

Narrator's name: Otto Brandt
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Interviewer's name: Gordon S. Welles and Allan Fletcher
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Oak Lawn Public Library

(Discussing Glaser, Kohn, & Co. pickle factory formerly in Oak Lawn.)

AF: You just . . . you sorted cucumbers. That's what they did there.

You sorted the cucumbers.

OB: No, the pickles. The small pickles.

AF: Oh, did, uh. . .

OB: Oh, they . . . (laughter). I don't just remember, but they used to have what they called 1200, I think 1600, and 1800, or something like that. They were different sizes. And, in this trough, we dumped a bag of pickles. Why, uh, there were little slots cut by each number, you know, there. In other words, there were dill pickles and this kind of pickle and that kind of pickle. Well, if we didn't know which one it belonged to, we put it in that slot, you know.

AF: To see how big . . .

OB: If it went through there, it went there. If it didn't go through that one, you know, you sometimes you got so you didn't know just which was which. So you just sort of put it in that slot, you know, if it goes through, okay. If it didn't go through that one, then it went back in the 1200 or the 1600, or the 2000. Whatever it was, I don't remember. But, uh, we used to get 10 or 15 cents from them to help sort the pickles out. You know, when they all came, they all come in at once. Mostly at one time, you know. Everybody would be picking about the same time,

OB: and they'd be lined up, half-a-dozen or so people, you know, with their buggies and little spring wagons, you know, to bring them in, see.

AF: From the farms?

OB: Yeah, we used to have pickles right across the tracks here. ^(Norfolk + Western tracks; W of 52nd Avenue at 96th St.) We'd go out and pick them.

AF: Hmmm.

OB: Oh, boy, that was a hell of a job. (laughter)

GW: I'm sure that it was.

OB: We didn't like it.

AF: Do you recall Henry Hilgendorf, Mr. Brandt?

OB: Yeah.

AF: Suppose, uh, I mean, uh, would have been a brother of Frederick. That's not the children, but these are two other Hilgendorfs we don't know too much about, Joachim and Henry . . .

OB: Joachim, that was my grandfather. Mecklenburg-Schwerin, yeah, my father came from Meklenburg-Streilitz. He come from Mecklenburg-Schwerin. It don't say how old they are, do they? (looking at cards)

AF: No. This is just taken from the records in the Historical Society downtown.

OB: (Picks up the ledger). There's the Book Moses. (laughter)

AF: Oh, my goodness.

OB: It's a pretty mug shot. (laughter)

TAPE STOPS, THEN RESUMES PLAYING

OB: (Concerning Hilgendorf family farm at 103rd and Cicero)

They had to pay the rent to him, you know, for the whole farm, but that's why when it was subdivided that way, well then, each one, instead my uncle paying each one individual, he just gave the whole works to grandmother. And then, of course, I suppose they struggled along with whatever it was. So when you figure it all out, there's 140 acres, and there was about . . . let's see. How many kids were there? Hell, I don't want to go through that god-damned thing (laughter) trying to find out. There must have been about eight or nine children. Anyway, figure out 15 acres, so there would be ten, but then there was two of them got 2 1/2 acres more. So that could have been nine, possibly nine. Of course, it wasn't a hell of a lot of money, but it still was a hell of a lot in those days.

GW: Yes. You were talking earlier about your father coming over and being a wagonmaker in Blue Island. He arrived here in Oak Lawn, you said, in 1889. I was wondering if you could kind of give me a breakdown on how things developed in his business from the time he came to Oak Lawn and got involved in the blacksmith shop and finally bought this building. Can you kind of give me the whole background on that? You were giving it to me in bits and pieces the other time, and I just wanted to get it down a little more accurately now from what you remember.

OB: Oh God, you're going to rake my brain.

GW: Yeah, well.

OB: Well, I mentioned to you as far as what I know. But it's too bad I don't have them pictures, you know, from downstairs of the old building, see. All I can say is when he came here, he started to work in Blue Island, and then he finally wanted to go into business for himself. So he had a building right over here next door (west) where the concrete slab is still from . . . of course, there was no concrete slab there then. There was a plank floor. Of course with the horses, you know, you had to have that plank floor.

GW: So that's where the site of the blacksmith shop was right next door, and that's what he started first.

OB: Yeah.

GW: Okay.

OB: And then he had the wagon shop which he worked in. Of course then after he started that, he bought the tavern, bought the saloon. It was a saloon in those days.

GW: Yeah. When did he buy the tavern? Do you remember when that was?

OB: No, that I couldn't say. All I could say is that . . . well, I was born in this building here. Not in this building, the other one.

GW: Right, the one that burned, yeah.

OB: In '98, see, and, uh, I was born in '93.

GW: So he was definitely owner of the tavern at that time, by '93.

OB: Yeah.

GW: So, sometime between 1889 and 1893, then, I guess.

OB: Yeah.

AF: That was already . . . somebody already owned the tavern and he bought it from them?

OB: Yeah, yeah. I'm pretty sure. Or it was here, so in other words, he just took it over.

AF: Was he a competitor of Frederick Schultz's tavern?

OB: Yeah, yeah.

AF: Were they kind of . . .

OB: Yeah.

AF: Was there enough business for two taverns in town?

