the Historical, gave the address when they did the, uh, inaugurated the new society building. They had a centennial four years ago. And then he built that home and he all the, uh, his kids and grew up and that became the Wilkes-Barre Institute where all our mothers went.

But he is a wonderful, wonderful man. He was born in 1809. I always have Abraham Lincoln, Charles Darwin, and George Washington Woodward. And he came from Bethany up in Wayne County. Came here at age 16 - in his teens - because the Wilkes-Barre Academy had such a wonderful reputation. And that's where his, that's where this, uh, Dr. Traugh's daughter was his classmate, Sarah Elizabeth Traugh, and that's who he married. And that's who he had all the children from. It's a wonderful story. It's just filled with them here. But, and then...

**CB:** Terrific! Have you known all this?

**BC:** No, but I went him to say this...

**FL:** Bonnie, who will be here for the, uh, twentieth, is the direct descendant of his. And I got that book because it was in the old Woodward house and Betty helped Bonnie when she was trying to get, take all the auction of all those things. And she gave that book to Betty and it was falling apart and so on, so I took it up to that bookbinder who out of this world. And it is in perfect shape again. And it has, it is a treasure. Everything is in there about the origins and so on of this country, and every state and how they developed their own constitution...Washington's address, everything is in that. It is wonderful.

**CB:** I'd love to see that.



**CB:** We took our English friends that were here for our daughter's wedding, which was last week, and we took them to Independence Hall yesterday.

**FL:** Yeah, right.

**CB:** Yeah, which has been stripped because they're putting air conditioning and so we could stand right up on the stage where Washington sat. There's no furniture in the room, it's just stripped back. And really it was almost more exciting that seeing all the furniture just because you could be all over the hall. Got a wonderful guide who, uh, gave a very inspiring presentation of what the kind of compromises were that they reached to make us into a friend.

**FL:** Are they, are they going to put i t back together the way i t was?

**CB:** Oh, yeah.

**FL:** I hope so.

**CB:** Just, just the way i t was. They photographed there the was i t was before they dissembled. They're, they're putting in, uh, new electrical systems so they took all the chandeliers down so it's...it's down...

**BC:** Wow!

**CB:** ...to the, the basic room. But that wonderful, uh, whatever you call the framework over the center, uh, podium, is still there and all the sculpting work.

Well, Fred, I want to thank you for, uh,...

**FL:** I f i t's any use to you, that's..

**CB:** You just, you...(tape ends)