

Walter Gutekunst and Carl Thayer

Transcript of the oral interview with Carl Thayer and Walter Gutekunst conducted by Emily Salvette. The interview took place on January 12, 2003 at a meeting of the Pittsfield Township Historical Society held at the Pittsfield Recreation Center, 701 W. Ellsworth Rd., Ann Arbor. The gentlemen reviewed the transcript in February 2003. The transcript reflects their corrections and additions, indicated in brackets like this [].

Interview Summary

Mr. Gutekunst was born on December 15, 1927 and has lived in Pittsfield Township all his life. His grandfather, John Gutekunst, was the stationmaster at Pittsfield Junction. Walt Gutekunst is a World War II veteran, and worked for 41 years at The Ann Arbor News. He and his wife, Marguerite Smith, have two children. Mr. Thayer was born on January 24, 1928. He was raised in Ann Arbor and moved to the Township in 1947 after he got out of the service. He worked as a barber, fire fighter and constable. He and his wife Shirley J. Miller have two sons.

Mr. Thayer and Mr. Gutekunst were both very active in Pittsfield's fire department that was established in 1948. This interview deals primarily with their recollections of the department, including its development, the equipment used, and major fires and accidents that occurred in the Township. (Note: After the first 45 minutes of the interview, Mr. Thayer showed slides from of fires and firefighting in the Township. His commentary during that presentation is not transcribed.)

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Carl Thayer and Walter Gutekunst Interview

I

Interviewer (Emily Salvette)

C

Carl Thayer

W

Walter Gutekunst

F

unidentified female questioner

M

unidentified male questioner

I:

I want to welcome everyone to another in a continuing series of oral history interviews that we're doing for the Pittsfield Township Historical Society. We're here on January 12th, 2003 with Walter Gutekunst. Say hello, Walter, so we can get a voice.

W:

Hello. Sure.

I:

Carl Thayer.

C:

Good afternoon.

I:

And both of them were involved in the Volunteer Fire Department in Pittsfield Township for...for many, many years, and so they...my understanding is that put you...we're going to start with and I'll ask you, Mr. Gutekunst to go ahead first and tell us what your earliest memories are of the township and the Volunteer Fire Department.

W:

Well, the Fire Department started in 1948. We had a 1947 International Truck. I don't remember just how many there was, but I would say fifteen to twenty volunteers. And we started over here to Losey's Auto Parts and it was...Harold Losey was our fire chief.

I:

Can you spell Loci for us?

W:

L-O-S-E-Y.

I:

Thank you.

W:

And Losey had a couple, three boys and all of them were on the fire department. Two of us was on, and Dick was Assistant Chief at some time. We had different fire chiefs along the way. We went over to...it was Andy Campbell's Gravel Pit. The first day the truck was delivered it pumped water out of the Gravel Pit over there to play with it. Since then Ann Arbor bought it and made a dump out of it. But that's later years. Um, he was in the Fire Department and went...you know, any number of fires. Carl came along and joined us over here with Harold Losey as a chief, and I don't know, Carl what should we...what did we talk about?

C:

I don't know. I'm sure it's going to rep♦be repetitious because we went through this once before. But basically the early years, there weren't many runs. We got paid I think two dollars...

W:

I believe that's what it was, yeah.

C:

A fire and two dollars an hour. So if you had a incident that lasted an hour and a half, you made four dollars. We got paid once a year, and it was just before Christmas.

W:

Just in time to pay our taxes.

C:

That's, see, that was...taxes.

W:

(laughs)

C:

Or Christmas gifts. Well, then as things picked up, we got an increase in wages, and we started getting paid twice a year. So then that gave us vacation money and Christmas money. Like thirty dollars or forty dollars for...But...and then pretty soon and through the years, then it wen to once a month, and then they put us on the same scheduling as the rest of the employees on the pay program, so it was every two weeks, but...

I:

Were those mostly young fellows, with families or was it all ages?

C:

All ages.

I:

Um-hum.

C:

The Township supervisor [Sam Morgan?] was...then we had a couple farmers...[Warren Rentschler, Ed Lavender, Webb Harwood, Ralph Harwood]

W:

Yep.

C:

...that were available during the day, which made it nice because the young guys, most of the young guys were working, either in factories or had business or things like that.

M:

Yeah.

C:

But farm people were available. There was a soft drink distributorship behind Losey's, and there was a couple fellows there, they were available during the day. Never attended a meeting, never attended a training, but Ron was on the fire department for years. That... [Bill Risky Ron Schairer]

W:

Well, they were available.