OB: Well, you can just figure out. (laughter) A shot was a nickel; a beer was a nickel. And, uh, every once in awhile, you know, some of the farmers would stop in. There wasn't too many around here, but they struggled along, you know. But, uh, like I say, well a lot of them would say, "Give me a pony." A pony was a nickel shot, a shot of booze. And a stein of beer, like you could get now for 45 cents, was a nickel. So, well, that's all I can say is we got going in there. All I can remember is, you know, when I used to run around back and forth in . . . of course, I do remember this, that upstairs. This flat (second floor of Brandt building, 5131 W. 95th St.) was our dance hall, see. It was like . . . well the steps ain't there no more. The steps used to go up there (indicating east side of building) you know. You'd come in here

- OB: and the back flat, but that used to be the dance hall up here. I can remember masquerades, you know, that we used to have years ago. Oh, they used to have one heck of a time.
- GW: I was wondering a little bit about when your father actually took over the tavern, was he still running the blacksmith shop at the same time?
- OB: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, he was running the blacksmith shop. As far as I know, he was running the blacksmith shop until he passed away.
- GW: Oh, so both of them were continuing at the same time, then.
- OB: Yeah, we had the blacksmith and a wagonmaker. He was a saloonkeeper.
- GW: So, these were his employees?
- OB: He graduated from a (laugh) wagonmaker to a saloonkeeper. (laugh)
- AF: Did he farm, too, at the same time? Have any farmland?
- OB: Oh yeah. He was farming. We was farming this ground over here, 54 acres. Then we had . . . well later on we had the farm out there at 95th and Ridgeland in the northeast corner there. We had a 140 acres that I had done a lot of farming out there. We used to grow potatoes and, of course, buck oats, you know. Done a little teaming, too, on the side, you know, hauling, but it wasn't much doing, you know.
- AF: He was doing most of it, though.
- OB: I just wonder today, now, I got my grandson in the tavern down there. He gets 45 cents for a glass of beer. (laugh) Jesus Christ almighty, I go down there say I'm going to get a glass of wine. I used to sell them

- OB: for 10 cents and 15 cents for a glass of wine when I was back there in '36, see. I sit down there and he gives me a mug, a glass about that big, and with a little ice in it . . . 65 cents. Jesus Christ almighty, we used to buy a pint of wine for 65 cents!
- GW: Can you repeat again, because it's been documented before, about how the first building here burned down, but I wanted to hear it again from you. How you remembered hearing it from your father. How the fire got started that burned the building down.
- OB: Well, we had the . . . There was an icehouse back there, but there was still a barn. There was a window broken in the barn in the hayloft, and there must have been some sparks. You know, in those days it was all coal-fired steam engines. And when they'd start putting that coal, you know, they would shake it up and all the hot cinders would come out through the god-damned smokestack, you know, and that's how the fire got started.
- GW: That was the best . . . the only thing your father could figure out at that point as how it got started.
- OB: Yeah, yeah. We knew a fellow by the name of Herman Reno. He was . . . he had . . . there was a bigger building, too, and he had a pop factory. And he used to make soda pop and all different things. Of course, that's when I was knee-high to a grasshopper.
- GW: This soda pop factory, where was this?
- OB: Right next to in the building. In the building that was here.
- GW: Oh, in the original building.

OB: Yeah.

GW: Oh, so when would this have been? This would have been in the 1890's.
There was a . . .

OB: Yeah, yeah.

GW: And what was the gentleman's name again? I didn't quite . . .

OB: Herman Reno.

GW: Herman Reno.

OB: Yeah, there's a couple of Renos here in town. There's ah . . .

AF: Art Reno?

OB: Art. Herman was an uncle.

AF: Were they Italian or . . . ?

OB: No, no. He was German. You see they pronounced the name Reno, R-e-n-o,
but I don't know, at one time I thought the name was spelled Rano,
R-o-n-n-a-u.

AF: Oh, oh.

OB: See?

GW: Oh, I see, so it had gotten changed over the years to Reno, somehow.

OB: Yeah.

GW: In terms of prosperity, and this may be kind of a hard question to answer,
but I'd be interested to get some idea of what you felt, do you think

GW: that your father was a pretty prosperous character by the time he got all these businesses going? Was he considered like the, one of the more prominent people here in the village at that time?

OB: Well, (laugh) you know, the old saying is, you know, you get two many irons in the fire, some of them are liable to get burnt, see. (laughter) Of course, he was a progressive man. He wanted to . . . he was always in to make another nickel, another buck; and, well, like he bought some lots, you know, for \$25. And he sold them. One time he bought some for \$18 over here right at 91st Street, and he sold them for \$27--25 ft. lots. Just like he say, he had a blacksmith working for him, and he had a wagonmaker working for him. And, of course, you know, one hand washes the other, you know. Somebody comes to the blacksmith shop, you know, well or to the wagon shop, why not stop in and have a drink or two, see. And all those pennies, you know, counted, of course. He had some pretty fair deal when he died, but my sister and I, we didn't get it. My brother got it. So, I just laughed about it. I figured okay. They say ill-gotten gain don't do you no good sometimes, so I just figured the hell with it.

GW: What do you mean by ill-gotten gain?

OB: (laughs) I don't like to say it. Now it, ah, I figured my mother, you know. My father died first. And my mother died right the next year. She was in no shape to handle anything. She had been sick for quite a little while, too. She was in no shape to handle it, and I just figured my brother made the will to suit him. Me and my sister, we got the hind tit. (laughter)

- GW: So, as far as the German community here in Oak Lawn, though, he was pretty well thought of being the tavernkeeper and the wagonmaker and all of that. I mean he got along pretty well with everyone, your father.
- OB: Oh yeah. You know the old saying is, you go to work and help somebody out and they help you out. There was different ones, you know, that needed a little help, you know. Sometimes, you know, they'd need some credit in the blacksmith shop and sometimes in the wagon shop. Well, he always went along with it, you know, and he always . . . you know it wasn't much, but it was a hell of a lot in those days. A dollar or, what, today I think a dollar in those days was like ten dollars today.
- GW: So he extended credit on a fairly regular basis to people who he thought were trustworthy and . . .
- OB: You know one, like I say, one hand washes the other, you know. One business was maybe helping the other one. This one was helping that one, and then why he got along and when he bought that 54 acres, we bought it for \$24,000. Of course, he took the money what my mother got for the 15 acres. So that was a hell of a boost, you know. I don't remember now must what . . . how much he got for that 15 acres, but he had put up a building on it. I was out in South Dakota getting rich. Yeah, went out there with nothing, and I come back with twice as much. (laughter) Out there where I worked 7 1/2 years for nothing, out there.
- GW: Can you tell us something about the neighbors that you remember right around here. The ones that you remember the best from your childhood. Just trying to get an idea of some of the very earliest people who were living in this part of Oak Lawn. The people that you remember right

GW: around the neighborhood here. If you can call it a neighborhood, I guess. That may be the wrong expression, but . . .

OB: Well, when you got those buildings there you got quite a few of them. That's all I could mention. Like you say, Gaddis there, and you know ever since I had my stroke I can't remember a hell of a lot. I know, but I can't say the god-damned names. But there was, like you said, there was Gaddis there, and there . . . I can't think of the fellow's name who was on the corner. Then there was Adolph Punis.

GW: Adolph who?

OB: Punis.

GW: Oh.

OB: And, oh Jesus, I can't think of them right now.

GW: Okay. Well that's something we can come back to as they hit you. I'm sure that there'll be other ones that you can think of. Is there anything you can tell us about your mother? As far as the way that she was. You see for all of these very early settlers, we have practically no information. So anything you can tell us about here, you know, the way that she was generally. I realize that's kind of a broad question, but ah . . .

OB: Well, I ah . . .

GW: You mentioned, for example, the last time I was here that the Hilgendorfs were the tall ones, and that your father always claimed that you were more a Hilgendorf than you were a Brandt.

OB: Yeah. Well, you see, my father was a short, kind of a heavy-set fellow. Of course, I wouldn't say he was too heavy-set. He weighed 160 pounds. But he was about, I would say, about 5 feet 5 inches -- 5 feet 6 inches, something like that. But my uncles were 6 feet 7 inches and 6 feet 4 inches. I was 6 feet in stocking feet. So I measured myself so I could say I'm 6 foot when I'm in stocking feet. My brother, I guess, he was a little better than 6 feet 2 inches. Of course, he had a big belly on him. I didn't. Yeah, all my uncles were tall, even my aunts.

GW: How tall was your mother, would you say? How tall was your mother, would you guess?

OB: Well, she was just about 6 feet.

GW: She was quite tall for a woman in those days, certainly.

OB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was just trying to think of some of the names that used to be along here. Course, I suppose you got all them, too.

GW: Well, we've got some of them. We don't have all of them. Well, let me get back to another favorite topic for a second. About the schoolhouse. You know, we were . . . we talked a little bit about that the last time I was here and I was just trying to dredge up a few of those memories, if I could, for a minute. About what you remember about the schoolhouse.

OB: Well, all I remember is the one at 95th and Cicero.

GW: Right, right.

OB: That's the one I went to, and, of course, the one that you've got over on Cook Avenue. Well that was built when I was, well I was about, well, my

OB: brother went to that. I didn't get to go to that one, so, when I go to work in eight, '98. I think that school was built in 1909, or something like that.

AF: Yeah, around that time, 1906.

GW: Right, 1906, I think is the . . .

OB: Huh?

GW: 1906 I think is the . . .

OB: 1906?

GW: Yeah.

OB: Well, you see, 93, 103, I'd be 13 years old. I didn't get to go to that school. My brother got to go to that school. I went to the one at 95th and Cicero.

AF: The one you went to was just a frame building, a one room . . . ?

OB: Frame, yeah, one room. Just the one room.

AF: How many students did they have?

OB: Well, we had around 60. That there used to be from primer to graduation. Only had one teacher and . . .

GW: Do you remember your teacher's name by chance?

OB: O'Toole.

GW: O'Toole?

OB: Yeah.

GW: Good Irish name. Do you remember her first name?

OB: Uh.

AF: That was a man, wasn't it?

OB: A man, yeah.

GW: Oh, it was a man, I'm sorry. His name then.

OB: God-damn, you got me!

GW: Okay.

OB: Toole, Toole, Toole.

GW: Well, I can . . .

AF: William, was it?

OB: Ah, you got me. I know it. It wasn't O'Toole, just Toole.

GW: Oh, just Toole, with an "e" on the end?

OB: Yeah.

GW: How would you calssify your school experience there, good, bad, indifferent?

I mean, did you like the place, dislike it . . . ?

OB: Well, I'll tell you, I through my course of life, now, I figured we learned

more from one teacher, from primer to graduation, than what they do today.

I don't know, that's my feeling. I don't know, I might be all wet. I don't

know anything what they're doing these schools, but I hear some of them

OB: talk, well, I think, my god, they're dumber than I am. (laughter) Hell, I only went to school until I was 12 years old. Then I had to go to German school, and when I got through, well, shit, I had the harness put on me to go to work. Like I say, the day before my fourteenth birthday, I took my first load of hay to 22nd and Throop Street. How my father goes away and took a chance with me to way down there horse and load of hay, load of loose hay. I know my father was on the school board, and, anyway, the guy I guess, he kind of went busted. He was in my father's saloon too god-damned much. (laughter) Anyway, that's the way I'd put it. He didn't get to finish it, so old man Aulwurm finished it. He was a building contractor in Oak Lawn. He was the one that finished it.

