

Narrator's name: Arthur Eichler
Tape number: 1
Date of interview: 6/10/59
Place of interview: Oak Lawn
Interviewer's name: Mrs. Clifford Reynolds and others
For: Oak Lawn Public Library
Moraine Valley Oral History Association

AE: Arthur Eichler, Sr.

MR: And your address?

AE: 4901, that's the old number we always go by.

MR: Would you be against telling your age? (laughter)

AE: Yes. Eighty in August.

MR: Eighty in August.

AE: The sixth of August.

MR: Would you give the names, and ages, and addresses of your relatives?

AE: There's Margaret, and Arty Eicher, Jr., and Marsala Martin.

MR: How about grandchildren?

AE: There's Joann Geislinger, Maryann, and Bobby Martin.

MR: What about great-grandchildren, which I know you have. (laughter)

AE: Their right names?

MR: Whatever.

AE: What I call them. There's Pee-wee, Lou-Lou, and Boo-boo.

MR: Whose children are these, Mr. Eichler?

AE: Joann's.

MR: What was the name of your wife, Mr. Eichler? Your wife's name?

AE: Marsala Eichler.

MR: And she passed away about five years ago?

AE: Over that isn't it?

Voice 2: 1951.

MR: How long have you lived in Oak Lawn?

#2: Forty years.

AE: Oh, every bit of that.

MR: How long?

AE: About forty years.

MR: Where did you come from when you first moved here?

AE: From 65th and Paulina. That's where I lived, but I had a business at 63rd and Ashland.

MR: What kind of business was it?

AE: A variety store.

MR: A variety store, uh huh. Did you come here just with your wife or did you come with parents or brothers and sisters?

AE: No, I come with my wife and my son and my daughter.

MR: Where did you first settle when you moved to Oak Lawn?

AE: About 89th and 52nd Avenue. I bought a little farm there.

MR: You bought a farm? That's Oak Lawn proper now. Why did you come to this area? To start a farm or a business?

AE: Well, I always wanted a farm all my life. When I belonged to the West Englewood Businessmen's Association and that's all we used to talk about. When we retired, we get a farm. The mistake that we made is that we got pedigree cows and pedigree hogs; but when we wanted to sell them, the only place we could sell them was the stockyards because we didn't belong to that association, so I gave that up.

MR: Was that out here in Oak Lawn that you were doing that?

AE: Oak Lawn. 52nd Avenue.

MR: What conditions did you find here when you first came?

AE: Well we used to come out here on the Sundays. Me and my wife we had a funny habit. Wednesday night was her night. I would take her any place she wanted to go. Sundays were mine, and it was always the farm. So we always came out to Oak Lawn, because I had quite a few friends out there.

MR: Can you describe this area when you first came out here?

AE: Yes, it run from 87th Street to 99th Street south. 87th Street north, from Cicero Avenue to Central.

MR: What kinds of roads, trees, landmarks. Were there any landmarks?

AE: Oh, that was all farms and dirt roads.

MR: Was 95th the main street like it is now?

AE: No, no.

MR: It was just another street at the time. Dirt road. Who were your first neighbors?

AE: Braasch.

MR: What Braasch was that?

AE: I wouldn't know. I think that it's relation to Braasch that's working for _____. Yeah, he lived next door.

MR: Do any of them still live around here?

AE: No.

MR: Can you remember any humorous or other experiences of those early days? Hard winters or hot summers?

AE: Oh yeah. I'll tell you about moving out here.

MR: Well, go ahead. That's what we want.

AE: We've moved out here on a Saturday in sunshine as nice as you want it. So we left pretty near all our furniture out. This was the Saturday before Easter. And when we got up Sunday morning, everything was blockaded with a big snow storm. And my wife cried; she wanted to go back. So, we couldn't get back. Now in the meantime, I was taking care of Coup's Warehouse, so we had a walk up to the depot to get to the train.

MR: Was that the Wabash depot?