C:

Um-hum.

W:

They were right there where the station was [at Losey's] and if there was a fire they went.

I:

What kind of training did you get?

C:

Ladder work, first off, setting up ladders was...was one of them. Then how to...ah, pumps, running pumps. And he was our expert pump man. They don't care how good a fire-fighter you were, you didn't have a pump man, you were in bad...bad trouble, so...

W:

I...I run most of the pumps.

C:
Walt did most of the pump work. Called an engineer, he was our engineer.

W:
Yeah. So, but...we took...we took a school...Wally Gannon taught a fire school for us. I got a diploma in there, but I can't even tell you what year it's from now...'49 or '50, somewhere in there. I'm sure Russ...Rich Payeur went to it to. He's got a diploma. Did you go to that first one, Carl?

C:
Was that one in Dixboro?

W:
Dixboro, or was it Stone School over there I thought we went to, Carl.

C:
Well, I know...that, and then went to Dixboro one weekend.

W:
Okay.

C:
We'd have weekend trainings.

W:
Yeah.

C:
That's what they were.

I:
Oh, I see.

C:
And it was...and most of them were through the University. They were...they were University instructors.

I:
Oh, really. Were there a lot of volunteer fire departments? Were they all volunteer fire departments in Manchester and...

C:
Um-hum. Correct.

I:
...Milan and all them?

C:
Um-hum.

I:
So Ann Arbor had its own department.

C:
Right.

I:
But that was in the city?

C:
Ypsi City had their own.

I:
Okay.

C:

Township was volunteer along. And they slowly eased the volunteers out and went to a full-time, like Pittsfield has done now pretty much.

W:

One thing we brought up about the fire department, last time we talked about this, Carl, Harold Losey, our fire chief at the time, brought in and had a picnic right across the road here, and he brought the fire chief from Ann Arbor out. Up until this time, Ann Arbor would not send a truck to us or we couldn't send them a truck. This was right after they had the Angell Hall [Haven Hall] fire in Ann Arbor. And they had a bunch of antiquated equipment down there. We took our truck down...Harold brought it down and used it down there. A lot of the equipment broke down, it was a such a big fire, that they'd never fought anything like that. We took our truck down there and used it and that made an impression. So the fire chief came up from Ann Arbor to this picnic, we kind of instigated a fire mutual...

C:

Mutually...

W:

...agreement, where the fire chief had to do the calling. But if someone from a...from...we had a fire and our fire chief called down there, they would send out a truck to help us. And that's where Mutual Aid started, and it is since spread to county wide, I guess. We...we'll go out anywhere they need anybody.

I:

Hm.

W:

But up until that time, Ann Arbor, well the story always goes, they went out Jackson Ave. to the city limits and stood there and watched the house burn because they couldn't go outside of the city.

C:

So they had fatality that way. On Miller Ave.

I:

I see.

C:

They actually lost a person, so they couldn't pull line because if they'd get another call within the city they would not be available and those people paid city taxes. So this is when they decided better get into Mutual Aid. And it's worked well. There's been a few problems, but...Pittsfield's been all over. I mean, Jackson, Adrian...I mean, not just...we've been in every township in Washtenaw County literally. But I've been to South Lyon. Well, I got it on the...I got it on the slides over there. We put school trainings on all over the Southern part of the state, and so between that we got acknowledgement; people begin to recognize who we were. Went up and did duty at MIS, and the guy that was in charge of that fire duty up there, I had fought fire with him where the Meijers is now. And he said, ♠I don't know you from anyone else, except I know what he does. ♠ So I got...I drew Dick Petty. So I was Richard Petty's firefighter for the...for the couple days up there.

I:

(laughs)

C:

That's about it.

W:

I think we got called an awful lot, Carl, because we had the first aerial truck around with a bucket on it. And nobody else had the bucket. They had the snorkel. They had ladder trucks, but

nobody had the aerial truck that we bought that...that Sutphen we have over there. And when we got that, why, everybody wanted to borrow it.

I:

How...how much higher would that go? Or was it just that it was easier to fight fires from a bucket?

C:

Eight-six footer.

W:

Well, that was...yeah, eighty-five, eighty...

I:

Wow.

W:

...six foot. Yeah.

C:

But I think what finally determined that was Woodland Hills.

W:

Yeah.

I:

Um-hum.