GW: You talking about the Cook Avenue School now?

OB: Yeah.

GW: Yeah. Well do you remember when they tore down the old school at 95th and Cicero? How long ago was that? Do you remember?

OB: Oh, God, that, I don't remember. No, I don't remember.

AF: How many months a year did you go to school in that at 95th and Cicero? Was it all year?

OB: No, no. We got out in June.

AF: Same as the . . .

OB: Then went back the first of August, the first of September, I don't remember. I don't remember now.

AF: Most of the year, though.

OB: Oh yeah. I think it was nine or ten months. See, it was June, July, August. Yeah, it must have been . . .

GW: Well, how did one teacher handle all those students? How did he go about doing the day's instruction?

OB: Well, he done it. (laughter) No, I still say he was a hell of a good teacher.

GW: Well, did he . . .

OB: I was just a knee-high to a grasshopper, see, but he handled everything. Well, at that time, you'd possibly be . . . graduation would be about a half-a-dozen or so. See, so then you'd figure about 60 kids going to school, and that was the only school here. You could figure, well, if you're going from primer, you know, from six years old to twelve, fourteen, well, you know, you should be able to go to work and figure out about well six to eight, ten, every year graduating. So, now, I thought he was a hell of a good teacher. And I was just a young punk.

GW: Did any of the kids in those days have the responsibilities like coming in and filling up the stove in the morning or anything like that? Do you remember any of that? Were there any special things in the classroom that you remember, any incidents or . . . ?

OB: No, no. No, I think, when it was cold, our teacher had to go to work and get that all going before school opened, if I remember right.

AF: Did he live in the town somewhere?

OB: Yeah, yeah. He lived over on 54th Avenue. A little house on the back of the lot. About a good halfway down off of 95th Street on the east side

OB: of the street. I don't know if the house is still there, but I knew that's where he was.

GW: Oh, so it's on 54th Avenue, you say, half way between 95th Street and where? 95th and 99th?

OB: And 96th.

GW: And 96th, oh.

OB: Right in the block, there. There was a little house kind of in the back of the lot.

GW: Okay. Now onto one of my favorite subjects. I want you to think; you were going through all the multifarious jobs you've had in your lifetime the last time I was here, and I kind of wanted to get have you run through the whole litany again, from, you know, the time you got started with the hay wagon, ah, down through, you were talking about the laundry business and everything else that you've done and your farming out in North Dakota. I wanted to hear a little bit more about that too. So, when did you start working in the tavern? How old were you? Do you remember?

OB: In the tavern?

GW: Yeah.

OB: Oh, well, at that time it wasn't like it is now, you know. There wasn't anything the law about a twelve, fourteen year old guy drawing you a glass of beer or something like that, but you wanted . . . maybe I should start from the front, from the bottom up, or . . .

GW: Sure, go right ahead.

OB: There's working on the farm here. Then when it rained, we had to work in the blacksmith shop, help in the blacksmith shop or the wagon shop.

GW: Did you get proficient at the shoeing horses? Were you pretty good at that?

OB: Oh, no, no. I was a wagonmaker. I used to make hay racks and rain barrels. What we called cisterns. You know, it makes like a five-by-five or five-by-six rain barrel. I used to plane the sides down, you know, so that when you put them together, you know, so that they'd be open on the outside and closed on the inside. We would also drill holes in the tires, you know, and then set the tires. And the old plank, you know, after awhile you got an electric one. And, well, all little odds and ends, especially setting tires when it rained or something like, when it rained, you couldn't set tires, but you could drill holes in the wheels, you know, and the tires, to put them in. And, well, of course, I went to work when I, then what did I say, from there I got married and started hauling coal at 55th and Lake Park or 54th and Lake Park, Consumers Company.

GW: What company was this?

OB: Consumers.

GW: Oh, Consumers Company.

OB: Yeah, they're still here, ain't Consumers?

AF: Was that the electric company?

OB: No, no, no. He worked coal, . . . coal . . . Consumer's Coal Company.

OB: I don't know if they're still in the business or not. They ought to be, Christ, they were a big outfit. (laughter) I got 50 cents a ton for hauling coal, I know. Loading it on the wagon and unloading it.

GW: When did you start working for them? How old were you at that time?

OB: I, I . . . it was right after I got married, 22.

GW: You were 22 then.

OB: Yeah. But that's when I got married. I bought a team of horses, and I started hauling coal for 50 cents a ton, and a three-mile limit. In other words, within three miles I got 50 cents a ton. If you went more, you got 10 cents a ton more. So, of course, I come back out here, and I finally went to South Dakota.

GW: How old were you when you moved to South Dakota?

OB: Well, I was 22 when I got married, and my daughter was three years old, about 25.

GW: About 25, so you were hauling coal, and then you decided you were going to go out to North Dakota.

OB: Yeah.

GW: Okay.

OB: And get rich.

AF: What gave . . . why did you pick North Dakota?

OB: South Dakota.

AF: South Dakota. Why did you pick South Dakota?

OB: I had a cousin out there.

AF: Oh.

OB: I had a cousin out there.

AF: Was that one of the Hilgendorfs?

OB: Oh yeah, yeah; one of my cousins.

AF: From Minnesota?

OB: No, no, from right Oak Lawn here. William Hilgendorf's son, Jack.

AF: Oh, he went there.

OB: John. We had an Uncle John, too, nephew John, too. Couple John's nephews went out to Minnesota. They did other things but farming, too.

OB: They had a pretty good family. Then, of course, they went out there, and I'm out there for 7 1/2 years. My father died, and I came back. I went to work in the . . . I started in the laundry business with the brother-in-law. He had a laundry route, and he had typhoid fever, and guess somebody had to handle the route. So I handled it, and when they got through, then, I bought it from him. Took the laundry route.

GW: What kind of farming did you, getting back to the farming for a second, what kind of farming did you do out in South Dakota? What were you raising?

OB: Well, small grain.

GW: Small grain.

OB: Yeah. And I was into everything. I was always had about 25-30 hogs. And I was always milking 4, 5, 6 cows. I had to get a little from everything, you know. Things was that rough out there. You'd take the cream check, you know. Take every can of cream, and you'd just get the groceries and take the groceries home and get no money. (laughter) Well, then, of course, like I say, my father died, and I came back here and got in the laundry business.

GW: Were you running the tavern, too, as well as the laundry business?

OB: No, no, no. I was . . . that was '36. Then I bought an interest in the tavern.

GW: So, who was . . . after your father died, who was running it at that point?

OB: We were renting it out.

GW: Oh, you were renting it out.

OB: Yeah, my brother had the handle of it, so he was renting it out. And that was back in the bootleg days. They had the, you remember, what they called the speakeasy's?

GW: Uh mmm.

OB: Don't talk so loud; the sheriff might be standing outside waiting for you. Well, they had a little trouble. So we says, to hell with it. Let that god-damned business stand empty; let it lay there.

GW: When was this that you the trouble? About what year was this?

OB: Oh, that was in the twenties, late twenties. Yeah, so anyway, I figured well my son got old enough, the grandson got old enough to work the laundry route, so I let him work the laundry route while I started in the tavern business. And, hell, I had a partner. A fellow by the name of Louis Priller. He's dead now. Him and I were partners; we had the pool room together. He had the pool room, and I bought interest in the pool room, and he got 1/2 interest in the tavern. Back in the depression days when, Christ, if we took in \$15-\$20 a day, you were doing good. That's when I had it worked up to \$30 a day.

GW: The big time, yeah.

OB: Oh, Jesus. I was getting 50 cents an hour working. Christ Almighty, I worked ten hours sometimes. Every other day, I worked 16 hours. Christ, I had to. There was no money here. And as far as gambling, the only thing that kind of helped us along were the slot machines. God-damnit, it was a good thing we had that; it kind of helped along, too.

GW: When did you have the slot machines?

OB: Oh, that was in the late twenties, I think. I just don't remember.

GW: Mmm. Yeah, well, was this an active speakeasy back in the late twenties? Did you do a fair amount of business then?

OB: I wasn't in it. I wouldn't be in it. My brother had rented the place out.

GW: Oh, you mean all the speakeasy activity was conducted by the fellow you rented the place out to?

OB: Yeah.

GW: Oh.

OB: I didn't rent it out; my brother rented it out.

GW: Yeah, all right, okay.

OB: I don't want the blame for that.

GW: Yeah, okay, we won't give you the blame. Do you remember who it was who was running the tavern? Do you remember the fellow's name?

OB: A fellow by the name of Ed Hunt.

GW: Ed Hunt?

OB: Yeah.

GW: Uh hmm.

OB: Yeah, Ed Hunt; then a fellow by the name of Bill Givens was running it. But after awhile, a fellow that was a state copper, George Rigg, he was a state copper, and he came out and he wanted to rent the place. Of course, that's when beer come back. Everything was legitimate then. So, he ran it awhile, and he couldn't make it go. So Louis, he wanted to work and stepped in there, and I stepped in as a silent partner.

GW: And who is Louis? I'm a little lost now.

OB: Priller.

GW: Oh yeah, okay.

OB: He had the poolroom, see, next door. So we combined it, and it got along. Of course, he had a good job downtown with Hall Printing. He had a hell of

OB: a job. He was an estimator for printing. He had a hell of a job. Of course, he would alternate, you know, nights. Every other night like to . . . that's when I worked the 16 hours, see. Every other night, every other day, I'd work 16 hours; and every other day, he'd work from seven o'clock to closing time. Like I say, when we . . . there was no god-damned business. Why what little there was, why we lucky thing we had the slot machines. It kind of helped keep the tables set. Well, then, of course, he says, "Partner," he says, "I kind of like to get out of this."

GW: Did you ever have any trouble as a result of the slot machines like the police coming in and doing anything to them or not?

OB: Well, they had me once. They led me . . . they took me over to Willow Springs here, and I said, "What the hell is the matter? Isn't Tom Novak supposed to take care of this?" "Who's Tom Novak?" (Asked the police) I pretty near laughed in his face. (laughter) "What do you mean, Tom Novak." "Hmm, that's that. You don't know; I don't know." And I says, "Get a hold of him." So they called up. He came out. I had just seen him go in the back room, come out, but I still phoned him. (laughter) They make you laugh, you know. And I know god-damned well they had to knock over, you know, in order to go to work and get them to declarate some more, you know. Well, then, he'd take a late one. He brought me back home. "Hell, he says, They were just taking care of you." What the hell is the matter with them. Well, the thing, you know, you take the whole god-damned thing. It's all a joke. Sometimes when you figure it out. But my brother was mayor, you know, and every once-in-a-while, they'd say, "Well, we got to knock somebody over! Make it look good." So, he had to pick on his brother that day, and so I told him, too.

OB: I said, "What the hell's the matter," I said to Al, "Why the hell didn't you tell me you were coming out." He said, "I didn't know." I said, "The hell you didn't." Every-~~once-in-awhile~~, somebody's got to be knocked over. I said, "If it's not me, it's Bill Hoff or somebody else." Well, it's always taken care of, you know, what the hell. But, of course, now it's different. I . . . they even took my machine away when I had a license for it. Had a state license, see, but didn't have no county license. Took the god-damned machine, and I said, "Take the god-damned thing. I paid for it." I'll tell you, that's a hell of a joke.

GW: Getting back to the laundry business for a second, when did you finally get out of that entirely?

OB: I . . . in '42.

GW: In '42.

OB: In '42 or think it was '42. When Larry went in the servie, my grandson. He went in the service, and I handled it then for awhile. I said, shit, if I got to go to work and I got to take care of the laundry route and then take care of the tavern, too, see. When I had bought him out, when I had bought Louis out, well, then I, you know, I had somebody working for me. Then I was taking care of the laundry route in the daytime, and then I worked in the tavern at night. "Hell," I said. "If I got to kill myself to make a few extra dollars," I said, "The Hell with it. I quit the god-damned laundry route."

GW: When did you buy Louis out? Do you remember what year that was?

OB: When I bought the laundry route?

GW: No, no, I was thinking when Louis was your partner here in the tavern, when you bought his interest out in the tavern?

OB: Oh, when I bought his interest out. Gees, it's pretty hard for me . . .
I can't remember that.

GW: Okay, all right, fair enough.

OB: I just try to figure back . . .

GW: I was just trying to keep all the chronology straight in my mind, here, as to when all of these things were happening.

OB: I think that was '38.

GW: '38. Okay.

OB: '38 or '39. I know we were in business about three years. I would say somewhere's around there.

GW: Okay, I want to get back to just the tavern for a little while. I . . .
what kind of an atmosphere . . . were there . . . was this a natural
gathering place for people on the weekends and that kind of thing?

OB: Yeah, it was. Well, it, like they say, just an old friendly tavern. You know, it all because of that people that I knew here. The only time I had trouble was when I rented the basement out. I used that for a little gathering, you know, for bachelor parties. I think they use them now for bachelor parties and birthday parties and something. I used to let them have it for nothing just so they bought the drinks off of me, see, and so . . .

GW: It's the only way I'm ever going to remember any of this.

OB: Ha?

GW: It's the only way I'm ever going to remember any of this. You see, my memory is not much better than yours.

OB: I was just wondering. You weren't marking nothing down. I thought, well gees. . . .

GW: Well, I've been marking a few things down.

OB: What a hell of a memory he's got. (laughter)

GW: No, it's just the fact that my memory is so bad.

OB: Now, what was it you were asking me before?

GW: Okay, just about what kind of a gathering place the tavern was, yeah.

OB: Oh, it was just a big friendly tavern. I would say in the first ten years, I could count the trouble I had on one hand. But it was only when I had rented the basement out. You know, they would have a gathering here, you know, and so forth. There were no strangers when I got done with it. Personally, with my own people, I guess a couple of times I had to quiet them down, you know. Getting a little bit loud, so forth. But otherwise, I guess two times, I guess, they really come to hammer one another. But otherwise, why they always said it was the friendliest tavern in town. Of course, I always tried to keep it that way, you know. I says, "If you want to fight, go outside." My father used to say, "Get out. Go out there." (laughter)

GW: Would families come to the tavern, too? Whole families, would they come to the tavern before the laws prevented such things from happening?

OB: Well, their wives, yeah, and sweethearts, at times would be in there.

AF: Did you serve food in the tavern, too?

OB: I did for awhile.

GW: Did your father serve food in the . . .

OB: Well, he used to go back in the kitchen. He'd say, "Nina, make up a little of the schinken." Schinken means ham, see, in German. Well, we'd always have some ham, you know, and he'd cut off a . . . we'd do our own smoking and cut it up, you know, and take it in there, and we'd have sausage, you know, homemade sausage, and cut up a few slices of that, you know. Not slices, you know, rings. Take them in, and fill themselves up on that, and then they'd buy three-four more beers. We made another 20-30 cents, you know.
(laughter)

AF: Was there a restaurant in town, anywhere in the early days?

OB: Well, there was . . . oh yeah, once-in-awhile there'd be a restaurant start up. Used to be one here where Sandemann Funeral Home is. Used to be there. Emery used to have one down there at his place.

AF: Mostly people ate at home though.

OB: Yeah, yeah, couldn't afford to go out and eat.

AF: Did you ever go out on picnics to the lake or in the woods around?

OB: Well, we used to . . . our church used to always have a picnic over here. And every year, we used to have a dialogue. I was always one of them. I was always a performer. And especially if learn them all in German, you know, mostly all German people here. Gees, there was very few. Well, a

OB: lot of English and German, but that's about all that's here. There wasn't too many Irish here those days. Well, in the days I'm talking about, you know, and I used to have, with my broken German and the pieces we to say, you know, I used to have them laughing to beat hell.

GW: Well, what kind of a performance was this that you were doing?

OB: Well, just comic.

GW: Oh, a comic performance in German.

OB: Yeah.

GW: Sort of like . . .

OB: It was like a play, you know.

GW: Oh.

AF: At the picnic.

OB: One of them that I remember is about a teacher we had and everything else, we'd talk and talk and talk. Something about his wife, you know, and this here and that there. And I know she'll be awful angry with the way I'd put it out. The whole god-damned, the whole grove was just about busting wide open. I guess I was kind of a good at some of that. My father, I remember one time, we had a minstrel show up in the schoolhouse. . .

GW: This is at the Cook Avenue School?

OB: Yeah, and they had put that addition on. And they had no seats put in then. They weren't putting no seats in them yet for first at the west end there, that other half. First they had a quarter, then a half, then put the other half in.

GW: So you were in the minstrel show or?

OB: Yeah, yeah, we were all black-faced guys. That's when I used to play the concertina yet.

GW: Yeah, I heard from another old resident of the village, Reba Elvidge, who used to come over here, and she said . . . and she called it the "open and shut," your concertina. I guess she was referring to your concertina. Did you play here in the tavern too, at the dances?

OB: Oh yeah, yeah. We used to have parties once-in-awhile next door. That is, before the beauty shop was here and because that there belonged to the tavern too, then. We had a big door in there, and they'd dance in both stores. Yeah, Mrs. Elvidge, what'd she say?

GW: Well, she just remembered. She said, "Well, I hope he says something about playing the open and shut," which I assume must be a concertina. Ah, but she remembers that very well, your playing over here at the tavern.

OB: Yeah, I used to play at Emery's. Emery had a hall down there at 54th, and they used to have big dances there. I used to play there all the time. Well, not all the time, but different times.

GW: What kind of music were you playing in those days? Was it . . .

OB: Popular music. Then, of course, we had polkas, you know.

GW: I was wondering, did you play much music that was solely of German background for . . .

OB: No, once-in-awhile, yeah, old German pieces.

GW: How often was the dance hall used up here on this floor where we are right now? Was that a . . . ?

OB: Oh, that I don't remember. I was only a little kid. All I can remember is that there was a hall here. Oh, I would say I was about four years old or so when I'd be dancing around, you know, everybody else would be dancing. My sister and I, we'd be dancing by ourselves around here, yeah.

GW: Did your father tell you any about those days. I mean, ah, how much, you know, whether this was actively used? Was it an every weekend occurrence that they'd have a dance up here or was it fairly rare?

OB: No, no. They used to have masquerade parties, you know, and they gave a few prizes, you know. I think a bottle of whiskey or two bottles of whiskey, or a couple bottles of wine, or a gallon of wine, or something like that. They used to have some awful uniforms, yeah.

GW: But that was when you were younger, when they used to have the masquerade parties.

OB: Yeah, yeah, as I say that burned down in '98.

GW: So, it was before '98 that they had the masquerade parties.

OB: Yeah.

AF: What would people do on Sundays? What was the most popular recreation in the early days?

OB: Go visit your cousins. We used to get an awful treat when we'd go down to 102nd and Cicero.

AF: Just go visiting people.

OB: Yeah.

AF: Did most people have horses and buggies or did they walk?

OB: Oh, well who had a car? (laughter)

GW: Good point!

AF: But most people had wagons or rode horses; they didn't walk.

OB: Very seldom did you see somebody walk. That's like (short laugh) . . . makes me laugh when I think of it. I wanted to get out and go walking in the morning before I went to work, see. So I walk over to Cicero Avenue to 93rd, then over there and back. This one day, I'm coming back here (along) the spur and everybody that come along that knew me stopped, "Come on, Otto, you want a ride?" "Oh, gees, I want to walk. Just taking a little walk here, a little exercise." Pretty soon another guy come along. "Hey Otto, hey do you want a ride?" "Hell no, I just want to take a walk." By God, I betcha \$5 that if I didn't want to walk, there wouldn't be a soul around. (laughter)

GW: Yes, yes that's the way it normally works out. Now I notice on the door of the tavern downstairs, and I also know from some of the other things that I have read, that you were quite the baseball person at one time. I mean, yourself actually playing and managing. I was wondering if you could tell us something about the baseball activities around here in Oak Lawn that you remember and what part you played in all that.

OB: Well, I was never much of a baseball player, because my father used to have the picnic grove over here, between 93rd and 94th there and Tulley here; and we always used to have a picnic. I'd have to be here to haul the beer

OB: over. If they wanted some beer, I'd have to haul it over there and like water to wash your glasses, you know, and everything else. It wasn't set up, you know, for anything. It was just "hitchiss" (you know, hit and the word miss) see, any old way. I didn't get a chance to play ball very much, but I used to be a left fielder when I did play. I could run like a deer.

GW: Well, was the baseball team any good in your day? Or did they have any kind of a reputation?

OB: Oh that just locally. Course like it is today, too, but well later on we had, when Smitty and Harnew had the ball team here, they had a real good team going. And, of course, they were good players themselves. Then, of course, I just went to the ballgames. But later on when they quit, the Athletic Club got together, and we got some of the guys together for here. And we got, picked up a couple of other fellows from the city, and we got into what they called the greater Chicago Semi-Pro League.

GW: Uhhmm. Yeah, I think that's what I read about, when you were involved with that.

AF: Were the Schusslers in that?

OB: Huh?

AF: The Schussler boys part of that?

OB: Yeah, Eddie was, their son. Russell, that's the other one, he was in it, but later on, why he dropped out. When we got in . . . like when we got in the Greater Chicago Semi-Pro League, why then we had to get as good a

OB: stuff as we could. We got some good . . . we had a couple of good pitchers and we had a very good catcher. Only a little guy, but boy, he was a 1,000 percent catcher.

GW: Do you remember what his name was, by chance?

OB: Knepper.

GW: That was his nickname or that was his real name?

OB: Oh, Knepper that's . . .

GW: Oh, Knepper, K-n-e-p-p-e-r, that, yeah.

OB: And Johnny Orr was a pitcher, and I had the guy's name . . . Lefty Masterson. They had both, Johnny Orr had a tryout with . . . god-damnit, who the . . . well, Masterson had a tryout with Philadelphia. Johnny had a . . . god-damnit, I . . . Johnny Orr had a tryout with some . . .

GW: Did any of them make it in the professional leagues, do you remember?

OB: No, no, they weren't that good. But we thought they were plenty good for out here. And yeah, hell sometime we'd play for around \$300 a game.

GW: That was . . . about what time was this that you were playing for \$300 a game?

OB: Oh, god-damnit all, I couldn't say. God-damnit, I couldn't say.

GW: Was it while you were back working here in the tavern, by that time, in the '30's?

OB: Yeah, yeah. No . . .

GW: Or was it earlier than that?

OB: It was in the '40's.

GW: Oh.

OB: '40's, yeah. Yeah, the Athletic Club was more or less sponsoring it, and we always run our carnival, you know. And the money we'd make there would be used after to sponsor the ballteam. Course, Orr, last he was getting \$50 a game to pitch, \$50 win, \$35 lose. (laughter)

GW: So there was a real incentive for winning all your games in those days. Not like today, I guess.

OB: Well, they each got \$10 a Sunday. Each, all of the rest of the players. They had to put it up on the game. So if they won, they got \$20. If they lost, they didn't get nothing. (laughter)

GW: Ohhh boy, that's a real incentive, yes. Where did you . . . did you have a playing field around here in Oak Lawn where you played?

OB: Yeah, it was right over . . . when you drive up the spur here. When you get to the end where the trees are. Well, of course, there are buildings there now, but it was right in that triangle corner.

GW: Off in that direction, then.

OB: Yeah, 95th, the spur here, coming up to the trees here and 93rd Street. Right between there, from a block on this side of Cicero, up to Cicero. We had the ball diamond in there.

GW: Did you get a pretty fair crowd out on a Sunday?

OB: Oh, yeah, sometimes we got a good crowd. Well, otherwise we never would have been able to pay what we did.

GW: Do you remember what the admission was in those days?

OB: Pass the hat.

GW: Pass the hat. Whatever you could afford is what you paid?

OB: Yeah, and some of them well didn't drop but 3-4 pennies. Betcha I know well one of the boys, well, especially when they get them at first, you know, when they see what they drop in, pick out the pennies, "Here, maybe you need it worse than we do." (laughter)

GW: Oh yes. Well, Allan, is there anything else you wanted to ask about the things that we had gone over so far?

AF: No.

GW: Ah . . .

AF: What was your wife's maiden name?

OB: My wife's maiden name? Wegner. Wegner, W-e-g-n-e-r. They say Wagner, but ah . . .

AF: She was from Oak Lawn?

OB: W-a-g-n-e-r, see, this is Wegner, W-e-g-n-e-r. 87th and Ridgeland.

AF: Oh, she was.

OB: Yeah, that was my first wife. Second wife was, well she's from . . . Well they started out living west of Oak Lawn, but they had the trailer

OB: court there, Gassner's Trailer Court. What the hell is his name now?
Anyway, it's 91st there, the trailer court.

AF: Oh, the one on Cicero?

OB: Yeah, her father owned that.

GW: What was her maiden name?

OB: Gassner.

GW: Gassner. Okay.

AF: Do you remember a family called Miller that they evidently had the house
that after the library moved out of the Hilgendorf barn, they moved into
the Miller house. Was where the trailer park . . .

OB: Oh, Miller, yeah, Earl Miller?

AF: Do you remember them?

OB: Yeah, Earl . . .

AF: Was that a German family or was that Miller as in . . . just in . . .?

OB: Oh, god, you got me.

GW: So they could have been English or German, then, as far as you knew.

OB: Yeah, yeah.

AF: Were they farmers? Was that the . . .

OB: No, ah, he worked down at Chicago Ridge in a factory down there. All
that I knew about him. Yeah, Earl, he was . . . he had one little bum

OB: leg on him. Yeah . . .

GW: One more question about the building that we're in right now. When it was rebuilt right after the fire, did your father rebuild that all himself or who did? Did he have anyone help him work on it? I was wondering who was responsible for rebuilding it after the fire?

OB: Well, I don't know. Well, I do know one thing. There was a big, fat guy. His name was Brown, and he was a brick layer and a stone layer. That's all that I could remember, just him personally. But he was strong like two bulls. When you take the rock that's under the foundation of this building, you know, that white rock that's shipped from Wisconsin. But here, my father mentioned one time, that I remembered hearing him say that the limestone here in Illinois isn't hard enough, see, and that there in Wisconsin is a harder limestone.

GW: So you don't know if your father actually physically helped them rebuild the building or he just kind of supervised the project?

OB: Well, oh, I suppose he just stood. They had the plans, and he just stood there and watched them put it up.

GW: So he actually had somebody, a contractor, come in and build it.

OB: Oh yeah, yeah, sure. Yeah, all I remember him saying it cost \$6,000 to build it, and he only got \$3,000 insurance on the other one. So he lost \$3,000.

GW: Well, I think we've probably managed to exhaust you for right now. I'd like to have the opportunity . . . there are some other things that I want to talk to you about, but I figure you're . . . we've probably exhausted

GW: you for today.

OB: Well, you know, talk is cheap. (laughter)

GW: Yeah, but it still gets your throat dry.

OB: But it takes money to buy booze.

GW: Yeah.

OB: I've got some canned beer in the refrigerator there. How about a can of beer?

GW: Yes, well I think at this point before I'll answer, I'll turn off.

END OF TAPE

Shirley A. Miller, Transcriptionist