AE: Yeah. On the way home, I kept a walkin' and walkin' until I walked in the ^(Kaup)Coup's house (he had the florist at 87th and Central). So he said to me, he said, "So, you're the new neighbor, ain't ya?" I said, "Yes, where's my house?" (laughter)

MR: Was that Walter ~~Coup~~? (Kaup)

AR: Yeah. So he went ahead and he showed me. He said, "I'll take you through over there." He had some kind of machine. It wasn't an automobile, like a tractor. He was prepared for that. So he took it over there. Oh, the wife wanted to go back until it got nice. You couldn't get her to leave Oak Lawn for the world.

MR: How about your social events and your family get-togethers and things like that, what did you do?

AE: You mean my family? No that was all broke up. My brothers used to come out.

MR: What were your social events around the village or the town or the countryside at that time?

AE: You mean the excitement and that?

MR: Yeah, uh huh.

AE: Well, you take on a Saturday night, we'd run a movie picture on . . .
Let's see that man's name that has that grocery store there. . .
Every Saturday night we would . . .

MR: Was it Krueger?

AE: Krueger, yeah, so we would run it on his wall, and the people around would come over. It was a kind of get-together.

MR: What would you do have refreshments or dancing or anything after?

AE: No, no, no.

MR: What about your . . . Did you go to any dances out here?

AE: Oh yeah.

MR: Did you have square dances and things like that?

AE: Well, the only dances we had was when there'd be a wedding. So when I come out, I brung one of the . . . now, what would you call that wagon . . . it's a buggy. The driver sits up on top.

MR: Hansom cab, is that what they call them?

AE: Yeah. So, everytime there was a wedding, they'd call me. And I'd go over there and take the couple, and drive them through town.

MR: In other words, that's our modern day parade (laughter) after a wedding.

AE: And then all the kids in Oak Lawn, they all had horses.

MR: Including your own, I suppose.

AE: Oh yeah. Marsala had one; Arty had one. Freddie Behrend and the Hartloff girls, you know.

MR: How about your work out here, was it hard getting going?

AE: Well, I'll tell ya. When I got on the police force, it was 24 hours a day. We was open for a call anytime.

MR: I understand you were the first police force out here, was that right?

AE: Well, Frank O'Brien, he was the marshall. I was the police officer, and Emery was the justice of the peace.

MR: And I understand you had the first motorcycle out here, right?

AE: Right.

MR: You used to take off over the prairie after some of the criminals (laughter).

AE: No, the biggest joke was, ya know, whenever they had a fire, see, we had one of these pumpers, ya know, so I'd put that on my back and I would jump on the motorcycle and I would go through the prairie to the fire. Then Johnny Schultz, he'd come along (we had a sprinkling wagon). He used to sprinkle 95th Street two blocks each way. So, he'd come over to the fire with the sprinkler wagon. Then all the other neighbors and that they all come over with buckets, horses, buggies, and cars.

MR: Mr. Eichler, what year did you go on or form that police force or whatever?

AE: Year after I was out here.

MR: And that was in 19 . . .

#2: Let's see now, Arty said they came out here when he was 14 years old.

MR: Thirty-six years ago, right? Thirty-six years ago. What streets or roads were here when you first moved here?

AE: None.

MR: None at all? What did you use, just paths?

AE: Just a gravel road like we got out here.

#2: Well, what is Ural Avenue, just a dirt road, wasn't it? Arty always tells me you came down here in row boats, ya know, and paddled around.

MR: Was Central Avenue a street?

AE: Oh no. Just the same as Cicero.

MR: What forms of transportation were available?

AE: Well, the only thing we had was the train. Then, Father Geraghty come over, he wanted to start a Catholic church out here. And there was no place to start it, but Mrs. Hall she had a place across Cook School. So she said that if she could get the furniture for that, that she would start a Catholic church. So I was connected with Coup's Warehouse, so I brought out 20 chairs and a kitchen table. Then I drove to Lemont or to Sag and I brung in Father Geraghty. That's how the Catholic church started out here.

MR: And that's across from Cook Avenue School. Is that the Cook Avenue School as it stands today, and is that where it was situated at the time?

AE: That's where the Catholic church started.

MR: And it's across the street from the Cook Avenue right now?

AE: Cook Avenue school.

MR: In other words, at 95th and Cook Avenue.

AE: Cook Avenue, right off. Mrs. Hall, we had it in her house.

MR: What were the houses like in those days out here?

AE: Oh, I could tell you lots of stories.

MR: Well, go ahead.

AE: No. I'll tell you after this is shut off. (laughter)

MR: We may fool you.

AE: Oh, we used to have lots of fun.

MR: Now, tell the truth.

AE: Oh, I will.

#2: Tell them, you don't care.

AE: Oh no. I tell ya, there'd be too many, they would get sore over it, ya know. Well, most of them are dead anyway.

#2: You always used to tell us your interesting experiences, so go ahead and tell them.

AE: Well, you take a Halloween night, they used to take Johnny Schultz's horses and they turn them in backwards. So when Johnny Schultz would come out there, he would see his horse facing him. Then they would take his wagon and they would take it apart and they would put it in the depot. The rest I won't tell ya. (laughter)

#2: C'mon now Grandpa. Tell us about Harry Phillips' outhouse.

AE: No, listen, no. Maybe Harry Phillips will tell ya. He'll tell you that story.

MR: What churches and schools were in existence when you came here.

AE: Only Cook. That's four rooms there.

MR: At the place where it is right now?

AE: Yes. And the German Lutheran Church used to be on 95th Street there where the Rambler is. Then there was a Holland Church, do you know where Harnew lives?

MR: Frank Harnew?

AE: Yeah, a couple of doors from there.

MR: There's a little church standing there yet.

AE: All these churches and weddings and that, I was always invited.

MR: What other settlements were close by? Any at all? Was the closest Blue Island?

AE: Oh yes, we couldn't get what we wanted, no problem, we had to go to Blue Island.

MR: How long did it take you to go to Blue Island?

AE: Well, it wouldn't take me long with a motorcycle. With a horse and buggy, it would take a long time.

MR: In other words, a trip to Blue Island then was almost a day, right?

AE: You could figure a half-a-day up and back, anyhow. You see, we only had a couple of stores in Oak Lawn.

MR: Did other members of your family move to Oak Lawn?

AE: No.

MR: Just the one sister and brother that were married and settled here. Did you vote in the election for incorporation in the first election of village officers? You didn't. That was already incorporated wasn't it, Mr. Eichler?

AE: Well, from 87th to 99th and from Central to Cicero, that was incorporated already. But after that, they started taking it piece by piece until they come to Gassner, and he wouldn't go in. He had 20 acres where the trailer camp is now.

MR: At 90th and Cicero?

AE: Yeah.

MR: Did they vote to incorporate those areas?

AE: I suppose they did; I don't remember.

MR: You didn't vote, right?

AE: Oh yes, I voted for everything that there ever was. But I don't remember . . . Then they took in this other part from here from 99th Street to 111th.

MR: Do you recall some of the officers at the time that you moved out here? The names of some of the officers that were the elected officers?

AE: Oh yes. There was Fortin, Harnew. There was Emery, then Harnew again. Then the trustees were Powley, Flors, Piper . . .

#2: Gregor.

AE: Gregor, and George Hoffman, Larson, Winters, and a few other ones.

#2: But I mean, Grandpa, do you remember the officers when you first came out here. Do you remember who was the mayor when you first came out here?

AE: Fortin.

#2: Do you remember who the trustees were when you first moved out here?

AE: No. I had too much work to do right away.

#2: You weren't acquainted with the people, so.

AE: And then we wanted to get the electric down to the farm and the village wouldn't give us it. Then they called us and told us that if we dig our postholes, that they would wire it. So we all got together and we dug our postholes down to 87th Street. And that's how we got electric down there.

MR: Where did you have to bring that electric from?

AE: Right around the village hall, I guess.

#2: 95th Street.

AE: Yeah, they had it.

MR: Do you recall any outstanding works of progress since you have been here?

AE: What does that mean?

MR: In building the village?

AE: Oh God, yes.

MR: Well, go ahead.

AE: Everything come up here. The village has grown the same as my son. He said to me, "When are you going to take a vacation, Dad?" I said, "As soon as I see Oak Lawn." So every Sunday morning, I would take a half-hour and I would go through Oak Lawn. It used to be all prairies. Wonderful homes there. Wherever the only ones I knew up that way were the ones that had cows, ya know. Then when I go back there now, you take like the Victor's is it? He's the builder? Well, I was over there one time and he had a bunch of cows. The next time I come there, he had all swell homes all through there. Now, like this morning, I didn't have nothing to do I went down to Southwest Highway. Gee, I was surprised. Ya know, I wasn't out of here for about five years, ain't ya.

#2: Yeah, quite a while Gramps.

MR: What do you think of the recent growth of the village and how do you feel about Oak Lawn today?

AE: I think it is the most wonderful place in the world.

#2: We agree with you, I think. (laughter)

AE: Everything is improving no matter where I go. I used to take that back of our house there I used to have a bunch of cows running through 111th Street, and look at it now.

#2: I'm right across the alley from you now.

AE: And then you take here at 111th and Cicero used to be an old wagon shop. The hardest job I ever had is when I told old man Hoffman that he had

AE: to move his wagon shop. So, the village board told me they says, "Eichler, you got to go over there and tell old man Hoffman to move that wagon shop." I said, "Me? He'd kill me." So, I went over there. I said, "Mr. Hoffman," I says, "don't that look bad," I says. "You've got your wagon and that out in the street. Don't you think you ought to move them in." "What!" he says. "You just move out here then you tell me what to do." "Oh, no." So, that was all right until two or three months afterwards. I was over where the garage is. Ollie Piper had it. And, old man Hoffman came over, ya know. Oh, wait a minute. I'm getting ahead of my story. He backs out of the garage in the Model T Ford. He hits a fella, then he says to the fella, "Where in the hell did you come from?" (laughter). He says, "Didn't you see me coming out here," he says, "you should stop." Then we went ahead; we were standing across the street. And he says, "By God, that looks bum, don't it?" He started to move it then.

#2: Over where Anderson's feeding place is now, that's where Ollie Piper had his garage over there. I remember when I first came to Oak Lawn when old Mr. Hoffman had those big barns right on 95th Street. Great big old barns just like a country farm, ya know.

AE: He was the best-hearted fellow that ever lived. But to have to tell him what to do! Yep, he was there first.

MR: How big was Chicago when you first moved out here?

AE: Chicago? In just having to take in Ashburn there. So they run all around Oak Lawn.

MR: How long did it take you to get down to the Loop from Oak Lawn at the time?

AE: With the street car?

MR: Well, which every way you went down.

AE: Well, I used to work down on Monroe and LaSalle, I would say a half-hour.

MR: From Oak Lawn?

AE: Oh, no, no. That's from where I used to live.

MR: No, I mean from the time . . .

AE: Oh, I used to take my car. Oh, I could make it in 40 minutes. Yeah, I used to ride on the street car from 63rd and Ashland.

MR: Do you know any stories about Horse Thief Hollow or any of Black Oaks?

AE: Plenty, but I'm not going to tell them. (laughter)

MR: Oh, go ahead, Mr. Eichler.

#2: Ah, come on Grandpa.

AE: No, no.

#2: Tell about how Whitney used to dump all the gangsters out there in the ditches and there was blood.

AE: I told you when it come to the police department I wouldn't mention anything. No, not at all. It would ruin Oak Lawn.

#2: No, I mean, Grandpa. You don't have to say anything about anyone. Just tell how they used to come and dump the gangsters out here.

MR: You don't need to mention any names.

AE: No, we'll talk about something else. Not the police department.

MR: But during the roaring twenties, they did use the surrounding towns, I suppose.

#2: During the bootleg era, they used to dump people out here, didn't they? In the ditches.

AE: I don't know. (laughter)

MR: Do you recall any outstanding events in the middle years, around 1920 and 1930.

AE: In what line?

MR: Anything.

AE: No, it was always the same.

MR: Were the events here during the first World War or any of the families, or the families in service?

AE: Well, I moved out here right after the first world war.

MR: Rightafter the first world war.

AE: Yeah. I sold out my business there and come to Oak Lawn. Uh huh.

MR: Uh huh. Well do you remember if any of the people that lived here had any outstanding service in that war?

AE: I wouldn't know.

MR: You don't know?

AE: No, I wouldn't. When I got on that police force, I had so much darn work to do for the first year, ya know, then a stranger coming to Oak Lawn, then

AE: being a policeman. You know the fix I was in. I had to make friends with everyone.

MR: How long did you work out here before you got on that police force?

AE: About a year.

MR: Just about a year, uh huh.

AE: Yeah. And then it took me about four months to get all my kids organized for school. And then went from house to house and told everybody there that the minute they see a strange man or strange car or anything, call me right away. And they sure worked nice with me.

MR: Wonderful. Uh, did you have any old photographs or clippings of Oak Lawn that we might borrow?

AE: No. I would like to, but I ain't got nothing. All my family had 'em, but they all got away on us.

MR: How did you get your supplies at the time? What stores were here, or where did you have to go after your supplies?

AE: Well, there was old man Schultz, he had the post office and the grocery store right next to where his tavern was.

MR: About 95th and Cook.

AE: Then across the street was Krueger's store, and down farther . . .

MR: What kind of store was that?

AE: Groceries and everything, meat. Then down farther was George Hoffman and Larson had their grocery store there. And Behrend, he had it around the

AE: corner there.

MR: How about hardware and your farm equipment and stuff like that?

AE: Behrend handled everything like that. Poultry feed, everything. Then after I was there for about six months, they made a paper boy out of me. I was the first to deliver the papers around. Then they gave me a job there to go ahead and deliver all the special deliveries from the post office. And then, I think they put in the telephone then. And Marsala was the first paid telephone operator. Miss Powers had the place, ya know, and then when they had to hire an extra girl, they went ahead and hired Marsala.

MR: How old was Marsala at the time?

AE: Just got through with school, 16, 17, something like that.

MR: When did you go into business on 95th, Mr. Eichler?

AE: Go in business? Oh, you mean that little bit of a store?

MR: The little store you had there.

AE: Oh, that was only a little one.

MR: Well, didn't Art Jr. take that over when you . . .

AE: Oh, you mean that feed business and that. No, Arty was going to get married or something like that so I asked him what he was going to do. He said I'm going to keep a drivin' the truck for Kip's. I said, "No, you get into business for yourself." Well, I had the feed business started already. So, I went over to Mr. Behrend and I asked him if he wanted to sell me out the feed business. He said, "No." He said, "I need it," he

AE: said, because my customers all have charge accounts, ya know." "And I've got to have the feed with it." Well, about six months after it, he says, "I'm going to give it up," he says. "Will you sell me the feed." I said, "Sure." Then when Arty got married, he took the feed business over.

MR: And to this day, when did you retire?

AE: I retired when I come out here. (laughter) And I'm 80, and I still keep agoin'.

MR: I know you keep going, but I mean from your store business, Mr. Eichler?

AE: Long time.

MR: It must have been about 1940? 1939, something like that? And now you have your own little store. In other words, your hobby?

AE: Yeah, my hobby. Just so I can talk to someone, and my trade is the mothers and fathers come here with little bitty kids. All the little kids are grandfathers and grandmothers, and their kids keep coming. It's one nice family trade. It's just a good pasttime. That's what it is.

UG: Could you determine how long you were on the police force, Mr. Eichler?

AE: Oh, it must have been 15 years.

UG: And when did you get on, shortly after you got out here?

AE: Sir?

UG: Did you get on the police force shortly after you got out here?

AE: Yeah. About six months to a year after I was out here.

UG: Could you tell us how big the police force was at that time or were you the only one on it?

AE: Well, I was the only steady one. Then, Frank O'Brien, he was Marshall at that time. And he went ahead and Emery was the judge. Then, afterwards, I got to be constable and Frank O'Brien got to be justice of the peace and Emery got mayor.

MR: Do you confine your activities to just the police force or were you ever on the fire department?

AE: Well, I was there when we organized it. We organized the fire department, and we run a dance that night up in Cook's School. We used that big hall up there.

UG: Do you remember when you organized the fire department?

AE: No, Nick Schmalen can tell you that.

MR: Well, I believe that's all down in the history of the fire department. They just wrote it down.

AE: But pretty near everyone in Oak Lawn when there was a fire they all come out and helped. But then they organized the regular fire department and bought their first truck.

UG: Was that the same case in those early years whenever the fire alarm went out that everybody available just went out to help, huh.

AE: Well, I'll tell you the way it was. Now, first when I got on the police force, I had a car. It had a big bell on the side. Then we had a hammer

AE: on this side. So in case our rope would break, then we picked the hammer and we'd hammer. Then when we'd hammer, everybody come. That's the way we had it. You see we weren't allowed to make arrests in the car. And then we went ahead and got the motorcycle.

UG: Do you remember when you got the motorcycle there?

AE: Oh, I got the motorcycle as soon as I got on.

UG: You didn't have any, uh, traffic violators then?

AE: Plenty.

UG: You still had a lot of traffic violators then?

AE: More than ever. In those days, you had more trouble with automobiles than what you have now.

UG: Why do you say that?

AE: Well, we all had these open cars, and they had these big dusters on, o.k. And these fellas there . . . there was a speed limit of 15-20 m.p.h. and when they got in the country you wanted to see how high they could throw that dust.

UG: And of course at that time Oak Lawn was in the country.

AE: Yeah. And then we would go off after them.

UG: On your motorcycle, I betcha you . . . Did you have any trouble catching them on the motorcycle?

AE: No, catch anybody. There's only one fella that ever run away from me, and then it was on foot. That was on Cicero Avenue, and I chased him 85 m.p.h.,

AE: and he turned around and he waved and said goodbye and he just flew. I go back and I tell, what's his name, the mayor there, Frank Harnew, I says I going to quit. He says, "What's the matter with ya?" "Any sucker that runs away from me on a motorcycle," I said, "You want airplane, no more cop." Then I quit.

UG: That's when you left the police force. What business did you go into after you left the police force?

AE: Variety, the same. Well, no. I used to raise guinea pigs for the government. And that was my main item.

UG: Is this a good place to raise guinea pigs?

AE: Oh yeah. And I had that place filled with all of them. I always had 200-250 breeders, ya know. And then when they start getting tests on these bombs that there throwing up now, then they started working on monkeys.

UG: They don't use guinea pigs now.

AE: They don't use them anymore.

UG: They kind of put you out of business.

AE: Yes they did. I give Gliss I think, 50 of them there. The feed man in Oak Lawn, 50. Another fella a hundred. I got rid of them. It used to cost me, ya know, \$10 a week to feed them.

UG: Do you have anything else?

MR. No, I don't.

UG: Do you have anything else you can recall, Mr. Eichler? Anything else you would like to say? About early Oak Lawn or . . .

AE: All I can say is that they are all wonderful people.

UG: You enjoyed living out here.

AE: Oh yes. If I had my life over again, I'd come right out again. We got nice neighbors. We got nice kids. Sometimes I had forty kids in my yard there. All the neighbors bring them over. And then you take the whole O'Brien family, I was there babysitter, ya know. I raised every one of the. You know little Jolly, the big copper?

UG: Yeah.

AE: He used to sit on the motorcycle handle.

MR: In other words, you made our present police force police-minded at the time.

AE: Our police force there were pretty near all my kids. And you know those police there, they look after me just the same as if I was a little kid. They come at night time to show their lights in the yard to everything is o.k.. During the day, they come in and ask me how I am.

END OF TAPE

Shirley Miller, Transcriptionist