C:

I come out and I saw that roarin' and then I said, ♠roll Ypsi City and Ann Arbor.♠ Kay come across the bridge and said, ♠He's right, or he's fired.♠ Nobody ordered trucks, but the chief. So, but, he got up there, he said, ♠Thank goodness you had have...had the nerve that...♠ Right after that♠we lost two people in that fire...And then right after that he got...got an order and placed it, and it took, oh, about two or three years to get it.

W:

Yeah. Yeah, right.

C:

Because those were all built from scratch. All...you write your own specs on a fire truck.

W:

Yep. Yeah.

I:

Oh, yeah?

C:

And everyone's different. So if you want a Ford, you list an engine that Dodge or GM or somebody doesn't make. Or a chassis. They learn all these little tricks, but this is the way you program a fire truck.

I:

I got it. Did this have to go through the township then? The township bought all the equipment...

C:

Yes.

I:

...and, ah, they just didn't have a fire department that was full time staff, and...

C:

We were fort♠

I:

...and full time equipment.

C: We were fortunate there for a while. Um, the federal government gave money out and Bob Lilley got into it. So a lot of our equipment cost us half or less than you had from the...

I: Um-hum.

C: Pardon me?

M: Surplus

C: For...for a unit...for the unit, and that saved a...saved a lot of money, and we were able to upscale on it. And it actually brought our insurance rates down in the township. Because you have to be a ten. Everybody starts at a ten. And you have to go to nine before you can go to eight. Hope there's not an insurance man in here.

W&I: (laughs)

C: Um, I'm going to stand corrected. Eight, it starts reducing. Nine or ten are the same rate, but you have to go to nine before you go to eight. And this is what the city's going through right now. They're sitting on four, and I think they do have a couple five areas. But...and they said that if they needed all this firefighters and their equipment, it's going to push them up a notch. But I don't think it'll affect that much. But anyway, this is the way that's programmed. And by getting this new equipment, it brought our rates down quite a bit.

I: Um-hum.

W: I think Jim Kay, our chief at that time, went around to some businesses and solicited funds...

C: Um-hum.

W: ...too, Carl. I think he got some businesses to put in some money on account of the availability of this new truck.

I: Um-hum.

C: And then young Jim and I, and we went around and talked to farmers in the area to see if they would donate an acre or sell ten acres and...for a new fire station. And that's when we wound up, you know over there where we're at. Trying to pick a location that you can get in and out of. So it wasn't on a hill, so you didn't have to take off on a hill. Because they're hard, you know, or on intersections, right smack on an intersection sometimes that, because you can't get in and out, to back up but...There was a lot of thought put into all of this. But it's funny, what goes around comes around. All of a sudden you're right back here to a fire station and literally our original spot...

W: Yeah.

C: ...was kitty-corner across the street.

I:

(laughs)

C: But schooling, there was schooling every weekend if you wanted to go.

I: Uh-huh.

C: So it...depending on, they...you know, forcible entry, and you had Firefighter 1 and 2 and it went on up, and these are all state-accredited courses, so that whether you're in Detroit or Dexter, it's the same course. And you turn in your name, social security number and birth date, so they know. And then that goes up to state and it's all recorded, how many credit hours, and every...they'd print...they'd give you a regular print out...

I: Um-hum.

C: ...that what courses you've had and the hours you got in on it, so...

I: Now, about how many fires would you fight in say a month? Can you give us an average? Or was...did it really vary, change?

C: Fighting fires is minimal. Ah, fire runs...I went, let's see, 103 times one year to Woodland Hills.

I: To Woodland Hills...

C: To Woodland Hills

I: ...only?

C: I kidded. I said I could live over there out of what they're paying me.

W: Yeah, yeah.

C: But I lived just a couple three blocks from them.

I: Hm.

C: And I was always first on the scene, and they would wait for me to get there, and then usually the truck would turn around at the theater down there, the big theater across the bridge on Carpenter.

I: Um-hum.

C: Then go back home. There was three of us that could call the trucks off.

I: Um-hum. Were, um...was it like fire departments are now, where they respond to any kind of emergency -- medical, and that, and they were the first on the scene for medical...

C: Not...not originally, no. That started Ann Arbor City, Fred Schmidt I think started that. Um, it was almost like the guys was just sitting here giving them something to do. Kay picked up on it, and

as long as they're just sitting here, you know, the windows are washed and the floors are mopped, have them do something.

I:

Yeah.

C:

And their theory was that they could probably get there quicker than an ambulance...ambulance could, you betting on their location, because they're...the way ambulances are located, they're situated, one may cover Manchester, Chelsea and Dexter.

I:

Um-hum.

C:

And he'll sit in between. And then of course if they move one, then everything has to move up...move up a notch, so...it's got its good and it's got its bad, I think.

I:

But at first you weren't doing that.

C:

No. We did not. No.

W:

No. No. We just went to fires.

C:

And we did go to...well, we went to automobile accidents.

W:

Yes, yes.

C:

And plane crashes.

W:

Yes.

C:

Well...

W:

We have to ride.

C:

...well, we had our sh♦we went through a rash of plane crashes.

I:

Really? When was that?

C:

Um, well, the first one was on Scio Church and a disc jockey out of Detroit piled up over there. And then the next one I think was in the woods when the father-son course erred.

W:

Yep.

C:

Then the third one was Toma and a state trooper and they...they hit about 80 foot up in the air head on. I was in swim♦, was over here swimming at Norm's.

W:

Ha.

C:

And trying to get dressed with your body all wet♦

W:

(laughing)

C:

then...running across just the highway like that to get a fire truck. But anyway, they piled up. Then another one, there was two of them in a plane and the wing caught the hanger. I've got a picture of that. Um, then they had the one where, up on Independence, where it just missed the school, but it did...part of it hit the house. There's another in there. I don't know. There was...and then later on they had one on Varsity between Ellsworth and Stone School Road, there on the big curve there on McCalla's property now. Um, then they had one, so...we've had...we've had three or four that are down, but nothing really happened. But those...those were majors, some of those.

W:

Yeah.

C:

Oh, the one that hit the house right here.

W:

Yes.

C:

And it took out three people.

W:

Yes.

C:

So we've lost a lot of people in airplanes...

W:

Yeah.

C:

...you know. And then all of a sudden it quit and it wen to Wix was it Wic no, it was...out Pontiac Trail. Help me, Shirley.

F:

South Lyon.

C:

South Lyon. No. Just before South Lyon. What's in there? Ah...

W:

Milford?

C:

Pardon?

M:

Ann Arbor Trail.

C:

Well, no, it's off...Anyway, they started getting them and they were...they were getting planes that hadn't reached the runway, run off the runway, missed it then, ah, so on and so forth. Then that rash quit. [Salem Airport]

I:

Um-num.

C:

And it was funny how it went. I shouldn't say funny. It was odd, it really...

W:

Yeah.

C:

...just went in spurts like that.

I:
Well, Walter, what was the most memorable fire that you remember fighting.

W:
Oh...

I:
Hm?

W:
...I don't know, it's been...been so long ago. Ah, I was at the station one time and I was setting in for Harold. One around Gross Road, I think it was, and it was one of the first fires we had -- house fire. And we called...we called Saline or Saline came out too, and the two of us kind of put the fire out. I mean, that was...that was the big one that I remember right off the bat, because I guess I was kind of in charge of it. And of course Dick came along and I was happy to see Dick (laughs). And, ah, but that was one of the first fires I went to. Of course these... these big fires that we had with the oil tanks, Gallup-Silkworth down here and...and the other one over on Carpenter Road. Those were two big ones. But you've got pictures and everything of those already.

I:
Well, yeah.

W:
I'm sure.

I:
We do.

W:
Yeah.

I:
And I know you're going to show some pictures after we're done here. But what about barn fires? Is that...just not really...didn't really have that many of those?

W:
I...I...I don't remember...

C:
We had a few.

M:
The people over...

C:
Behnke.

M:
Spruce Tree.

C:
Where?

M:
Spruce tree, got a fire in there _____.

C:
Well, we had...oh, at Strawberry. I thought you meant a barn fire. I was trying to picture a barn. Yeah, we...

W:
Yeah, I was...


C:

...Strawberry and then Spice Tree, we've had...we had...

W:
Yeah.

C:
Every...every one, every complex has had very bad fires. Glenco Hills, that was a weird one there.

W:
Yeah.

M:
There's nobody in the building  _____.



C:
Yeah.

M:

I:
Hm.

C:
But Glenco Hills. They went through, got everybody out of the building and they kept waiting for the fire department, waiting for the fire department, and finally it dawned on them. No one had called the Fire Department. They called Ann Arbor and wanted to know where they were at, and said we...we haven't got any call on it. So, and of course all this is taped, thank goodness.

W:
Oh, yeah.

C:
So then they called Pittsfield, said,  You have a fire? We don't know.  So then they said, told us what they had reports of and we responded. And this made the newspapers, and they checked times on this one, and we were in the clear, but, I mean, it was...it was an awful time, yeah. And we lost...we lost quite a few...quite a few buildings in there, and no one was hurt on that one. But every...every multiple we've got here has had...had major fires. Like I said then, that Woodland Hills one we lost two. He went back up to find her and they were both...it got them both.

I:
Um-hum. On a big fire like that, I mean, I assume everybody would come out pretty much? And how many would that be? I mean, what, a hundred?

C:
Well, you...you start getting multiple departments on that. And there's probably 70, 80 people. Yeah, I would say.

I:
Um-hum. And how big was the volunteer force, um, at it's maximum, would you guesstimate?

C:
Jim Kay said he'd like to see a hundred. But I remember...but we probably had 40 or 50 at one time.

W:
I was going to say, yeah.

I:
Um-hum.

C:
And you could get, on a major fire, you'd 90 percent of those.

F: How do you organize the fighting of that fire with all the different departments coming in?

C: You have a...you have a central center, and now you have two name tags on your collar. And they're ver◆Velcro. And the first one goes if you're on the scene, and the second one you take off when you go in a building, so they know who's...who's there and where they're at. And then they're coordinated, there's...they got it written like a chalk talk. They get out these board and they start drawing and they draw pictures of whatever fire truck, is where they're located and who's in what area, and it's all programmed that way. So it's...it's pretty well covered.

M: I was going to ask about the schools. If you have the majority of schools down there. And then you have historical fires.

W: In the schools?

M: In the schools.

W: In the schools.

M: _____

W: I don't know as I ever went to a school fire. Did you, Carl?

C: I'm trying to think. I...

W: I don't believe so.

C: Made a lot of fire runs where they pulled a fire alarm.

M: Right. Okay.

W: Yeah.

C: But actual fires, I don't...I don't think...

W: I don't, I don't believe so.

I: Well, that's good.

C: Um-hum.

W: Sure. Sure.

I: We're glad of that.

W: Yeah.

I:

When did the volunteer force get...end and...or is it still...are there still volunteer opportunities for fire...

C:

There are. Yes.

I:

...fighters?

C:

It...it has to be a working fire.

I:

Um-hum.

C:

And then they'll tone out...But, no, the volunteers are called on...paid on-call now. On-call.

I:

Um-hum.

W:

Yeah.

C:

Because that's when they get paid is when they're on-call.

I:

So...

C:

Because it never has been volunteer. Very few people have volunteered, where you actually volunteer your time. Most everyone has always gotten paid something somewhere along the line.

I:

Um-hum. Well, I guess I meant our professional...

W:

Yes.

I:

...Public Safety Department started in the middle 70's, or earlier?

C:

Well, we had three fire chiefs. And then we went to Public Safety.

W:

Yeah.

C:

We had Losey, Thompson, and Kay.

W:

Yeah.

C:

And then we went to Public Safety. And then I think we've had five or six of those. But in the process, we went through something like 17 or 18 assistant fire chiefs. Anybody want to be assistant fire chief, just sign up.

W&I:

(laugh)

C:

They came and went.

W:

Yeah, they...

C: Depending on...we had school teachers and gas company and, I mean, I can go on and on. Ann Arbor City Firefighters like, you know, Roger [Losey]...

W: Yeah.

C: ...and...but...no, it was odd. I don't know if Lavender actually was ever Assistant Fire Chief or not. But, you know, potato farm up here, but he was real active on it. And he was our treasurer. And of course Sam Morgan was the supervisor, and so he was on it.

I: Um-hum.

W: Ralph Harwood lived over on Textile Road. He was on it.

I: Um-hum.

C: But as it got larger then...they always said we'd have no officers. We had a Chief and Assistant Chief.

W: Yeah.

C: And then there were guys that knew what were going on, you know, the...the Loseys and...well, like Fritts, your brother. Walt, myself. If you wanted something, those younger guys would kind of listen to you...But finally they went into officers and they appointed shift commanders.

W: Yeah.

I: Um-hum.

C: And it took three shift commanders, and I had gone through National Arson Academy, so I took over the fire investigation. And they made us sergeants. Well, then that backfired on them, because then we outranked the shift commanders. So they had to redo that. And those guys were full time pay, and so they revamped all that. And then pretty soon, they got sergeants and they became full time under...see, the state changed a lot too. I had...I had forgotten, and I didn't know about this till I was down there to Bethany Apartments one time and I couldn't figure out why he didn't go in. He was first on the scene and he's standing there, and I said, ♦You want some help?♦ He said, ♦Yes.♦ I was off...I had been given back all my gear. So, ♦What are we waiting for?♦ ♦It's we got to get one more person.♦ You had to have three people on the scene, and I think it's two go in and one's out so they know what's going on. And that was the state law. And that's what the city's griping about now, that it cuts out on their manpower that you have to wait that much longer till...say if you've only got two men on a truck...

I: Um-hum.

C: And I think they do periodically operate that way. They're not supposed to. You have to wait for the third person to show.

W:

Yeah, right.

I:
Does anyone have any questions from the audience?

F:
I have a question earlier in your life. Before fire department, I'm interested in where you lived, where you went to school?

W:
Well...

F:
...that type of stuff.

W:
Okay. Marcia. I was telling you a little about that anyway. Ah, I lived in Pittsfield Township all my life. Lived over on Payeur Road. And it used to be Pittsfield Junction, if you remember. Well, my grandfather, John Gutekunst, was stationmaster over at the depot over there. So I got to go over there and play in the depot. So, ah, it was real nice, fun. There was a waiting room over there for about 40 people. They had a room and seats all the way around the outside and a stove in the middle. And then there was a freight dock, and I was telling Marcia. It ran clear from the Ann Arbor track over to the other track, the side track, and it was about a card table height there or a little higher, so you could wheel freight from this freight car across the dock and over to the other freight car. This was a big...well, that was a nice playground for me to play, ride my bicycle on, because that was nice and smooth. So I used to go over there and play. Um, they used to run a train from Ypsilanti to Hillsdale, and believe it or not, that train is the one that had the right-a-way over there at one time. The Ann Arbor used to have to stop and switch all the tracks and stuff for it. But it used to be the other way. So anyway, I lived over there and was over in the station with my grandfather. Went to Sutherland School over here. That's over on Textile Road. Spent eight years over there, and got an education. I always said that you either had a good teacher or a bad one, and the last four years I had a good teacher. She was Ed Lavender's wife and was a fabulous teacher. I don't know what else I could tell you.

M:
Well, what years was your grandfather stationmaster.

W:
Well, I can't tell you when he started, but I was born in '27, and he was stationmaster, oh, for four or five years after that that I can remember. And he passed away.

I:
What was his name?

W:
John.

I:
John Gutekunst.

W:
John Gutekunst. Yes.

I:
And he had...had...is that...had that family been in the township for...?

W:
Yes. My father...my father was born over on Ellsworth Road. There was a farm over there that they had at that time. Then I guess they moved over there when he became station master and they lived here all their life and I lived in the same house until 1959 when I built my other one over there.

I: Oh.

W: So I...I grew up there. Oh, I was going to tell...I had a mention electricity too.

I: Um-hum.

W: We didn't have any electricity at our place out there.

I: Um-hum.

W: Ah, my dad was electrician by trade, and we had a Delco plant, which is a generating plant in our basement, because he bought it. He had wired a house somewhere and they were getting rid of it, so he bought this plant where you had to have batteries, and you have to this generator. And we had of course the exhaust, going outside and everything. He would run that once a week. My mother would wash and iron on Monday, so we'd run the generator to run the washing machine and run the iron when she was doing that because that didn't draw as much current with the generator was running, of course. And the rest of the week we had electric lights and stuff like that. But about 1934 or '35, right in them years, Edison was...Over on Morgan Road actually is where they came. Harry Payeur, that's Russ and Rich's dad.

I: Um-hum.

W: Bert Weinert down on the corner there, Marcia, from your house. And my folks all went together and they had to pay Edison to build a line into there. But when they built the line in they had the stipulation that if anyone else hooked onto the line in the future, they would get their money back. Well, of course, they built the rest of the houses around the area, so they got their money back, but they had to pay for you to get that Edison line in there the first place. Yep.

I: What was your mother's name? What...and her maiden name?

W: Lillian. And her maiden name was Lillian Peters. She was living on the corner of State and the railroad track right down there at the time when they got married. She actually is from up north most of the time though around Marion, Michigan. It's out of Harrison towards Cadillac about...

I: Oh, okay.

W: ...fifteen, twenty miles.

I: Um-hum.

W: That's where she's originally from.

M: Well, we're trying to get some idea of, you know, when the Volunteer Fire Department started in Pittsfield, and they have any type of a year?

W: Yeah, they...the township fire department started in 1948.

M:

W: Now, before that they would call Ann Arbor?

M: No.

W: No.

M: No. Saline.

W: oh

M: Saline. