

Transcript of
Oral History Interview
with
Walter Stiles

by
Millie Rahn

October 5, 2004

Manchester, New Hampshire

Interviewed and transcribed by Millie Rahn, folklorist and oral historian

Transcript of interview with Walter Stiles (WS) by Millie Rahn (MR) on October 5, 2004, at his home at 226 Sagamore Street in Manchester, New Hampshire. Total interview time: 177 minutes (2.9 hours). Both sides of two (2) 90-minute tapes.

Tape 1/Side A

MR: Today is Tuesday, October 5th, 2004. My name is Millie Rahn. I'm an oral historian and folklorist. I'm here in Manchester, New Hampshire, at the home of Walter Stiles. Let's start with some biographical information. Could you give me your full name, when and where you were born, a little bit about growing up here in this house, and in Manchester—things such as going to college, being in the military, and then we'll go from there?

WS: I was born in Manchester, New Hampshire, at Annie Cameron's Maternity Hospital at 131 Russell Street. Russell Street is up here [near his house]. It was in a Victorian house. It was a maternity hospital. I found out some time ago that Annie Cameron was in the first nursing class of the Elliott Hospital back around the turn of the [20th] century. She started this maternity hospital and many of the kids in this neighborhood were born at Annie Cameron's Maternity Hospital at 131 Russell: the Harkinson boys and Shirley Harkinson that lived up the street--they don't live there [now]; two of them are gone now anyway—and my two brothers; they are both living.

My mother had to stay at the hospital for three weeks in those days. It cost 35 dollars a week to stay there. My father gave me the receipts and I have those somewhere here in the house. After that, she left Annie Cameron's hospital with the baby carriage there. She wheeled the baby carriage north on Russell Street and took a left on Sagamore Street and into the driveway here and that was it.

MR: What date were you born?

WS: I was born October 11, 1922.

MR: So your birthday is soon.

WS: That's right. It isn't far away. We're going to celebrate it up to the Back Room [local restaurant] here very shortly with another guy I went to school with. He was born October 12th, 1922. We're going to have a party this Friday.

MR: So you were born at the local hospital. Where did you go to school?

WS: I went to Straw School, which is down on Chestnut Street. That was the elementary school. I started in kindergarten. We used to walk to school. I started in kindergarten when I was five years old and then went through all the grades. Miss Winegar was the first-grade teacher, Miss Bailey was my second-grade teacher, Miss Mullen the third-grade teacher, Miss Austin the fourth-grade teacher, and Miss Pinkman, the fifth-grade teacher. All the guys in the school were in love with her because she was very beautiful. Very beautiful.

Then Miss Bemis was the sixth-grade teacher. Miss Gould was the seventh-grade teacher. Then the eighth-grade teacher was Maud Willand and the principal was Alta Willand, her sister. Everything in those days was Miss. None of the teachers were married. That school was run by women. In fact, Alta Cera Willand, the principal of the school, was a very stern woman. I never saw her smile. She was like the great stone face. She was a great educator, but I'll tell you about that later.

MR: How did you family come to settle in this house?

WS: My father was born in Massachusetts, actually. He worked for the E.R. Mitchell Dental Supply people in Worcester, Massachusetts. They supplied dental supplies: false teeth, plaster, Novocain, and so forth. Mr. Warren ran that operation in Worcester. They decided to start one in Manchester, so my father came up here in 1913 and started the E.R. Mitchell Dental Supply people in the (Kennard?) Building at 1008 Elm Street, which is where the mall is today on Elm Street. He started there and worked there for 46 years. He ran the whole thing.

He was a wonderful father. He was really something! He was a hard-working man. He never went to college, but he knew more-- He used to read all the time. When my father had a birthday, or for Christmas, we'd always ask him what he wanted. He'd say this book or that book and so on; for example The Importance of Living by Lin Yutang or "I Remember": The Autobiography of Abraham Flexner. My father used to read all the time before going to bed. He had more wisdom and knowledge.

Speaking of reading, we had a big red leather chair and our dad would read to the three of us before going to bed at night. At seven o'clock on Sunday evenings, he would read one chapter out of the Bible. We went to the First Baptist Church at the corner of Union and Concord Streets. We also went to Sunday School and we were baptized there.

[My father] was just a great man, that's all. He died when he was 91 and a half. He was just a wonderful man. Even though my mother was in the state hospital, he hired live-in housekeepers to come here and take care of his three boys. Howie, my oldest brother; and then myself; and then Herb, my youngest brother.

MR: Tell me a little about your mother.

WS: My mother went to LaSalle Junior College, actually, in the Boston area. She was a Whall. Dorothy Allen Whall. Actually, I think she was brought up by her grandmother. Her grandmother was a very nice woman. I just barely remember her. She used to be a watercolor painter. They would come up and visit my mother. For some reason or other, my mother became bipolar. I would be in bed at night upstairs and she'd be screaming at my father. He just figured it was bad for his three boys to have this going on, so he committed her to the state hospital and she died there, actually. Once in a great while she would get out. She'd want to come back to Manchester to see us kids, but they used to take her back up. Of course, she had privileges up there. She wasn't so bad that she had to be locked in a cell or anything. She just died there, that's all. I guess she had heart problems in the end. She was a very beautiful woman, too. Very nice. We have pictures of her. That's the way it was.

MR: So both of your parents came from Massachusetts, and you were the first one to really put down your roots here and you've been here every since.

WS: That's right. In Manchester. In New Hampshire. My oldest brother goes to Florida in the wintertime, but he lived up on Salmon Street until they sold their house. Salmon Street's the next street up. They built that house in a banking right after World War Two. They only paid 600 dollars for the lot, but they couldn't afford to build the upper part of the house, so they lived in this kind of like subterranean house, but it was really nice. They had two children, Kenny and Linda. My other brother, Herb, he lived up on Lindahl Street with his wife and two children, but they got a divorce and eventually he moved up to Sunapee and he married another woman. So he's been married twice.

MR: You were saying that this house was built about 1890?

WS: I'd say right around 1890. I was always going to research that, but I never got around to it. I know they figured it was so far out, that when this house was built and the ones in this area-- They built the house across the street and the woman lived there for a short while and she didn't want to live there; it was too far out of the city. In fact, the first house my father looked at was at the corner of Sagamore and Union Street. Thank the Lord he didn't buy that place, because we'd be on Union Street, which is a very busy street. Sagamore is not bad. The street was first paved when I was five years old.

So he moved in here. They were raising potatoes in buckets in the front room of this house when my father bought the house. Imagine that. Of course, it faces south. My father always said, if you're going to build a house, face it south because in the wintertime you get the heat from the sun.

We had a wonderful childhood here. We really did. It was great. When it got hot in the summertime, my father bought what we called a storage tent. We had it out here in the side yard. We had a floor. We'd lean the floor up against the grape arbor in the fall, which is gone now, but the grapevine is still around. We'd lean it up against the grape arbor and when spring came and it began to get warm, we'd get the tent out of the cellar, put the tent up, and we'd sleep out all summer long. Three boys. You'd walk into the tent and there'd be one bunk here, one bunk here, and I always had the back bunk. So we slept out there. My older brother was always bothered by mosquitoes for some reason or other. He said I'm going in the house. They never bit Herb and they never bit me, but they always seemed to bite him.

MR: Your background was kind of New England Yankee?

WS: That's right, it is.

MR: Were most of the neighbors of similar backgrounds?

WS: There were a lot of French-speaking people here and Swedish people. In fact, right next door was Mr. Frank Ring. He's the first one that I remember living here. He was a house painter and wallpaper and paper hanger. They had no children, but he liked cars. He had a Jordan automobile and she had a Packard automobile with a rumble seat in it. When the parades came to Manchester, I'd go over to the house. She always had candy in a dish. When I was little, I'd go over there and Mrs. Ring would give me some candy. One day the Barnum and Bailey Circus came to town and she said, Walter, would you like to go down to see the circus parade? So I rode in the rumble seat going down and watched the circus parade from a rumble seat. Mrs. Ring liked flowers. That had an influence on me.

Then the Duhaimes lived in the three-decker down below. Mr. Duhaime was a plumber. Great people! The upper two floors were rented. However, the two front bedrooms on the second floor were used by the Duhaimes, as there were eight children. Lucy Duhaime is still living there. She never got married. She took care of her parents while they were living at home. They're both gone now and some of her brothers and sisters are gone. Lucy still lives there; she's about half a year old than I am, so as far as this neighborhood is concerned, she's lived here a little bit longer than I have.

MR: When you were growing up, did you do a lot of things in Manchester or did you go other places?

WS: Yes, I did. We went to Camp MI-TE-NA in the summertime because he [father] had to give these women who took care of us, like Nora Goodell—Nora Johnson I should say; she married Ernest Goodell—they needed a vacation taking care of three boys.

The YMCA camp is Camp MI-TE-NA up on Half Moon Pond in Barnstead, New Hampshire. It's still there. In fact I get bulletins from Camp MI-TE-NA. I'm a Camp MI-TE-NA alumni. In those days, he used to pay 30 dollars a week for three boys. It was 10 dollars a week for each. That was a lot of money in the Depression. We liked Camp MI-TE-NA and it was really very, very nice. We used to swim in Half Moon Pond; we learned how to swim up there. We would stay there three weeks.

You never really got homesick, but I had a camp leader one time who was a very ugly guy. One year I said to my father, I said I want to go home for a week. He said all right, if you want to go home. Then I told him the story. That counselor was fired right away because he was abusive to children. We got over that all right and I met a lot of guys up there. The Harkinson boys went to Camp MI-TE-NA. We went to camp for years. A lot of them are gone now. Freddy Truesdale went to Camp MI-TE-NA. His mother owned a restaurant here at the Daniel Webster Highway—Alma's Tea Room--and they used to do a tremendous business. I met a lot of fellows at Camp MI-TE-NA.

The entrance at that camp is the same as it was when we went back in the '30s. It hasn't changed, but they've got more cabins up there. In fact, I was one of the trustees at Camp MI-TE-NA several years ago, along with Arthur Dobles, who owned the big Chevrolet unit down here at South Willow Street.

The land behind our house was owned by the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company, the largest textile mill in the world. When we grew up, the Amoskeag Woods started right behind the garage and they went all the way to Webster Street. All the way to Webster Street. That was a big, huge area of woodland property. We used to cross-country ski in the wintertime. We used to climb trees. I used to have a favorite tree on the sandbank. They dug sand out there to build these streets in this area. The sandbank was there. Pollywog Pond was there at the foot of the sandbank and we used to get pollywogs in the summertime. It was really great. Then we had a lot of birch trees out there, so we used to see how far we could go in the birch trees without touching the ground. Of course, those are the days of Johnnie Weissmuller and the Tarzan movies. They called me Walt Tarzan. I used to swing through the trees. [Laughs] We also built lean-to's. Christian Brook ran through the woods starting in the northeast corner.

MR: Besides going to the circus and climbing trees and going to camp, what other kinds of things did you do around town?

WS: In the winter, we would walk through the woods to Dorrs Pond to skate. We also had an electric train which we would set up in the play room, Herb's bedroom.

My father had the Brown's Farm come up and clear-- He used to rent land out of the backyard here for two dollars a year from the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. So Brown's Farm came over and they got rid of the trees in the part of the area there and we had a baseball field right out back here. We used to play baseball every night. I loved first base. I was never a real athlete or anything, but it was a lot of fun.

Then we had our own track meets. We used to have track meets. We used to have pole vaulting. There was a manufacturing company in Plymouth, New Hampshire, and

my father would buy a pole-vaulting pole. My older brother was a very good pole vaulter. Very good. I wasn't very good, but we used to high jump. We had track meets, we had shot put. We'd find a big rock and see who could throw the shot. We entertained ourselves all the time. Broad jump, et cetera.

In fact, I was never a boy scout. Stewart Harkinson was a boy scout, but the rest of us weren't even boy scouts because we had everything to do right here. We entertained ourselves! We also put on shows in the camp in the back yard. Talent shows. We also had a stove in it for winter use. And we had our bikes. When we got to be a certain age, my father would buy us a bike. We were all over Manchester all the time. The Barnum and Bailey circus was coming? We'd go on our bikes and watch them put the tents up down near the athletic field. It was very exciting. We went everywhere on bicycles. In fact, we even hiked out to Massabesic Lake. Didn't even take the bike out there. We'd hike to Massabesic Lake and that's about five miles from here. We'd walk out there and walk back. Climb the big pine trees of Massabesic Lake. We were a bunch of monkeys.

[Laughs]

MR: What do you remember about the Depression around Manchester?

WS: I have very vivid memories of the Depression. I was going to Straw School in those days, and the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company went bankrupt on December 24th, 1935. That was the largest textile mill in the world. In fact, Manchester was named after Manchester, England. There are a lot of mill buildings down there now, but you should have seen it when they really had mill buildings.

Mill buildings were on, and some still are, both sides of the Merrimack River. Over 15 thousand people were employed making cotton goods and woolen goods.

Thousands of women worked, as well as men. The housing for the lower-paid workers was at the southern end of the complex. Supervisors had better housing to the north along Canal Street. In fact, quite a few of the workers' buildings have been torn down, but there are many still standing.

It was a huge textile mill. They did everything. People would come from Scotland, Greece, England, Ireland, and come to work in Manchester. The French-speaking people up in Québec would come to Manchester. They left their farms.

It was huge; you can see the buildings that are down there now. They've restored a lot of the buildings where the workers lived. Some of the supervisors' buildings are now condos. All these executives' mansions on North Elm Street, they were mostly people that had something to do with banking or the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company or the Boston and Maine Railroad or the Eppleys, and the R.J. Sullivan Cigar Corporation, makers of Dexter, low-priced, and 7-20-4 cigars, high-priced.

It made me think. They used to have a beacon on that building. That building's still there and that's been restored. It used to guide the pilots and airplanes going into the Manchester airport. Lindy—Lindbergh—flew over Manchester. I was about five years old. I was walking down the street, I had my metal airplane—and I don't know where that ever went to—and everybody had Lucky Lindy goggles. So the Spirit of St. Louis flew right over Manchester. Flew over Concord too.

MR: You were in high school during the Depression.

WS: That's right. I was in high school during the Depression. When I graduated from Straw School in 1936, I went to Central High School. I met a lot of my friends at Central High School. In fact, I'm in contact with a lot of them. When we have our

reunions, we set up reunions at the Back Room here or whatever. That was a great school and it still is a great school.

When President Bush came here to Manchester the other day up at McIntyre's Slope, just up the hill here, the Central High School band was there and I said to some of the kids, well, I graduated from Central in 1940. They looked at me like that!

MR: That was the only year that Central and West [high schools] had a combined graduation. Tell me about that.

WS: Yes, combined graduation. Mayor Caron was the mayor. We had it at the state armory down here on Canal Street. That was the hottest night. Of course everybody wore saddle shoes and wool jacket and white flannel pants. Everybody liked to dress up. Necktie and everything, even though it was so hot. We sat in the east end of the armory and it was so hot that night, all the lights up there. All the bugs would go up at the lights and we had a bug shower all night long while Mayor Caron was passing out the diplomas. John Clayton of the Union-Leader wrote about that some time ago. I know John and I told him that was our graduation. I think we had about three to four thousand people in the audience at the combined graduation. That was the only one we ever had.

MR: Why was it combined?

WS: I don't know. I guess somebody decided that maybe it would be a good idea to combine it, but that was the first and last time they ever did it.

MR: The first and last. So you got out of high school in 1940, just on the eve of the war here.

WS: When I got out high school in 1940, I went to work for the Public Service Company of New Hampshire at 1087 Elm Street as an office boy. Twelve dollars a week less 12 cents Social Security. I was tickled to death with it, because I had a paper route. By the time I left my paper route on North Union Street, in the best part of the city actually, John L. Sullivan, the secretary of the Navy, was one of my customers. Colonel Knox, who owned the Union-Leader ran for president, as you remember, way back. He was there and his house is still there. It was five miles. I'd take my bike from here, pick up the papers at the corner of Chestnut and Webster Street, across from the old Webster Street fire station.

Mr. and Mrs. Mann owned the store. If we behaved ourselves, if it was raining or snowing, we could take our papers inside and count them. These routes were owned by the Union-Leader. I didn't have to collect or anything; I just delivered. So I had a bike with a rack in it and I delivered the papers. I went up Chestnut Street to Clark Street, took a right on Clark Street and took a left on Ray Street and these old folks, Mr. and Mrs. Briggs, are sitting on the porch there in summer; they used to wait for the paper. I never missed delivering a paper. In fact, I delivered my papers during the '38 hurricane.

I got to the Poff house, which is on the left-hand side. The house looks the same way today as it did when I delivered papers. She said, young man, don't you know there's a hurricane? I said, Mrs. Poff, I know the wind is blowing hard and I am sopping wet, but the papers are dry. She said, well, you go home! I said I'm not going home; I'm going to deliver my papers. And that's exactly what I did. I delivered all the papers. Everybody got their paper. I'd either scale them in there or deliver them. Up on Pine Crest, I'd wait for the trees to come down and then I'd scale the paper in. Well,

everybody got the paper. Yes, everybody got their paper. That paper route was great because every time I'd deliver the paper, after the papers were done, I'd start at the top of Union Street, no hands on the bike, and I'd coast all the way down Webster Street.

[Laughs]

MR: How devastated was Manchester by the hurricane?

WS: Manchester was really devastated. That night it was really something. Getting home was bad enough, because all the wires were down. We had three silver maple trees out in front of this house. The big one right out here and then one on each side of the property. The branches came down, but they never really damaged the house. In those days you didn't have chain saws. When I got home, the lights were out here. We had candles. We had an old lamp that's upstairs in one of the bedrooms. My father lit that up and it was several days before we got electricity again.

That '38 hurricane. It came from the southeast. It was really something. We were really protected right here at this spot, but as I recall, the city of Manchester overall lost between 40 and 50 thousand shade trees. You see, it had been raining for several days before the hurricane. The ground was soft and everything, and when the wind came-- We weren't alerted to hurricanes in those days.

MR: Was school closed?

WS: I was in school that day, but the hurricane really didn't start in this area until late in the afternoon. The next day, I did go to school anyway, because I didn't want to miss school. [Laughs] Well, they turned us home. I was one of four or five Central High School graduates of 1940 that never missed a day of school. Never missed a day of school! We had our pictures taken in front of the Practical Arts Building.

After that hurricane, that next day it smelled like ground leaves all over the city here. It just whipped everything. It did a tremendous job. A tremendous job. Trees came down everywhere. There were nice trees over in front of Simmons's house and they came down. Some of them were going around like this [mimics motion], but the hurricane ended. It was an exciting time and, of course, being a young kid, you enjoyed the hurricanes, just like I enjoy snowstorms.

Everybody used to slide on Sagamore Street, you know. The city of Manchester used to block off the streets and about four o'clock in the afternoon, the city truck would come around and they'd hang a kerosene lamp on the barriers that were delivered at early snowfall time and picked up in the spring. Then the people who lived here had a right to drive to their homes, but other people who didn't live here had to go another way. The lanterns were picked up late in the evening, filled, and brought back the next night. They used to block off East High Street, Sagamore Street, Trenton Street, and several other streets.

In fact, a couple of years ago I went before the board of mayor and aldermen. We had a lot of snow that year. I said just for old times' sake, how about blocking off Sagamore Street one time? They didn't do it. But I have my sled. I have my Flexible Flyer sled down cellar. It was the fastest sled on Sagamore Street. I used to run and take a belly-flop on the sled. There were days and there were nights when there would be a hundred or 125 girls and boys sliding on Sagamore Street. Some days when the sliding was real good, there'd be seven or eight double-runners on Sagamore Street. Saturday and Sunday were very busy!

MR: This was the place to be.

WS: It was wonderful. The thing of it is you walk. You walk. You walked up. You came up, you came down. You walked back up again. One time I decided this is really an icy night. Of course, they didn't use salt on the roads in those days. Up now, where the Veterans Hospital is—Smith Road—we went all the way down Smith Road, all the way down Blodgett Street, down to Oak Street, on to Sagamore Street, and all the way down to Union Street. One slide. But you'd walk. Great exercise. Traffic was minimal.

When we went sliding after supper, my father would say, now when I turn the light on, it's time for you boys to come in. Well, my older brother didn't want to do much sliding, but Herb and I did. We'd go by and say, well, maybe we'll get one more slide in.

Of course I wasn't much of a student. We didn't have backpacks. We didn't take that stuff to do. We might have taken a book home now and then, but at Straw School, we had to memorize a lot of poetry. They frown on that today, but I think they're beginning to say that maybe poetry's great. We had to memorize the Vision of Sir Launfal by James Russell Lowell. [Recites] 'Over his keys the musing organist/Beginning doubtfully and far away/First lets his fingers wander as they list/Then builds a bridge of dreamland for his lay,' and so on and so forth.

That's the one where you have [recites] 'What is so rare as a day in June?/Then, if ever, come perfect days/And Heaven tries earth if it be in tune/And over it softly her warm ear lays/Whether we look or whether we listen/We hear life murmur or see it glisten/Every clod feels a stir of might/An instinct within it that reaches and towers/And groping blindly above it for light/Climbs to a soul in grass and flower.' We memorized those.

MR: It stays with you, obviously.

WS: Yes, I never forgot it. We used to memorize Love of Country by Sir Walter Scott. [Recites] 'Breathes there a man with soul so dead/Who never to himself has said'—of course he was an English poet. '...Never to himself has said/This is my own, my native land/Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned/As home his footsteps he has turned/From wandering on a foreign strand/If such there breathe, go mark him well/For him, no minstrel's raptures swell/High though his titles, proud his name/Boundless his wealth as wish can claim/Despite those titles, power, and pelf/The wretch concentered all in self/And living shall forfeit fair renown/And doubly dying, shall go down/To the vile dust from when he sprung/Unwept, unhonored, and unsung.' That's all.

MR: That's marvelous! Also, I've noticed that you have your five-mile paper route, and sledding, and going out after supper, and walking.

WS: And the woods, Amoskeag Woods.

MR: And you probably walked to school and back.

WS: Oh, sure, we did!

MR: That's very different from today.

WS: I can understand why the kids today don't want to walk. They can't walk to school; the drivers here are horrendous, really. They're everywhere. They don't watch out. We have people killed. Somebody was killed over here on Oak Street the other night. The guy was a drunken driver, but that DWI stuff today--

The city of Manchester, when I was a boy, had a population of about 75 thousand people. In the whole state of New Hampshire, there were probably 75 to a hundred thousand vehicles. Now, in the city of Manchester alone, there are over a hundred

thousand vehicles, right in this city. Traffic everywhere. Cars everywhere. Two-car families. Four-car families. We're a one-car family. We got used to that. Being a salesman, we had a company car. I didn't have any money anyway.

When I first got my job with Morris Alper and Sons, Inc., in January 1953, I had a Pontiac convertible. A 1951 Pontiac convertible. It was really nice. After I started that job, left Portland for training-- We had an office at 31 and a half Exchange Street in Portland, Maine. That was our branch office. So I'd have to go there, and then the main office was in Brookline, Mass. When I pulled up in front of Forcier's Market in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, he said for a guy like you, you don't need any business. I said, what do you mean I don't? He said, you don't need my business with a car like that. I said, do you know what I'm selling? Do you know what I'm offering to you? Why do you make a decision like that? So I started right out with the guy. [Laughs]

MR: Let's do the chronology and then we'll get into this, because I want to get back to your travels and other things. So you got out of high school and you worked as an office boy.

WS: That's right. I worked for the Public Service Company. Worked on Amherst Street, also in the repair department--toasters, et cetera--then back to the third-floor accounting department. I worked there until I went into the Marine Corps.

MR: When was that?

WS: It was 1942. They landed on Guadalcanal on August 6, 1942. I thought that the Marine Corps on Guadalcanal-- That was the first Allied offensive on the Pacific, when the First Marine Division landed at Guadalcanal. I wasn't there; I wasn't in the Marine Corps yet. I went down to the Marine Corps recruiting office here, in what is

Divine Millimet, the post office there—it's a law firm now—on Hanover Street; Hanover and Chestnut. I'd go over from the Public Service building. I'd asked my boss. I had to go to the post office anyway and I said I'm going to go to the Marine recruiting office.

Every time I'd get up to the Marine recruiting office, my heart would be pumping. [Mimics] You've got high blood pressure! So I went back seven times and the corpsman said pull those chairs together. They didn't have a fancy office in those days. They had kitchen chairs. [Mimics] Lie down on the chairs and put your arm out like that. So I put my arm out like that and the corpsman came along and gave me the blood pressure check. Says you're in! So I calmed down. That was it.

I enlisted November 6th. That was the day: November 6th, 1942. We couldn't go back home except to get our toilet articles. We had to sleep in the Cadillac Hotel down on Chestnut Street. I had to sleep with another guy in the same bed. [Laughs]

MR: Was the idea so you wouldn't change your mind?

WS: Mr. Harvey over here, who's long since gone, he was the night watchman at the Cadillac Hotel. I remember him coming in. He called me Waldy. He said, Waldy, everything's going to be all right. He liked me and I liked him. He said everything's going to be all right. So the next day we got up and we went down to the Webster lunch place on Elm Street: Nick Bentas's father's lunch room. And we walked down to the railroad station, so that was the seventh of November in 1942. We got on the train and, of course, in those days in Manchester, about 125 trains went through the city of Manchester going to White River Junction and going to all the places. Trains were everywhere and I loved trains. My dad and two brothers saw me off.

MR: That was the B and M?

WS: The Boston and Maine Railroad. We used to call it the Bent and Mangled Railroad. [Clock chimes] That's a grandfather's clock, of course. That's a John Wood Philadelphia clock. It was made between 1770 and 1790. It's been in my family since that time. George Washington was alive when that clock was striking.

MR: That gives me chills. It's wonderful.

WS: It's beautiful. I wind it every Monday morning. I like clocks anyway. My brother made that clock [in corner of room]. He's retired. He buys the works and does the woodwork. I've got clocks all over the place.

Anyway, Manchester was a booming railroad town. It really was. I think one of the difficulties we have in this city and all across the United States [is] every time they build a shopping center, they widen the roads so that cars can get there. The railroad should be going to Boston. Really.

They had a commercial when I was a kid. [Recites] 'Some drivers claim that a railroad train/is a mess of smoke and cinders./But it rolls along/with a cheerful song/While I look out the winders./Smiling while I ride in style/I hear that whistle tooting/For it's cheaper far in a railroad car/To do your day's commuting.' That was one of the things they had on the radio. I'd listen to that.

I went to Parris Island. I never really got homesick in the Marine Corps. Never. A lot of guys were homesick. Parris Island wasn't a resort; that's for sure. I was issued a Springfield O-3 rifle. Rifle number 917218. It was a bolt action rifle, too. If you didn't know your rifle number, you were in deep trouble with the D.I.'s—the drill instructor. We used to drill from morning to night. You'd be exhausted at the end of the day. Bayonet practice. It was everything.

MR: Were you mostly with other guys from New Hampshire or from other parts of the country?

WS: These guys, yes. Arthur Conlon, he was from Manchester. I didn't even know Arthur, but he was in charge of the detail going to Parris Island. They were all from New Hampshire, but I didn't know them really. I didn't know any of them. I've got pictures of all the guys. I know Arthur Conlon died of Alzheimer's. He died up at the veterans house up here in Tilton, New Hampshire.

MR: Were there many French people in the units?

WS: There were quite a few. That's right. There were a lot of French boys, yes.

MR: I bring that up because I just interviewed someone in Fort Kent, Maine, who is Acadian French and did not speak English until he went into the Army during the war. He was 18 and had never spoken English.

WS: Canadian-French, that's right. In fact, Manchester in those days had 50 thousand Canadian-French speaking people. Shopping night was Thursday night. That was the day they got paid at the Amoskeag Mills. Everybody would walk down and shop. That was the day when shopping was on Elm Street. It was just simply wonderful. The Woolworth's five and 10-cent store. Goodman's bookstore. Hill's Department Store. Varick's. Moreau's. Leavitt's Department Store. The Manchester Dry Goods. Pariseau's Department Store. Nelson's Department Store. It was really great.

I'll tell you about one of the fellows that enlisted. Roland Boisvert was his name. We got to Parris Island, after we went through all the rigmarole of having chow and getting some of the clothes we were supposed to get, we formed a platoon at Parris Island. Platoon number 939. Nineteen forty-two. They started to call the roll. We were

still in civilian clothes. We were tired, I'll tell you. It was a long ride to Parris Island from Manchester.

We got out there and they started calling Smiths, Jones, Stiles, Boisvert.

[Pronounced Boyce-vert.] I was standing next to Roland Boisvert [pron. Bow-ver], see? And I said, Roland, I think they mean Bow-ver. Roland had a wonderful sense of humor and he said— Of course you sirred everybody at Parris Island. He said, sir, that is pronounced Bow-ver. And that rebel D.I. came over to Roland and said, lad, as long as you're in Platoon 939, when I call Boycevert, be sure you answer. He [Roland] said, yes, sir! So he called him Boycevert all during Parris Island. [Laughs] But we did have a lot of French-peaking people, yes.

I don't know where most of them went. Roland, I know, after the war, he had combat experience and he was working at the veterans hospital here. He tried to commit suicide working up on the V.A. hospital. He became a vegetable, actually, after that and he died. In fact, his wife worked for the Ford dealership up on the Daniel Webster Highway. A lot of guys in the war had all these memories about what they went through and so on.

MR: What did you do after Parris Island?

WS: After Parris Island, I went to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. I didn't know where I was going. When you go in the Marine Corps, you go anywhere. You go where they send you. So they sent me to Camp Lejeune. Hadnot Point, North Carolina. It was a beautiful place. They were just building all these brick barracks. I lived in M.B. 309. Marine Barracks 309. They were H-shaped barracks. They were just like an 'H.' There were four squadrons upstairs and down on each end of the building. There were a

hundred guys in each squadron, so there were 400 guys in each barracks. I found out that we had to study radar, which was the 268 radar. The radar, the range, as math, and elevation, they were shooting down the German planes over London. Nobody could figure out how they did it. Well, that was radar. We couldn't write home and mention the word radar. We couldn't do anything. It was a secret weapon, actually.

So I learned that and we learned to train on the radar. Then guys were getting their general orders to go here and there; the 14th Naval District Pearl Harbor and so on. So I spoke to the sergeant major and said where am I going? Where's Par going? He said, you guys are going to the Army Air Force School of Applied Tactics in Orlando, Florida. That was the filter center where you learned about the air defense grid. The whole globe is divided up into the air defense grid. We went down there and goofed off, but we learned something.

Then we went back to Camp Lejeune and then they transferred us to Cherry Point, North Carolina. There's where we actually got training on the 268 radar and also on the air defense grid. So we left from there on a troop train with Pullman cars and went to Los Angeles and down to San Diego to Camp Miramar. There's where we waited. We didn't have dormitories like they have them today. We lived in a big warehouse. Third Marine Air Warning Squadron. There's where we lived and then we went overseas on the USS Kadashan Bay, a small aircraft carrier, to South Pacific—Espiritu Santo, New Hebrides. They were transporting F4U fighter planes down there. We were passengers on that aircraft carrier. It was one of those Kaiser carriers, about 875 feet long. We zig-zagged all across the Pacific until we got to Espiritu Santo.

In the service, what you do is you arrive and you wait. So we set up our radar equipment on Espiritu Santo and we practiced. Just like the planes practice at the MAG 11; Marine Air Group 11. We had an airfield there and we practiced there. The planes came in and the planes came out. Finally, they decided to move us to a Marine Air Depot Squadron One, which was down-- This was a coral island. It was a beautiful island. They had the largest floating drydock in the world right out in Malekula Bay.

I got to go out to the floating drydock one day and the USS California battleship was out there. I spoke to one of the swab jockeys there and said can you give me a ride out there? I'd like to see what a battleship looks like in a floating drydock. I did. It's really something to see. We stayed at Espiritu Santo for awhile longer and then we went up to Bougainville in the Solomon Islands. We went right by Guadalcanal. We were just waiting on Bougainville because the Australians had a perimeter there on Bougainville. The Marine Corps took the island originally. There were 25 thousand Japanese on Bougainville. These guys, these pilots, would fly over everyday, fire bomb their crops. . That was the idea of Admiral Halsey. [End of Tape 1/Side A; 48.5 minutes]

Tape 1/Side B

WS: Admiral Halsey decided that that's the way they would do it. They wouldn't take the whole island. They wouldn't kill all the enemy on the island. They'd just let them die on the vine and that's what they did. Of course, I was trained in combat in the Marine Corps, but I was not a combat Marine. I never got in combat. I was close to it, but that was it.

MR: So you were doing the radar?

WS: That's right. I was in radar. We all had rifles. I had an M-1 rifle. We all had rifles and we all had helmets, because every Marine is a rifleman. When worse comes to worse, it doesn't make any difference whether you're in radar or what you are, you use that rifle. They were nine-pound rifles.

Then we stayed on Bougainville for quite a while. The Australians actually manned the perimeter. I'd go up on the Piva River on Bougainville. Roy Miller, my buddy who's now in Pensacola, Florida, we'd go up there and kind of swim on the Piva River and the Japanese, you could see them up further. The Australians, guards, would have tea every afternoon at three o'clock. I've got pictures of us drinking tea. We'd hitchhike a ride back down to the camp.

Then in 1945, we left Bougainville on a Liberty ship and went to Hollandia, New Guinea. We didn't get off at Hollandia. We went over to the Philippine Islands and down to Mindoro Island. There we waited again. I rode a water buffalo on Mindoro Island. The Filipinos were great people, wonderful people. We didn't even put tents up, because that was the non-rainy season. Incidentally, we were transporting beer also to one of the air wings in the Philippines. There were five thousand cases of beer when we loaded the ship. When we arrived in the Philippines at Mindoro, there were 25 hundred cases left. That's all there was.

MR: It evaporated.

WS: That's right. [Laughs] When you're down to the hold of the Liberty ship, you had ways of hiding things. We weren't supposed to go down there anyway. So they drank the beer we were transporting. Anyway, we waited there. The war had moved way up

north by that time. We were on Mindanao in the Philippines. We landed at Malabang, Mindanao, just about the time that President Roosevelt died. We were on an L.S.T. [landing ship tank] at that time. We landed and the Japanese were all gone. The Filipino guerrillas had killed all the Japanese and thrown their bodies in an old Spanish fort there. So we set up radar there and the whole operation.

The first atomic bomb was dropped while we were there. You maybe recall or read it in history, anyway, that it was dropped on Hiroshima first and the second one was dropped on Nagasaki and then the war ended. The emperor surrendered. That was it.

Harry Truman was the president then. When I got back, when he ran for office again, he's the only Democratic president I should have voted for that I didn't. Because we were all getting ready to go to Japan. We were changing all the stuff on our wooden crates and so on, but we didn't go.

MR: When did you actually get home?

WS: We flew out of Malabang on a C-46 and ended up at an island between Leyte and Samar. Tubauai Islands. The war was over. I had enough points to get home, so we waited there for a while. Then we got on the USS Prince William, which was another Kaiser carrier. We had survivors of the Indianapolis, that was sunk. The Indianapolis was one of the ships that carried an atomic bomb up to where it could be loaded on an airplane. We had several outfits and we were all going home. We played pinochle all day long. We had a Captain (Pedersen?). He was the captain of that ship. He says, boys, he says, welcome to the USS Prince William. All we ask that you do is stay out of the way of the crew. Enjoy yourselves. The war is over and you've earned a rest. So just enjoy it. And we did.

We finally got to San Diego. We landed at San Diego. We were all sleeping on cots and everything, so instead of doing anything with the cots, we just threw them overboard. I can see the wake of that carrier and all these cots going down. [Laughs]

We got to San Diego and we went back up to Camp Miramar and then we took a troop train from Los Angeles all the way to Cherry Point, North Carolina. Geez, I remember going through Hannibal, Missouri, along the Mississippi River. The houses along the railroad tracks had welcome home signs. It was great, really. Everybody felt so relieved.

Then I got a 30-day furlough and came to Manchester and then went back to Cherry Point and on November 23, 1945 I got discharged from the Marine Corps. Then we hitchhiked, Joe Meehl, who was from Middletown, Connecticut, and I hitchhiked. They gave you money, but we hitchhiked and saved the money. I stayed at Joe's house for two days, then took the train to Manchester. You could get a ride anywhere in those days.

MR: That was your first big trip after leaving this little neighborhood. You literally saw the world.

WS: I saw the world, that's right. We did. Incidentally, when I enlisted, we had an encyclopedia table here. When I first came home with the Marine Corps literature, which I still have actually, my father said why don't you enlist in the Navy where you'll have a good place to sleep? I said, Dad, I'm enlisting in the Marine Corps. That's all there is to it. And I did. My two brothers and I, we survived. We all survived.

MR: Were they in the Marines too?

WS: They were in the Navy. My brother Herb was on a minesweeper in the Caribbean around the Panama Canal and that area. My older brother Howard was a pilot, but never got overseas actually. He was a pilot in one of those four-engine bombers, but he never got overseas but he was a good pilot. He doesn't pilot anymore, but he did a good job.

So when we got to Pearl Harbor coming back, I went up to the bridge and I asked them to find out if my brother's outfit has left the States yet? I can't remember the outfit now, but they signaled to Honolulu to the base there and they said, no, he's still in California. He was there when I got back to San Diego and he came over to the barracks at Miramar. Of course, in the Marine Corps the language is terrible. [Laughs] My brother said, you aren't going home and speak to Dad with that language, are you? Of course, you're so used to talking that way--and it comes out every once in a while now.

MR: The war was over and you came home. Then what did you do?

WS: I came home and I hung around. Incidentally, I was the sergeant of the guard and we were inspecting the posts on Mindanao in the Philippines. The officer of the day told me about the G.I. Bill. We wouldn't know anything about the G.I. Bill on Mindanao in the Philippines. He said, Stiles, when you get back to your tent, I want you to write to the University of New Hampshire or Dartmouth College and go to college. Well, it had never entered my mind to do that, but that's what I did.

I did write to the University of New Hampshire. I made an appointment and I went down to Central High School to get a transcript of my marks. Fortunately I had taken a college course when I was in Central High School, although my teacher in the sixth grade at Straw School said, Walter, you're not college material. How many times

have you heard that? I was convinced. That's why I went to work for the Public Service Company.

So I went down to Durham and the admissions officer said well, Walter, you didn't do too well at Central High School. I said no, I have to admit I didn't. I said but if you will let me in, I will justify your confidence in me. I would like to go to college. He looked at me like that and said, you're in! That's how I got into the University of New Hampshire in Durham.

MR: What did you study?

WS: I studied several things. I started out in hotel administration. When you're in hotel administration, you learn how to run a hotel, but you may go down to Florida to run a hotel. I'd been away from home a long time and I decided I'm not going to be a hotel administrator. Then I had another major in horticulture, which was really great because I like growing plants, et cetera. Dr. Yeager, the professor, he was one of the Beechnut trustees; he was one of the Beechnut company. So I majored in that. I didn't know really what I wanted to do. Some people know they want to be a doctor when they're six years old, but I didn't know what I wanted to do.

First of all I decided that I'm not going to waste my G.I. Bill. I'm going to quit school for a year. So I quit the university and came home. I went to work for my father in the E.R. Mitchell dental supply people and I learned about dentists and so on. I decided that I didn't want that and then I finally decided I wanted to go back to school, so I went back to Durham and said I'd like to start in again at school. They accepted me. I majored in Far East history and learning all about Macao and all that. Then I finally ended up majoring in psychology. I guess I was trying to understand what I was all about. I

majored in psychology and I began to make the dean's list. I had a 3.0. I'd never done that. I never made the honor roll at Central High School. Ever! I was a terrible student.

Finally when I made the dean's list, I said this is great. I decided well, maybe I'll go for my master's in psychology. You met a lot of funny people in psychology. I got to know one of the professors in psychology there, Roy Cooley. I lived across the street from the Congregational church in Durham, New Hampshire, in Mann's house. Mr. Mann, he worked for the University of New Hampshire for 50 years. I had a little room there and it was great. I studied hard and got half of my master's and I decided hey, Stiles, you're going to be perennial student, so I'm going to leave. So I decided to leave.

I decided to leave, so Cooley and I used to go over to Portsmouth, go over drinking. We weren't drunk. I wasn't the D.W.I. type. We'd go out and have a beer. I smoked cigars in those days because Winston Churchill smoked cigars. Bob Bayk of Bayk Philly cigars was in my outfit at Cherry Point. Every month he'd get 10 boxes of 50 Bayk Philly cigars. He always gave me a box. So I was a big cigar smoker, which was bad. It was really bad.

One thing I wanted to mention too. In that year, 1948, I hitchhiked across the United States with my buddy at UNH, Walter Page. Walt lived at 81 Spring Garden Street, Manchester. He was a casualty of World War Two. It's a funny thing. You never ask guys what they did. He was on some sort of a battleship in the Navy. I got to know Walt. We had four guys in a room, a bunk room with four. Then we had four desks in the other room in Fairchild Hall. He wanted to go to Stanford University. I said well, if you don't have any money and I don't have any money, I've got two mummy-type sleeping bags. Why don't we hitchhike across the United States? That's exactly what we did.

From Manchester to Los Angeles by way of Yellowstone National Park. We slept out.

People invited us in. They gave us meals. It was a great experience.

I remember at one of the towns in Illinois, they said wouldn't you boys like to use the shower and clean up? Then she said, would you mind, she said, I'll take you out to the highway? I'd like to show my mother what two boys from New Hampshire look like hitchhiking across the United States. I said it doesn't make any difference to me; I'd be glad to. It was Rockford, Illinois. He was an Army officer, actually. This guy was an Army officer. It was a marvelous experience.

MR: The world was so much bigger then.

WS: It really was. It was really wonderful. We slept in Jackson Park in Chicago. That's a huge park. You wouldn't even walk through the park today. You'd get murdered.

MR: When you were doing that traveling, could you understand each other with all the regional accents? Yours as well as the places you were traveling through?

WS: Oh sure. I'd say you're from Illinois, southern Illinois, aren't you? It's like at Parris Island. The same idea. You had different accents.

MR: That's always fascinated me. In those days there was no Internet, there was no cable television, so you didn't really get to hear this like you do now.

WS: That's right. Exactly. As far as I'm concerned, and I don't want to be against technology, but I'll tell you, those days were wonderful days. As you can see, we have a computer [in the house]. My wife has email. Like I call Roy Miller. He lives in Pensacola, Florida. He was a staff sergeant in the Marine Corps with me. I called him to find out how he was. He'd had all kinds of heart problems; he had by-passes. The first

couple of days you couldn't call because all the telephone lines were down [during the recent hurricane in Fall 2004]. He would email me and say, why don't you email me? I said, Roy, I said, I want to hear your voice. I'm not interested in email. I want to hear you. I'm not interested in email. I read the papers every day, but I want to talk to you. That's what I do. I don't waste time with email. In fact I took a computer course and learned how to play Solitaire, and that's it.

MR: So you went out to California and stayed there awhile?

WS: I stayed in California. First of all, for about two weeks when I got to California, we slept in my aunt's backyard in the sleeping bags. They had that kind of soft grass. Bougainvillea on the garage, and everything else. It was a beautiful area: 1037 Second Street, Santa Monica, California. Walter hitchhiked from there up to San Francisco and I came home—flew from L.A. to Boston. I came back from California to continue on at UNH. I feel in love with California in the Marine Corps. We all did. So I went back out there to live. I went to work for a grocery firm out there and decided well, geez, I don't know whether I want. But it was the food business, anyway.

MR: That was in Santa Monica?

WS: No, that was in San Francisco. Gordon Barnard, who lived up the street, worked for New Hampshire Insurance Company and was transferred to San Francisco. He said you can stay with me as long as you want to—at 2201 California Street. I said I'd like to stay here for a while. Cable cars went right by the apartment building. If you wanted to go to the top of the Mark Hotel, you'd just pick up the cable car or walk. You'd just walk.

Let's see. Some people came over from Kentfield, California, who were friends of a friend of mine. In fact, this friend was one of the guys who was in the naval recruiting office here in Manchester. When I went out there, he gave me a gallon of maple syrup to give to the Warners. I went over the Golden Gate Bridge and gave it to the Warners and they said why don't you come out here and live with us? So I moved from San Francisco to Kentfield, California. Jack Warner, they lived in a trailer. Their son had a little house there. It was a beat-up kind of a place, but there was a river there. I stayed there for a while. Then I was in a bar one night at San Francisco and I called Janet's home and I said why don't we get married? [Laughs] We've been married 52 years, going on 53. We've lived here. Three children. Grandchildren. Everything else.

MR: You met Janet at UNH?

WS: I met her at UNH, that's right. I met her at UNH. I met her brother first. Hugh Mallett. He was at UNH too. I went to 457 Walnut Street and met Janet. In fact, I knew her father, Lansing Mallett. Hugh was a Hood milkman, just like Charlie Mowry living next door was a Hood milkman. A rubber-tired milk wagon. As a teenager, I loved to deliver milk. I got paid in chocolate milk. We had the north end route. It was great. No pay, but fun.

MR: So you came home and got married.

WS: That's right. Came home and got married. June 14, 1952. Flag Day! Then what did I do? For a while, I worked for Leon Pearson, the landscape man, as I had off and on when I was in college. Then I was down to the New Hampshire employment office down on Dow Street and Mr. Cameron took a liking to me and said they're going to have interviews for a food job with a broker. He set me up for an interview at the

Cadillac Hotel. That's where I slept before I went in the Marine Corps. That hotel had five stories in those days, but they had a fire and they cut it off at three.

So I interviewed and there were 13 other guys there interviewing. They all were in the food business. I didn't know anything about the food business, but I got the job because Charlie Gardyne, my eventual boss, and Carl Dearborn-- Charlie's long gone now. He looked like General Eisenhower. Carl Dearborn lives in Portland now. They liked the fact that I went to school after the war, so that's how I got the job. I worked for 30 years and I became the best salesman in the company. I sold millions and millions of dollars worth of food. Then I was an area manager and I was a trainer. I used to train salesmen. I used to do a lot of things.

We had so much work to do, you worked night and day seven days a week. Work never hurt anybody. I learned that from my father because he was either in his office, on the road, or home doing stock and trade work all the time when I was a kid. He lived to be 91 and a half, and I'll be 82 October 11th and I'm hoping I can live to be a hundred.

[Laughs]

MR: You said you did work some with food in San Francisco.

WS: That's right, I did. I worked for S and W Foods, actually. S and W, I think it was. They had a warehouse down at lower San Francisco, but it was kind of drab and everything. When I went over to Kentfield, off the Golden Gate area, I went to work.

Janet's father ran the N. J. Fontaine Company, which was a rug company. They laid carpet and I used to work for him when I was in school. For example, [at] Hill's Department Store in Manchester, we'd work all night recarpeting the store, which is on the corner of Elm and Merrimack Street. We did the theatres. We did the Carpenter

Hotel. I liked physical work and I learned to do carpet work and use Roberts' Stripping. Then I finally ended up as a food salesman.

See, I had some land up here at Smith and Mammoth Road. I wanted to have a retail horticulture sales center when I was working for Pearson. They put the kibosh on that because they thought I represented a trucking company from somewhere, and I was at the City Hall testifying. They sent people up from Washington because they thought I was going to put a trucking company up near the Veterans Hospital, which was a stupid thing.

Anyway, I finally ended up as a food salesman. The Alpers—Ben, Mark, and Dave Alper—they were the greatest guys. They were wonderful people. When Janet was sick, Dave Alper called me into his office and said, you've got one thing to do, he says: see that Janet gets well. You can imagine how I felt. I worked harder. I mean, I worked harder and I was allowed to buy into the company, a privately-held company, and it worked out good. So by the time I retired after 30 years, it worked out good.

MR: You and Janet have three children?

WS: Three children and five grandchildren. In fact, one of the granddaughters left here this morning. Our daughter, incidentally, went to UNH after her high school. She didn't know what she wanted to do so. She was down to Virginia and so on; they didn't offer the right courses. It's a long story. She went to Notre Dame College here and graduated summa cum laude, from Notre Dame College, which is now closed. She's a fourth-grade school teacher in Hillsborough, New Hampshire. She does well. She's a very smart girl, if I do say so. She has a lot of drive. She's now going for her master's.

We all have drive. My youngest boy, Tom, he's an investment advisor. He makes more money in a month than I made the whole year. He knows all about mutual funds. So between that and owning land, and having land at Smith and Mammoth Road, and 40 acres which turned out to be 60 acres in Hillsborough, New Hampshire, it worked out good. [break at 26.2 minutes, then resumes]

MR: Let's shift gears here a little bit and talk about Manchester, New Hampshire. I'll toss out some topics. We want to talk about urban renewal. We want to talk about Amoskeag. About French identity. What else?

WS: How about trolley cars? I can tell you about trolley cars. The Public Service Company of New Hampshire owned the Manchester Traction Light and Power Company, which was the trolley cars here in Manchester. In fact, the trolley cars used to go up Beech Street, which is right down here. It stopped on the corner and you'd get on the trolley car. Trolley cars were wonderful. They were great. It was all electrically run. You could get in a trolley car and go out to Massabesic Lake or you could get in a trolley car and go to Biddeford, Maine. Trolley cars were everywhere. They were a wonderful mode of transportation and transported a lot of people.

It's like railroads. With all the population we have in this area here, if we had railroads we wouldn't have to destroy so much property by building highways. Every time they build a shopping center, they widen the highway. And it's expensive. It's very expensive. The trolley cars were wonderful. I used to like to sit in the trolley car. The trolley car would be on Elm Street and it would go up Bridge Street and then go up to Beech Street. Then I would get into the back of the trolley car and it was just like a whip.

It'd swing around. Mr. Shea, he was one of the trolley car operators. He lived over here on Oak and Lodge Street. Nice man; very nice.

MR: Do you know when trolley cars started?

WS: They started long before I was born. They used to have horse-drawn trolley cars here in Manchester before electricity came along. I don't remember when that happened, but when I was a boy there were all kinds of trolley cars in Manchester. Trolley tracks were in the middle of Elm Street, for example. They ran both ways. When people wanted to get on the trolley car, automobiles had to stop.

In 1940, the Public Service Company discontinued the trolley cars and they started with the buses. The bus garage was below North Elm Street here. The buses were all right, but of course, people don't ride the buses anymore. Everybody wants to drive up to the front pew of wherever they're going, whether it's church or wherever it is. They have to drive their cars. That's why we have so many automobiles here.

Because of all the cars, we have one-way streets in Manchester. Maple Street is a one-way north. That's right down here. Then Pine Street is one-way north and Chestnut Street is one-way south. It's to get the traffic through the city as soon as they possibly can.

MR: When I-93 and I-293 were being built, what effect did that have on the city?

WS: It had a big effect because what happened was they started building shopping centers out around the city. The downtown area of Manchester was just demolished, as far as shopping was concerned. You had Hill's Department Store, as I said before. You had the John B. Varick Company, which was the greatest department store. You could

buy anything there from toothpicks to fur coats to rifles or raccoon coats or whatever, and toys.

They had the best toy department there was. I've got my tractor that I got for Christmas that came from there. It's going to go to my grandson. My father would always say, boys, make out a list for what you want Santa Claus to give you. Go downtown and look and maybe you'll get something like that for Christmas. We were lucky. We got electric trains for Christmas. I have one car there, but the rest of the train my younger brother has now. He has his tank truck that he got and I have my tractor that I got. You could climb the bankings here. It still runs.

Elm Street was a very exciting place. On Thursday night and all day Friday and Saturday and Saturday night, people would shop in Manchester. They'd come in from all the surrounding areas—from Hooksett and Bedford and so on.

MR: Because it's the largest city and it's always been the focus.

WS: That's right. Manchester's population stayed about 75 thousand people for quite a while. The Amoskeag mills were very busy. Fifteen to 20 thousand people worked in the Amoskeag Mills. When they went bankrupt-- Manchester was known as the city that pulled itself up by its bootstraps. It made national headlines. The Straws and so on, they went down to Washington, D.C. They didn't get a lot of help from Washington, but when the Amoskeag mills went bankrupt in 1935, then along came the '36 flood, that did a job on [the city].

MR: I was going to ask you about that.

WS: You could hear the water going over the Amoskeag dam. We didn't have the Hill dam. We didn't have the Wear dam. The flood came down. I was at Straw School and we'd go down early in the morning and sit on the banks of the Merrimack River, up high, and we could see houses come down from Hooksett, lower Hooksett Village, and hit the old iron Amoskeag Bridge. It was exciting. Of course, we never had cameras.

MR: What time of year was that?

WS: That was in March. March 1936. Actually the flood started in Manchester. As I told John Clayton when we celebrated the sesquicentennial up at Derryfield Park, we had so much snow that year that the water was literally a river coming down Sagamore Street. It was coming down Blodgett Street. It went down to Sheehans' house and Mrs. Sheehan said to Paul Harkinson—he's a doctor now, he's still living in Manchester; one of my best friends, lives up on Shaw Street. Her daughter was a teacher. We went down the cellar in Sheehans' house and got all of her books up so they wouldn't be flooded. The water just ran right through the cellars up there. Grenier's house down on Oak. Sagamore. It just came down everywhere.

Then there was about 125 inches of snow up in the mountains. It was a real snowy winter. Then, when the rains hit the snow in the mountains, then the real flood began. Boy, it came down through here. It devastated the whole area. I've got all kinds of books here. People lost their homes; they lost everything they had.

MR: What did they do?

WS: The Red Cross, the Salvation Army took care of them. We gave stuff to them. Everybody tried to help them out. Nobody had flood insurance. We were lucky. We lived here. The Merrimack River is down here. I remember when the MacGregor

Bridge went out and then they built the Notre Dame Bridge. Before they built the Notre Dame Bridge, they had a special suspension bridge going across at Bridge Street so the people who lived on the west side could walk over to the east side, and vice versa.

Then they built the Notre Dame Bridge, which was a beautiful arched bridge. That was a beautiful bridge and then they tore that bridge down. Then they built the two-way bridge. I used to go to the hearings. Don't tear the Notre Dame Bridge down. That's a beautiful bridge. It was a beautiful bridge. That was torn down. Only 50 years old.

It seems as though in those days, everything should be torn down and made new. Well, people don't come to New Hampshire or New England to see new buildings or new bridges. They want to see old things. So I lived through the MacGregor Bridge, the Notre Dame Bridge, and now the separate two bridges that go from the west side to the east side.

In fact, I was in the Legislature at that time and we dedicated the first section of the new bridge. I was on the Ways and Means Committee and I was in Concord. I spent seven years. I decided I was going to limit my term in the Legislature, so I did. I believe in term limits.

MR: What years were you in the Legislature?

WS: When Norm Packard died, he was in this ward. He died and I got elected to the tail end of his term. That was when the first space ship went up. Remember that? That was when the woman school teacher [Christa McAuliffe], remember she died? My swearing in was by Governor Sununu, he was the governor then. He's the father of Senator Sununu who's now in Washington. I liked the senator much better than the father. [Laughs] Governor Sununu was okay; he was all right. He was governor when I

was up there. That whole Sununu family, they're brains. They're all MIT graduates. They're something else. It's a big family too; a large family. They're down to earth people. They know what needs to be done. Of course, they're Republicans too. [Laughs]

MR: What made you decide to run for office?

WS: When Janet and I got married in 1952, I had a double hernia from working as a landscaper building dry stone walls, et cetera. Leon Pearson owned the business. He was the Rembrandt of landscaping. Dr. Donald Flanagan did the appendectomy at the same time. I was up in the Elliot Hospital. They were looking for ballot inspectors here in Manchester. Virginia Cain was the Ward Two chairman. She wanted to know if I would like to be a ballot inspector.

What you did, you just checked off the voters as they came in. We had paper ballots in those days. The first time when I worked at the polls was in the old Blodgett Street schoolhouse, which got torn down. It never should have been torn down. It was the Thornton Naval Vets building, but that was an old, old schoolhouse; one of the schoolhouses in Manchester. In those days I had all I could do to take care of the family and I wasn't really involved in preserving buildings, but I look back on it and say it never should have been torn down. That could have been kept there very easily. Anyway, I enjoyed it, because I met people; wonderful people. I got to know everybody in the ward. I had no trouble getting elected and re-elected and re-elected. I knew most everybody in Ward Two.

MR: So you were a ballot inspector on election day. And your family was young.

WS: Exactly. That's right. My company used to allow me to work Election Day and not be on the road. They would let me do that, which was great. I was a ballot inspector for 20 dollars. You got paid 20 dollars to be a ballot inspector. When General Eisenhower ran for president, I shook hands with General Eisenhower right down here at Merrimack Common or Veterans Park. I was looking for a job. This was in 1952. I was looking for a job. I was up in northern Vermont and I told the man I wanted to be back in Manchester because General Eisenhower will be there and I want to see General Eisenhower. And I shook hands with him! I shook hands with all the politicians.

So I got involved in politics and I really enjoyed it. I'm a conservative politician, I'll admit that, but that's all right. It's fun. That's how I got involved. Now the ballot inspectors have the same job and they get over a hundred dollars for doing the same job that we did for 20 dollars. But they have a hard job finding people. Of course, wages are higher.

In fact, now I'm a registrar in Ward Two. One of the registrars. In the state of New Hampshire, you can register to vote on the day of the election, which is one of the few states in the Union that you can do that. That's the way we have to work that one out. In the coming presidential election, I think we'll have at least three registrars. In the past 50 years, we've voted at several places—at Straw School, we voted at the Jewish Community Center—I was a selectman then. A selectman in a city like Manchester is not like a selectman in a small town. A selectman selects the place where you're going to vote. That's what it is. He decides where we're going to vote. Then we ended up voting at St. Paul's Methodist Church up on Smith Road. A year or so ago, they had daycare centers at that church, so now we vote at Hillside High at Derryfield Park. We're going

through a big school construction program here in the city. A 105 million dollars doing over schools and building schools. They haven't even finished that job over there yet

I got interested [in politics] and I like people. That's why I liked calling on grocers. It was a wonderful job. I started out as a retail salesman and I enjoyed it. Mom and pop stores. In fact, I was very fortunate. I went from the mom and pop stores era to the supermarket. Romeo Champagne. Champagne Supermarkets. He was way ahead of his time as far as food was concerned. He used to have health benefits for his employees way back. Romeo Champagne sold out to the Grand Union Company.

The first market he had was Manchester's most sanitary market. It was over on Amory Street on the west side of Manchester. He was a wonderful man. He made a lot of money in the food business and he sold out to Grand Union. He sold each store for a million dollars and then they threw in another million, so he became a millionaire. When I went to talk to him—he was still living then—about a contribution to the restoration of the City Hall, he said Manchester's been good to me and I want to be good to Manchester, so he gave me a check for 25 hundred dollars, while I was there. Then he said come back in another month and I'll give you a check for another 25 hundred dollars. So he gave five thousand dollars to the restoration of the City Hall. He didn't want anybody to know it, either. The day of his funeral at St. Marie's church over on the west side, I went over. I didn't go to the funeral, but I went over there and I talked to his daughter and I said, will you mind now if I reveal the fact that your father gave five thousand dollars to the restoration of the City Hall? She said, no. She said, oh you're the guy! I said yes, I'm the one. [laughs]

It's an exciting city. People take pride in this city; they really do. It's a wonderful city to live in. Living right here, you wouldn't think you were really living in the city. I've always walked downtown. I like to walk. I'll be 82 October 11th. If you don't use it, you lose it. So you walk and you don't clutter the highways. [End of Tape 1/Side B; 45.0 minutes]

Tape 2/Side A

MR: Being from Massachusetts, when I think of Manchester, I think of that iconic image of looking at Amoskeag from the bridge and thinking of all the people that worked there, particularly the French community. Can you talk a little bit about the different ethnic groups in Manchester?

WS: Oh sure! I'll talk about the French people first. This was a city where you could go away for two weeks and leave your house unlocked and nobody would ever come in and rob it. There were a lot of Greek people here in Manchester. I have a lot of Greek friends. Loads of them. They are a smart bunch of people. We had Greeks and Jews and we have everything. In fact, my oldest boy is married to a Jewish girl. There are all kinds of people.

When I went to Central High School, for example, I went to Straw School first, we had one black boy, Buster Redding. He went to Straw School. There were only a few blacks here. When my mother was sick, we had one black woman take care of us for a few days here: Mrs. Thorne. She was a wonderful person. I like blacks anyway. I try to be colorblind because blacks are just as smart as whites and if given a chance, they do

just as good a job. You watch some of the programs on television on investments and so on, they know as much about it as whites.

This Mrs. Thorne. We had a cat. I was five years old or thereabouts and I jammed the cat between the screen door and the regular door. She came out and she said, Walter what are you doing? Well, I said, the kitty is in the door there. Anyway, she said, you shouldn't do that. She was so good to me; she was a wonderful woman. I was walking down Elm Street years later and I saw this black woman walking and I said, are you Mrs. Thorne by any chance? She said yes, I am. I said, I'm Walter Stiles. [Mimics] My little Walter! She hugged me. What a wonderful woman she was.

When the Barnum and Bailey Circus would come to town, the guys driving in the stakes with the elephants, they'd be helping to set up the tents. I don't know if you ever saw that, but they'd be driving in the stakes and they all had sledge-hammers. They'd drive in the stakes and the elephants would pull the tents up. It was a very exciting time, those circus days.

MR: You've mentioned the circus a couple of times. It sounds like it was a big event.

WS: It was a huge event, actually. Oh, the circus parades and the animals and everything. I always liked elephants. You see, I'm an elephant collector. [Points out object in room] That's a teak-wood elephant from Thailand. The National Geographic was selling those, but I don't have any more room for elephants now. I always loved elephants. In fact, we used to have Benson's Animal Farm down in Hudson, New Hampshire. You could go down there and ride the elephants and you'd always give the peanuts to the elephants.

MR: So that's why you like the Republicans.

WS: That's right. [Laughs] I've voted for Democrats too and, as I say, I should have voted for Harry Truman. He dropped the atomic bomb on Japan. I mean, he gave the go-ahead. In fact, when Roosevelt died-- Roosevelt had never told Truman about building the atomic bomb. Truman found it out when he became president. I don't know if you've been to the Roosevelt home on the Hudson River. I can see why Roosevelt wanted to go to his home on the Hudson, because he wanted to get out of Washington. Of course, he had infantile paralysis. I remember the day Pearl Harbor was bombed. We were out in the camp out here in the back yard and we heard about Pearl Harbor. Then, let's see, in '40 I was out of Central High School and working for Public Service Company.

We had all kinds. We had Greeks. There were a lot of Greeks here in Manchester, and still are. There's a big Greek church out here. The French and the Irish. Of course, there were a lot of Irish people in Manchester. I have a lot of friends who are Irish. I have a lot of friends here in the city anyway. I know a lot of people.

MR: I bet you do. When I think of New England mill towns, particularly along the Merrimack from New Hampshire down into Lowell and Lawrence, there's the layers. There's the Yankee, Irish— A lot of the Greeks came to feed the millworkers and work in the mills. They worked in food and that was their contribution. Then there were all the farms surrounding the mill towns. There were the layers of immigrants. The French, it seems, are so identified with Manchester and also the church.

WS: There are a lot of churches everywhere in the city here. You know, the heads of the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company didn't tell you which church to go to, or synagogue to go to. We have synagogues. We have churches: Protestant and Catholic churches, Congregational, Methodist, and so on.

I went to the First Baptist Church at the corner of Union and Concord streets for over 50 years. About three years ago we had a black minister. The name was Lydia Mann and her husband was one of the chefs up at the Puritan Back Room. They're Greeks [restaurant owners]. Canotas family. Pappas and Canotas. That's the best restaurant in the city of Manchester. I told them as long as I live, you'll have all my business because I don't want to eat anywhere else but the Back Room.

But Lydia Mann was a wonderful woman. She used to preach. She would have part of the service at the First Baptist Church. We had people there, a very few people, but just enough to make it a terrible thing for Lydia Mann. She was a big woman, but she had a marvelous voice and she would preach as part of the service. We had a few people who sat at the back of the church and ridiculed Lydia Mann.

We were searching for a new minister for the First Baptist Church and they voted him in and then they wanted to get rid of him. They didn't like the way he would bring in blacks. Nothing wrong with bringing in blacks. They have to worship just like everybody else does. In fact I think the black people are more spiritual than the white people, in many cases. Anyway, Lydia died of multiple sclerosis. They had a son who had a hip problem. Janet would take the son down to Boston to Mass. General Hospital and we would take her-- She must have weighed 300 or 400 pounds; she was a very heavy woman. I know when they wrote the obituary, they said when Lydia Mann hugged you,

the whole world hugged you. She was always hugging people. She was beautiful outside and beautiful inside.

We used to have a Bible study class. She knew her Bible. She really did. Lydia Mann died at 39 years of age. Her funeral was held at the Brookside Congregational Church. We now go to the Brookside Congregational Church. When Janet and I got married, she was going to the Franklin Street Congregational Church. Her people, the ones that she knew in her Sunday school class had all moved away, so when we got married, we went to the First Baptist Church because a lot of my friends were still there. So Janet became a Baptist and when this thing happened, as far as Lydia Mann was concerned and all the fracas that went on at the First Baptist Church, I became a Congregationalist.

MR: Fair enough. Now the black community here, did they work in the mills or what did they do?

WS: In those days there weren't many blacks. There really weren't many blacks at all. I don't recall any of them working in the mills. They probably did. [break at 10.7 minutes, then resumes]

MR: For this part we're going to try to recreate what mercantile Manchester used to look like with some of the stores. You want to tell me some of that?

WS: Let's go over to the corner of Merrimack and Elm streets, where Hills Department Store used to be. In fact, that building burned a while ago and they're restoring that building right now. Above Hills Department Store there were all kinds of dental offices and all kinds of doctors offices. When I worked for Janet's father, as I told you this morning, they had such traffic in that store, and it was a carpeted store, so we

used to do that work at night. We'd start when the store closed on a Saturday night and we'd work all day Sunday laying that carpet.

Then, as you went north on Elm Street, the John B. Varick store was there. That's where that tractor [on desk] came from; from the toy department of the John B. Varick. That was on the first floor. You could go down to the basement and you could find tacks, you could find paint, and everything in the basement of that building. Then you'd see toys on the first floor and they had a jewelry department. Herbie Wood ran the jewelry department in the John B. Varick Company. Then you'd go up to the next floor and they probably had fur coats and so on. You'd go up to the top—it was five stories high—and the place was filled with all kinds of things. Whatever you needed, it was there.

Then as you went further on up Elm Street, you came to the corner of Manchester Street and Elm Street. In that area there was the Dyer and Chipman Drugstore. It's now a framing store in Manchester. In fact that's where we had these pictures framed. Then across the street is the Citizens Bank, but unfortunately it used to be the Merchants National Bank. That was another thing torn down by the Amoskeag Bank in order to expand their bank.

In between that and the corner of Hanover Street was Leavitt's Department Store. That was the largest department store in the city of Manchester. It was a beautiful store. You could buy anything there. Before that, it was Barton's Department Store. It was a nice store. That's when everybody shopped downtown. Then the Amoskeag Bank was on the corner of Hanover and Elm Street, where the Citizens Bank is today. That whole thing is now Citizens Bank, but as I say, the people that ran the Amoskeag Bank decided to expand and they should have kept the Leavitt's building, anyway, but they didn't.

They tore everything down and built something new and it doesn't really blend in with the city. But when it's gone, it's gone. That's all there is to it.

Then you go across the street and go north on Elm Street. Right there on that corner was Larry's Manhattan Shop. That's gone now too. They tore that building down and built a more modern building. Now the Chamber of Commerce is in there.

Then the next area was the Puritan Restaurant. We ate at the Puritan Back Room today [for lunch]. They did a big business there. Then if you go up Hanover Street, as I said, the Lyric Theatre was on the right-hand side. A lot of us went to the Lyric Theatre because they always had double features. You'd get two features for one ticket.

From there, up further, was Goodman's Book Store. Incidentally, every store that you went into on Elm Street had a different smell to it. I can always remember the Goodmans' book store. I can remember Mr. Goodman and his son, Bill Goodman, worked for him. They sold stamps. I was a stamp collector, so we used to go down there. He had books, but as I say, also stamps. Mr. Goodman was a very tall man and a very nice man, but when a bunch of young kids came in to look at stamps, he was right there to watch them. [Laughs]

Then we went further on up and there were several stores. Louis Georgeopolous's Men's Shop and then on up further was the Crown Theatre, where all the cowboy movies were. So, if you wanted a cowboy movie, you went to the Crown Theatre. They always had two features in the Crown Theatre, too.

Across the street, you'd go up to the corner and there was a drugstore. Then the New Hampshire School of Accounting was on Hanover Street on the second floor. On the first floor as you come down Hanover Street and come west again was a Star Market.

They sold S.S. Pierce fruits and vegetables along with a lot of other things. It wasn't the same Star Market chain, but it was the Star Market.

Down further was the Palace Theatre. The Palace Theatre is still there. That was built in 1915. We used to be able to get in for a dime. We'd walk to the theatre. If you were tall you'd pay 15 cents, but if you were a shortie like I was, you'd pay 10 cents. There's where we saw all the Tarzan movies and the Joe Penner movies and the Marx Brothers movies—all in the Palace Theatre. They were great. Groucho Marx and so on.

Then going down further, Machinist's Department Store was there. That was a large department store. In fact, Mr. Machinist lived right down here on Sagamore Street, just below Oak Street. He became a millionaire just from that store.

In fact, three families that became millionaires lived below Oak Street. Conair Tire, they retread tires and so on. Then Mr. Archambault, who inherited the George C. Trudell company, which was a plumbing concern. When he [Trudell] died, he left the concern to him, Mr. Archambault. Trudell is the one who has the big mansion up on River Road, where the bishop of Manchester lives, across from Stark Park.

So then as you go on up Elm Street, Grant's Department Store was up on the corner of Concord and Elm Street. They made popcorn. They always had popcorn going on, so when you walked into Grant's, it was popcorn. Then you'd go on up further to Manchester Dry Goods and so on. All the stores! There was Beaugard Sisters on Elm Street. It was a beautiful store. They never married, neither of them did. I guess both of them lived to be well into their 90s. That closed. Then Pariseau's was another.

MR: What did the Beaugard Sisters sell?

WS: They sold women's things, more or less. Dresses, wedding gowns, and so on. The same as Pariseau's did on up further. That was a very nice downtown store, too.

MR: With all these stores, would people come from outside Manchester?

WS: They certainly would. They would come from all around. They'd come from Hooksett, from Auburn, Candia. Of course, they'd come from across the river too. The French section in Manchester was the west side of Manchester, although there were a lot of French people living on the east side too.

MR: So that's what you would call it: across the river?

WS: That's right. That was the French section. MacGregor Street and so on. Cartier and all these. In fact, when I was reading meters for the Public Service Company, I walked in every single cellar in the west side and the east side and the south side and everything.

I read meters after I was an office boy. Then I was a collector and collected back bills. We were still in the Depression. I had my own car and I would pick it up on West Brook Street in the Public Service garage. It was a high-wheeler Plymouth and I used to go around collecting. When gas got short, I'd borrow my brother's English bicycle and I would collect on bicycle and go all around the city.

One time I was up in East Manchester and the man that owned this building said I'm glad you came. I was about 18 years old. He said I'm glad you came. I have owed a bill to the Public Service Company that I've felt guilty about and now I can afford to pay for it. So he gave me 495 dollars in five-dollar bills. I took that back to the Public Service. They had written it off R.B.D.—reserve for bad debts. Mr. Schiller was the president of the Public Service Company. Mr. Keeler called him up and he said, Walter

has just collected 495 dollars from some company that had gone bankrupt, but the man who owned the company wanted to pay the back bill. So I collected and I did everything. I read meters. I collected. I delivered bills.

It used to be cheaper to deliver the bills in those days by hand than it was to mail them by mail. We would what we call throw bills. You'd throw bills. You'd go out to the houses and deliver the bills. Just like a mailman, only that was it. That was a lot of fun. You get a lot of walking in too! That was a great company to work for. They were really nice and really good.

So let's see. We didn't talk about Nelson's Department Store, which was across the street from where 1000 Elm Street is today. It was in the Kennard Building. That was the building my father's office was in--the E. R. Mitchell Dental Supply people--on the second floor along Mechanic Street.

Incidentally, behind that building was the Derryfield Club. That was a gorgeous club. It was a private club. My dad used to park his car in that yard in front of the Derryfield Club. That was all paneled. It was beautiful. There are pictures of it in the historical association.

Also when I was a boy, I played a 120-bass accordion and used to take lessons from Gus Wenzel. He used to sit right here. I had my accordion up in the front hall and I'd practice at least an hour a day or more every day. Of course, I liked the piano accordion. Well, I've got arthritis in my fingers and everything else, so my fingers won't work. I still have an accordion, but I had a Wurlitzer accordion at that time. I loved the accordion. We played in the Billy B. Vann show on stage of the Practical Arts Building of Central High School. Billy B. Vann program. About 40 of us played the accordion. We

went [coast to coast?] with Billy B. Vann. [Laughs] Then when I got into the Marine Corps, I came home on furlough in October 1943 and I figured I was going to be going overseas, so I might as well sell the accordion, which was a stupid thing to do. Anyway, I sold the accordion for 200 bucks. If I had saved it till after the war, even if I hadn't touched it again, it would have been worth over a thousand dollars. It didn't make any sense though. You couldn't take those things in the Marine Corps, that was it.

MR: Yes, too much to carry around.

WS: We talk about around the city. You can take a highway here now and go right all around the city of Manchester and have various exits. I think it's about nine miles around the city.

Then we had a Jordan Marsh here in Manchester. I mean, they wanted to build at the south end of Elm Street in Manchester, but Bedford, New Hampshire, as near as I can understand, gave them a tax break in Bedford, so Jordan Marsh built their store in Bedford. It's Macy's now. That was really the beginning of the end as far as Elm Street was concerned on department stores.

Then, of course, we have the big shopping center down on South Willow Street. We have J.C. Penney's, Filene's, and all those down there now. As far as Elm Street was concerned, we don't have the big department stores. We have small stores along Elm Street now, but we're filled with restaurants. We have the civic center down on Elm Street, so that has brought a lot of people into Manchester. When they come in, they want a place to eat a lot of times, so the economy of Manchester is in pretty good shape. The only thing is we have a parking problem, but we'll correct that eventually.

We have a lot of parks in Manchester. The Amoskeag Manufacturing Company gave land for Oak Park, which is right down here on Oak Street. In fact, we were talking at the Back Room today. This fellow who came in, his house is located right across from Oak Park. All this parkland in Manchester was given by the Amoskeag Manufacturing Company. And the Straws. If your name was Straw, you had a lot of money in those days. They named Straw School after the Straws. Those big mansions up on Elm Street, which you probably haven't seen yet, they're gorgeous places; beautiful homes. We used to say that's where the rich people live. We live in the silk-stocking district on Sagamore Street; we're the remnant.

MR: Where did the Amoskeag name come from?

WS: Amoskeag. I think it means a place of many fish. Something like that, because the Indians used to fish down there. In fact, where the Stark house was there were all these fishing areas. We have Indian digs all over the city.

Down on Elm Street, as you go west, it used to be the New Hampshire insurance building, but it's now named something else because other people bought that, but in that area was the Smith mansion. Governor Smith was not only the governor of the state of New Hampshire, but he was also a mayor of Manchester, as well. That was a beautiful mansion. He was involved in all kinds of banks. Banking was a big thing. Banking and manufacturing were big in Manchester. Of course, textile mills, as I said before: the largest textile mills in the world. They used to employ between 15 and 20 thousand people, depending on the amount of orders they had.

I was in Straw School when the Amoskeag mills went bankrupt. Miss Willand said there will be no Valentine's Day boxes in the school this year at Straw School. The

kids were so poor. They came from very poor families; they were unemployed. The unemployment rate was very high—20 or 25 percent here in the city. Then the kids from the school were moving south because the textile mills down South were working and they paid less money than they did up here. It was slave labor, really.

MR: That was the height of the Depression, too.

WS: It was. It was the height of the Depression. You know, it's a strange thing. Right in the middle of that whole Depression, it didn't bother us. We had the woods out here. We had a baseball field out here. We cross-countried. We skied. We went to Three Greens up on the end of Sagamore Street, which was three hills, tobogganing. I remember in the winter of 1933, it was so cold that winter, that they didn't open the schools certain days. They couldn't afford to heat the schools. They kept it warm enough so the pipes wouldn't freeze. So what did we do? We went out and went skiing. It was just so cold.

It's such a nice city. This neighborhood here? For years the same people lived here. The Dunn family is gone now. I remember this house across the street here. George Dunn's father was in the Civil War. I remember as a little boy, he was in his Civil War uniform walking out the front door of that house. A Civil War uniform, so that shows you how old he was. Mr. Dunn was a nice man. His wife was hard to get along with, let's put it that way. She was very hard to get along with. She called him Hubby some times and the other times she said he won't do anything for me. She was kind of a mental case, you might say. I used to work for her for 25 cents an hour building her garden over there. In fact, when the couple moved in over here, they changed that all around, but I'd wheelbarrow stuff from Blueberry Hill.

We used to pick blueberries right over there. There were blueberries all around the area. When Nora Johnson was taking care of us when we were kids, she said boys, if you go over and pick blueberries, I'll make blueberry muffins. So she made blueberry muffins for us. I like blueberry muffins. [Laughs]

MR: Let's talk a little bit about the City Hall restoration because you clearly have an interest in historic preservation and saving things that otherwise would get tossed.

WS: Right! I read the paper one day. Leo Bernier had an article in the Manchester Union-Leader in 1994 about the sesquicentennial. The City Hall was an absolute disaster; it really was. It had duct-tape everywhere. I don't know, I got the idea that I wanted to save that building and help with the restoration of the City Hall. I didn't know Leo that well in those days, but we're very friendly today.

They had T-shirts for the sesquicentennial with the City Hall on them. They had ordered them and they needed to be sold. They decided they were going to work on the City Hall and restore it. So the City Hall employees moved up to 1000 Elm Street, which is a tall black building that you see down there today. The finance department and a whole bunch of them moved up there. The City Hall where you pay the taxes and do your automobile registration was right on the first floor. I had a table right there in that area and I used to load these T-shirts and everything right on that table. As the people went by, I sold T-shirts, red books, everything. Some days I'd take in over a thousand dollars. Then I went around to the banks and so on. We had hoped to get [money] from the Amoskeag Bank, but they went bankrupt. All the banks went bankrupt in the city.

The Manchester National Bank was on the corner right across from the City Hall plaza, now, but Market Street went right through to Elm Street. The Manchester Bank

was right there on that corner. When I was working for the Public Service Company, I used to deliver documents from the Public Service Company down to the bank on Elm Street. I used to deliver documents to Norwin S. Bean. He was the president of the Manchester National Bank. As it turned out, the Norwin and Elizabeth Bean Foundation was the largest giver to the City Hall restoration. Of course, Norwin Bean is gone, but it's ironical to think that I delivered documents to Mr. Norwin S. Bean. As I say, if they were bankers or textiles, they had the money. That's all there was to it.

I used to go into Norwin S. Bean's office. It was on the right-hand side as you walked in the front door off Elm Street. I delivered the documents to Mr. Bean and went back to the Public Service Company and did other things: moved typewriters for the girls in the office. I was busy all the time!

Then I used to take all the money to the Amoskeag Bank from the Public Service Company. You could walk right into the Public Service Company, pay your bill on Elm Street. We'd go to the bank in the morning and we'd go to the bank in the afternoon and deliver this money. I'd take anywhere from one million to two or three million dollars to the bank with Chris Gossler, who used to guard me going down the street. [Laughs] We'd go into the Amoskeag Bank and deposit the money and come back to the office at 1087 Elm Street. The office boy did all kinds of things. He did everything. It was really something. I used to go over to the post office and pick up the mail and walk back.

Incidentally, I saw the old post office. That was a post office, but the old post office-- When Franklin D. Roosevelt was president, they tore down old post offices and built new ones in order to make business and revive the community. When we were very young, my dad took us down and we watched them tear down that old post office. It was

just like the legislative office building up in Concord that didn't get torn down. It was a beautiful old post office. I would go over to the new post office, supposedly, which is no longer a post office period. It's the Divine Millimet office building now. They have restored that building and kept that up. The old box is still there that I used to get Public Service mail out of when I went to the post office.

MR: Did it have any of those W.P.A. [Works Progress Administration] murals that so many post offices had?

WS: Oh, sure! They not only had W.P.A. murals, but on Maple Street, when you'd come north, they also had W.P.A. music buildings, too. There's an old Victorian house on Maple Street, around Prospect or Myrtle. When we'd walk home from Central High School, they'd be in there practicing. They even paid people to learn to play an instrument, as far as the W.P.A. was concerned. Frank Bresnihan used to live right up here. He was a W.P.A. foreman. He made 13 dollars a week as a foreman. The other W.P.A. workers made 11 dollars a week and they used to cut right through the Amoskeag Woods. They were working on Dorr's Pond. They were going to make a swimming area out of Dorr's Pond, but it was full of muck and they never got that done. We used to skate on Dorr's Pond. This was right across from the Puritan now. That was a great place to skate. We used to walk through the woods and go over there and skate. They had a pot-bellied stove in the hut there and you could get a steamed hot dog for a nickel and go skating.

MR: When was the City Hall restoration finished?

WS: The City Hall restoration was finished in 1999. They all moved back into the City Hall. It was all done over. We have a picture book here that we put out. It's a beautiful book. The historic association had a tour down to the City Hall as the restoration was taking place, and this fellow walked off the bus. His name was Roy Shoults. He said do you mind if I take some pictures? Leo Bernier, the city clerk, was in charge. He said sure; in fact, we'll hire you to take pictures. So he took all the pictures of the restoration of the City Hall as it went on.

MR: So you have the books and you have the photographs.

WS: That's right. In the process, I was getting the Spirit of Manchester award one night in the Aldermanic Chambers. Mayor Wieczorek was there and he announced that the second-floor conference room was going to be named the Walter A. Stiles Conference Room. I almost flipped! I really did. I couldn't believe [it]. They gave me this: a plaque.

MR: A plaque that says [reads], Walter A. Stiles Conference Room, January 19, 1999, in the City of Manchester—with the city seal--incorporated June 1846. Very nice!

WS: When I was raising all this money, we got more publicity. My picture was in the Union-Leader about every other day. [Laughs]

MR: Good for you. You should get some credit for it.

WS: My father, he loved the history of Manchester. We have some beautiful history books: Thorpe's History of Manchester; Potter's History of Manchester. It's a mint copy on the Potter's history of Manchester. He was a judge here in Manchester. In fact, he was going to write this history of Manchester and in the book, he said, well, all these people who volunteered they were going to write for the book, but I ended up writing the whole book, he said.

MR: [Looking at photos in The City Hall Restoration Project: A Pictorial Guide to the Restoration of Manchester's Treasured Landmark, by Walter A. Stiles, Leo R. Bernier, and Roy Shoults, Sr.] There's the conference room [photos page 36]. One of your many legacies.

WS: My wife Janet was looking around for somebody to paint the picture in the conference room; an oil painting in the conference room. Lo and behold, the son-in-law of some of the people we knew—the Rileys; she was in the Legislature--he's a painter and lived up in Warner, New Hampshire. We have a son in Warner, New Hampshire, so we always go to Warner and Bradford, New Hampshire, every Sunday afternoon to see our five grandchildren and two of our children and the in-laws. He was right there, so I would go into his house and sit right there and he would work on the painting. He also used to do paintings for the people in the school in New London, New Hampshire. That got him started, so he's a full-time portrait painter. Mike Koza, a really great guy. A guy in church the other day said, hey, we had a meeting in your room. And he said, you kept looking at me! [Laughs]

That was the crowning glory. The aldermen in private session voted for this room to be named after me. I couldn't believe it. I'm on the bronze plaque down there, as you go up the stairs. But I was in there all the time, I had a hard hat, see? I could go in while all the construction was going on. Roy and I would go in there and he would take pictures. He took all the pictures. It's really a picture book; about 244 picture of the restoration of the City Hall. We sold those for 10 dollars. We had a hundred hard copies all numbered from one to a hundred. We sold those for 30 dollars. Well, if we'd known how they were going to sell, we'd have had 500 of the hard copies, because more people

wanted hard copies. Although we sold hundreds more of the soft copies, and we still have a lot to sell. Leo and I are going to work that out with the Chamber of Commerce and we're going to work it with all the businesses in Manchester. Maybe they can give them away.

Our fund has really grown. I joined the city employees credit union. They gave us a cut out of every single transaction they made. It really works good. That building will never, ever have to worry about being a dumpy building again. In the process of restoring that building, they opened up the 1845 entrance, which is where it is today. That's the original entrance to the City Hall. They closed up the Elm Street entrance, and that was put in in 1896 at the centennial time. The place was in sad repair. It was all duct-tape everywhere. It was awful, but now it's a beautiful building. You probably have been there.

MR: I have not, but I will definitely make a point of it next time I come up.

WS: It came out real nice. I was in there all the time and I found things that we never would have saved if I hadn't have been around. In fact, I found out in the back between the second and third floor of the City Hall there was wallpaper on the wall. Of course, we had layers of walls; layers of walls and layers of ceilings. When we started that project, the roof was leaking in the City Hall, believe it or not. It was actually leaking. That shows you how far gone the building was. That got done. The whole project, with the connector, was seven point three million dollars. [End of Tape 2/Side A; 48.7 minutes]

Tape 2/Side B

WS: When the Aldermanic Chambers were on the second floor, I'd go down there and we would attend them as a citizen. There were many citizens interested in what was going on in the City Hall. Bill Cashin was a Democratic alderman from the west side. He said one day, if Stiles ever said anything good about me, I don't know what I'd do. Anyway, Bill is retired now and we're good friends, but he admitted that I was the catalyst for the starting of the restoration of the City Hall. I was a catalyst because I started selling all these T-shirts, red books, everything.

These had been ordered for the sesquicentennial celebration in 1996. From 1997 to 1999, the City Hall was vacant so the contractors could do the construction and restoration work. All the offices were moved to 1000 Elm Street. The citizens of Manchester were able to register their vehicles there--city registration--get birth and death certificates, as well as marriage and dog licenses and also pay motor vehicle violations.

In this area I set up a table which held several sizes of T-shirts for 10 dollars, caps for five dollars, sesquicentennial red book for 25 dollars, city seal tie clips and necklaces for five dollars, and pens for a dollar. This location was on the first floor of the mall, which also had a Dunkin' Donuts sales area and other stores, and it also led to the attached parking garages. The pedestrian traffic was heavy. There were days when I sold over a thousand dollars worth of merchandise relative to the sesquicentennial. I spent five days a week, week after week, selling this merchandise.

Leo Bernier's city clerk's office was on the second floor. I had a desk there also. Paula and Tricia and others were in that office. They kept the records on all the money

and made out the deposit slips and typed letters. They also did their own work as well.

They are very capable women!

In fact, I was trying to look for a red book over there [in house], but you can't see it. I'm the only non-political person—I'm political, but I'm the only non-political person who ever had their picture in the red book of the city of Manchester. They've been putting those out since 1916 or 1917.

It was a fun project. I remember Leo and I talking and saying the thing is going now, they can't turn us back now. And they didn't. It was a thrill to be there and to work and be in that area making sure that we found every artifact that we could possibly find. In one of the chambers I found an old calendar. They'd just left it on the wall, or they left the backing of the calendar on the wall. It was 1909. So I salvaged that. Sally [Fellows, city archivist] has that in the archives. She's got a lot of things down there.

MR: Did you find any shoes in the walls?

WS: No, I didn't find any shoes, but I found a couple of coins. We found coins, but no shoes. We found wallpaper and if you go into the city clerk's office, Leo Bernier's office, a section of that wallpaper attached to the plaster is in a frame. We found out also that way back in the 1830s, 1835 or so, there were two wallpaper manufacturing companies in Manchester down along the river. So they used to manufacture wallpaper too. We have the names of the companies.

When you come right down to it, this city and Lowell--and Lawrence, too, and even Nashua—were the start of the Industrial Revolution. But Manchester was really the largest part of the whole thing. In fact, during the sesquicentennial time, my daughter, her husband, two grandchildren, and Janet and myself were in England. We went to

Manchester, England; a beautiful city. I wanted to meet the mayor of Manchester, England, because I had brought over a travel bag from Manchester—a couple of T-shirts and so on. He was out. It was the last day of campaigning. His name happened to be Mayor Shaw, believe it or not. I wrote him a note and left the T-shirts et cetera.

We had a Mayor Shaw here in Manchester. He's the one who just died a while ago. He got killed. He was coming up the highway and something happened to Bob Shaw and somebody ran right into the back of his car and he died right there on the spot. He was a Republican when he came over here and that chair was over there. I used to say to Bob Shaw, hey Bob, you ought to be able to deal with Cashin. [Mimics] Ah, we can't deal with Cashin. You can't deal with Cashin. Well, anyway, Shaw ran for mayor a couple of times since then. He was a very hard-working man. He had a big filling station up on Webster Street. Then he decided to open up a sandwich shop on Elm Street. He used to drive to Portland to get his special bread. He came from Maine. Bob Shaw was Bob Shaw. He liked to be a rabble-rouser, actually, and he did a good job of it too.

[Laughs]

Bob Shaw was a great guy because he put the city on computers and that was the best thing that ever happened. When he got killed, I tell you, I couldn't believe it, really. Somebody tail-gated and ran right into the back of his car or whatever it was he was in. But I think he must have had a heart attack, because he was working at Hannaford Brothers up here in the deli department. He couldn't retire. Of course, a lot of us are that way. You've got to keep busy all the time. As long as I can walk, I'm going to keep busy. That's all there is to it.

MR: You also made this connection to Manchester, England, which is also mills.

WS: Manchester, England. That's right. I wrote this letter to the mayor of Manchester. I got a return back from his wife, I think it was, or Mrs. Shaw. In that letter I said we're restoring the City Hall of Manchester, and I was just wondering if you could make a token contribution to the restoration of the City Hall of Manchester, New Hampshire. Well, the I.R.A.—the Irish Republican Army--was raising the old devil and they had destroyed about two and a half million dollars of a complex in the city of Manchester, England. They couldn't afford to do it; they just didn't have the money. So we never got a contribution, but they got these red books of City Hall. They got all the things that I brought over there. I don't know what they did with them. It's a nice city. They still have trolley cars in Manchester, England. Still have them! When we pulled up in front of that— To not to be able to meet the mayor because, as I say, it was the last day of campaigning, but that's all right.

Another thing we should talk about are the fire stations in Manchester. When I was a boy going to Straw School, on Vine Street in Manchester, which runs parallel to Elm Street, was the Vine Street fire station. Beautiful place. If we were good and behaved ourselves, we could go down to the Vine Street fire station, walk up the stairs, and slide down the brass rail. We were in grammar school then. We thought that was great. They had the Ahrens-Fox fire trucks. Of course, every kid is interested in fire trucks and firemen. There'd be a fire up here and we'd run up here and say the fire's up in the Amoskeag Woods. They'd talk about Mr. Ready's pig pen. It's out in his pig pen area. Somebody would go out there and light a match on a dry day.

MR: Did you have call boxes?

WS: Yes, we had call boxes. We've got one right across the street here now. In those days in Manchester, when somebody pulled the call box, then at the central fire station would be a whistle. It would whistle exactly where the fire was; the general area. When they came out with a certain whistle, you'd know it was on Smith Road or Sagamore Street or it might be over on Varney Street on the west side. You'd always know where the fire was. In fact, we were sitting on the front porch of our house when we were kids, and this grandfather's clock went off and the kid said is your father in the fire department? I said no, that's our grandfather's clock. [Laughs]

MR: Were there any big fires in the city?

WS: There were a lot of big fires. One of the largest fires in Manchester, long before me, was the 1871 fire in the Manchester area. Right near the City Hall actually. That's another thing about Manchester. Manchester built reservoirs. We had a big reservoir up on where the Western Tower area is. Then in the Depression they built another big reservoir, which we used to ski in before it was filled with water—17 million gallons. It had many more gallons. Then there was also a reservoir right over here on Russell Street. It had a big red fence on it. It went down Harrison Street and then back over on Oak Street and up on Blodgett Street. That was an 11 million gallon reservoir, granite-lined. When I was a freshman in high school, they decided they were going to get rid of that reservoir. They started digging in there. See, everything was fed by gravity. They would fill that reservoir up and then it would go down—everything was down hill all the way—and if you go down in the Amoskeag Mill area, you'll see where they used to let the water in to run the looms. If the river dried up, they'd be able to use the reservoir water to run the loom or to fight fires with.

There was the central fire station. That was a beautiful fire station. There are pictures of it in the historic books of Manchester. Now the telephone company is there and all along that area.

Then the parks. The same thing. Victory Park was right across the street from the fire station, the Vine Street fire station. Well, that was filled with elm trees. Giant elm trees. Of course, the elm tree blight came along and all the elm trees died. We had elm trees in front of Straw School that were that large; they were monstrous. But they're coming back. I've got one in the side yard here now, so I'm going to let it grow.

Americus elmus is what it is. I think the elm trees have licked the Japanese beetle. Of course, they brought them over from Japan in the silk business.

Then we had a fire station on Maple Street, which was just above Corey Square. That was a wooden fire station. That's closed now. I think they made a house out of it. We have the Weston fire station and I've tried to talk fire chief Joe Kane— He lives right down here and he's a good friend of mine. I said we should have a firemen's museum up in the Weston fire station. In fact, I said I've got fire engines and I've got them right here and I'm going to give these if we ever get that museum going.

Those are reproductions of horse-drawn fire equipment we bought at Sturbridge Village down in Sturbridge, Mass. Those are reproductions and they claim that those reproductions are worth quite a bit of money. Those were the days I'd pay 25 dollars for a fire truck and I was only making 80 bucks a week and I had three kids and a wife.

[Laughs] So I never bought all the fire trucks that I wanted to buy, but I'm lucky that I got what we've got. I spoke to Joe Kane the other day. He said, well, my plate is full right

now, he said; I've got a lot of things going, but maybe we can get that fire station restored.

MR: Well, you've done City Hall, so a fire station--

WS: We've got to get that one going too. I don't want to see any more buildings torn down in this city! We restore all these buildings. In the book of the drive for the restoration of the City Hall, I wrote this is the most important building we can restore in the city of Manchester. If we restore the building at the center, this beautiful Gothic building, then restoration will take place all along Elm Street and that's exactly what's happening.

MR: It's so symbolic, too, about the city. So if the city hall goes---

WS: Exactly. I take tours and I take people way up into the bell tower. In fact, Leo wanted me to take a tour of German kids in there today, but I told him I'm busy with you.

MR: Well, this is going in the archives.

WS: Fire stations are great. Geez, I remember one winter I was in bed. This was in my bedroom when I was a kid. We had two twin beds. My brother and I in this bedroom up here. There was a fire and that fire truck couldn't get up Sagamore Street and it backed right into the pole. The fire box is on that side of the street, too. I don't know how they ever got up, but they eventually got up to the fire. I don't know what the fire was.

I told Chief Joe Kane, I said look, with the New York problem there with the firemen and all the lives they lost in the financial district in those two buildings by those people who drove the airplanes into them— That [September 11, 2001 destruction of the

World Trade Center] was a horrendous thing. We could do the same thing up here. We've lost people in our fire department and that would be a memorial. It was built in nineteen-oh-three [1903]. I wanted to get it done in twenty-oh-three [2003], but we never got it done. We haven't started it yet. But they haven't torn the building down and they won't tear it down now. I know people who live up on Weston Street. They would like to see a firemen's museum up there and we've got enough land up there so we could make that museum. Of course, the city will own the building, so the city will still have to pay for the heating of the building. It's a nice old fire station and it should be restored. It shouldn't be torn down.

MR: I have a few more questions and then I think we can start pulling this session to a close. I wanted to ask you about some of the holidays and events throughout the year. You mentioned the parade after Thanksgiving.

WS: That's right. The Christmas parade. That is the largest parade that we have. We have the Armistice Day parade too. In fact, I march in that parade myself. I have my Marine dress blues and I march in the parade. I didn't have any dress blues when I was in the Marine Corps, but I was in the Goodwill Industries up in Concord, and there hanging up about three years ago was a Marine blouse, a dress blues Marine. I tried the thing on and it fit perfect. The brass buckle was there and the white belt. I tried it on and I bought it for 15 dollars. That included the so-called senior citizens discount. I don't like the name senior citizens, to be honest with you, but I said by golly. So I wore it to the Marine Corps birthday party out at the Wayfarer, which is November 10th every year. You see, the Marine Corps is one year older than the United States of America. It was founded in Tun Tavern in Philadelphia in 1775. That's when they founded the Marine Corps. In a

bar. That's when it was founded. I saw the recruiting officer Kennedy and he said, Walter, come on down to the recruiting office next week and I'll give you a pair of trousers. Well, he's this high and I'm this high, but the waist was perfect. I took them over to the Kelly Street tailors and had the trousers taken care of, so I've got the whole uniform now. Fifteen bucks.

MR: Are those birthday parties held all over the country?

WS: They are. Yes, they are; they're held all over the country. It's a great affair and as I told you before, Rene Gagnon, who slid outside on Sagamore Street, was one of the flag-raisers on Iwo Jima during World War Two. As I say, I never met him, but I knew his wife Pauline; his widow.

MR: Were there any other Fourth of July picnics, or town picnics?

WS: Back when I was a kid, at Stark Park-- You know, General John Stark was one of the Revolutionary War generals. He came from Manchester, New Hampshire. In fact, where this house stands, and all this area, was all General John Stark's property. He had 16 or 18 hundred acres of property. The Stark house was down on Canal Street, but when the new Amoskeag Bridge was built, they moved the whole house, lock, stock, and barrel up onto Elm Street, right across from the Brookside Church. They did a good job moving it and preserved it, but it isn't in the original location where General John Stark lived. Stark Park, on River Road, the house that the Starks lived in at Stark Park is gone. That burned down, but the well is still there. General John Stark is buried up in Stark Park up in Manchester. It's a beautiful place. Has zig-zag roads going in there. Every Fourth of July everybody would go up there and they had cannons up there. They didn't fire them.

The same way with Weston Tower. There are cannons up there, too. In fact, way back when I was a boy, they had a huge fire in Nashua. The Nashua Fire. I think it was 1927 or 1928. The trees up there were small in those days, so we went up to the Weston Tower and we could see the smoke from the Nashua fire from there.

In fact, I was digging in some old storage boxes up in the attic here in the house. Our bedroom roof began to leak, so we did the whole thing over and in the bottom of one of those boxes—it was lined with paper--was the Nashua fire. I think it was the Boston Globe. Bernie Streeter is the mayor Nashua. I gave the paper to Bob Baines, the mayor of Manchester, to give to Bernie Streeter.

Another thing we used to have in Manchester was the snowshoe convention. They used to come down from Québec and have snowshoe conventions. They would snowshoe down Elm Street. All these different groups of snowshoers would come down. It was really quite an affair. It was so cold and sometimes the street would have ice or snow on it, but even if it was bare street, they would still snowshoe down Elm Street. They had a great time. They used to drink and they had a lot of fun.

MR: It was like a midwinter carnival.

WS: That's right. A midwinter carnival. Exactly.

MR: What about election days?

WS: Election days. Election days are something else. I started out as a ballot inspector on the old Blodgett Street school house, which the Thornton Naval Vets used as a meeting place. Charlie Barnard was the moderator. He lived over here on Russell Street. Charlie made sure that the ballots were counted properly. He was a lawyer and he also had charge of the Smith and Heald estate, and would borrow from the estate.

Unfortunately Charlie, the nice guy that he was, used to go down to Rockingham Park in Salem hoping to win enough money so that he could put the money back. He ended up in the state prison. [Laughs] Poor Charlie. He's gone too. I liked the man; he was okay.

We had the wooden ballot boxes and when people would vote, a ballot inspector would turn the crank. A bell would ring and record the vote. The old Blodgett Street school house was one of many located in Manchester. It was made of brick and wood. Unfortunately it was torn down many years ago. It should have been preserved.

Now, as I say, we vote at Hillside High School, but for a while there you went from paper ballots to all regular electronic ballots or whatever it is. Now we're back with filling out more stuff; we fill out more paper to register people. As I said, New Hampshire is one of the few states where you can register to vote on election day.

MR: That's amazing to me.

WS: It is; it really is. There are a few others: Oregon and a few others where I guess you can do the same thing. Now we're getting ready for the presidential election. All that stuff that happened down in Florida last time [2000 election] is all coming back and Kerry is talking about that. It's between Kerry and Bush.

I met George Herbert Walker Bush when I was in the Legislature. He was the vice president of the United States then. We all had our pictures taken with George Herbert Walker Bush—the current president's father—and Mrs. Bush.

MR: He was up here on a visit?

WS: He was up here. With our preferential primary in New Hampshire, if you're in the Legislature, particularly, you meet all the presidential candidates.

MR: Because everybody wants to come to New Hampshire. [Laughs]

WS: There he is, right there. [Goes through prepared files for interview.] That's the picture they took, although they spelled my name wrong. Every Republican-- These are all the invitations. Of course, you are the honorable. Once you've been in the Legislature, you're the Honorable Walter A. Stiles.

MR: [Looking at photograph.] This is signed by both George Bush and Barbara Bush.

WS: That's right, but they spelled Stiles [wrong]. There we are right there.

MR: I'm just going to read this into the tape. On George Bush's letterhead. April 25, 1986. The Honorable Walter A. Stiles and the address. [Quotes] Dear Walter. Barbara and I were honored to be guests of Speaker John Tucker and Senate President Vesta Roy in your legislative chambers. To speak under the watchful eyes of Hale, Lincoln, Washington, Webster, and Pierce was a privilege I will long remember. Visiting the New Hampshire General Court was a vivid reminder of how well representative government works. Those of us serving in elective office today face a world of many serious problems. There are no simple solutions, but we are fortunate to have 200 years of experience to help guide America's future. With best wishes, sincerely, George Bush. [end quote] It's interesting because isn't Barbara Bush related to Franklin Pierce? I think she is. She's Barbara Pierce Bush.

WS: She could be related to Franklin Pierce.

MR: Well, how nice.

WS: Isn't that nice? It looks like I'm kind of bowing. Barbara Bush was up here last week, too. [George W.] Bush was up here. 'Happy' McIntyre, who lived in that little cottage over Russell Street there— McIntyre ski area was named after 'Happy'

McIntyre. I knew him very well. I said when I was up there, I said geez, Happy McIntyre would be proud to know that the president of the United States was in the area that was named after him. He liked me very much when I was a kid. He had a wife that was, I think, quite ill. He would take her to work. She never had to go to the state hospital, but she was very sick a lot of the time. She was a very nice woman. That's a nice picture of the Bushes. She's [Barbara Bush] quite a woman with her pearls. Incidentally, I can't find it now, but she had a hip replacement, which I had done. I had it done right in the midst of the restoration of the City Hall. So I told the people don't send me a card; just make a contribution to the restoration of the City Hall.

MR: Which will make your recovery so much faster.

WS: Ray Wieczorek came up to see me. The mayor came up to see me. That operation was the best thing that ever happened. I was in pain all the time. I couldn't work outside. It's a terrible thing to lose your hip; my right hip. I had to give my own blood. We went up to the Red Cross. They wanted three pints because it's a bloody mess when they do a hip replacement. I contributed a pint a week for three weeks. I didn't think you could do that, but of course, I'm a nine-gallon donor anyway. You can give blood and really help somebody and it doesn't cost you a nickel. My older brother, Howie, is a 14-gallon donor. I used to give as much blood as I possibly could because it was a good thing to do, but now that I'll be 82 in a few days, I don't give any more blood.

MR: Is there anything that you want to say to tie this together? You've seen and experienced so much over the years.

WS: Number one, Manchester is a melting pot of New Hampshire. In other words, these people all come to Manchester to work. Leo Bernier was commissioner of welfare here in Manchester for a while and then he became the city clerk of Manchester. Leo's a great guy. He's a very compassionate man and we got along fine.

The whole city is so interesting and it's still interesting. With Pine Island Park when I was a boy--the Disney World of Manchester—it was just wonderful. And the circus coming to Manchester. The Ringling Brothers' Barnum and Bailey Circus unloading at the station and coming up and all the elephants. It was really very exciting.

The last time the Ringling Brothers' Barnum and Bailey Circus-- Janet and I weren't even married at that time, but I said, what do you say we go down to the station, meet the train, go on up to the circus grounds on Maple Street, and watch them put up the tents? Then we'll go home and come back to the side-show. It was a seven-ring circus. That was the last circus that came to Manchester from the Ringling Brothers. I mean a real big circus. They're going to have it down here at the civic center, but it isn't like having a tent. In fact, one of the girls in my class of 1940 died in Hartford, Connecticut, in that big circus fire in Hartford, Connecticut, when the tent caught on fire.

Another thing I'd like to say is that my Marine recruiting sergeant, Sergeant Kelly, died in the Cocoanut Grove fire in Boston. I had no sooner got to Parris Island. My father had the Union-Leader sent down to me and there was Sergeant Kelly's picture on the front page. He died in the Cocoanut Grove fire [November 28, 1942]. He was pushing people out and evidently— It was after a big football game—a B.C. [Boston College] Temple game or something. I never was in that building, but some of my Marine buddies afterwards were stationed at Boston Naval Shipyard and they told me that the people

were running out of the building; they were on fire and they died. Almost 500 people died in that fire and Sergeant Kelly was one of them. He was a nice guy and lived at 21 Hanover Street when he was in Manchester. That area is torn down now. He was up there as a recruiting sergeant.

I was working for Public Service Company then and Genevieve Sinclair, who was one of the best-looking girls in the third-floor accounting office of Public Service Company, thought that Sergeant Kelly was a great guy. She'd say, how's the sergeant today? And I'd say, well, he looks good to me. It was one of my times trying to get over there and get into the Marine Corps. I finally made it, as I told you this morning, by laying down, relaxed, and blood pressure normal.

The city is a great city. It's home to me. As far as I'm concerned, this'll be my nursing home right here at 226 Sagamore Street, hopefully. Of course, you never know how you're going to go, but right now, as far as I'm concerned, I don't want to die in a hospital. I'd like to die right here. In fact, the ashes are going to be strewn on the east bank of the garden here and that's it! [Laughs]

MR: What can you say after that? I will say thank you very much. This has been delightful. [Tape 2/Side B ends at 34.1 minutes. End of interview.]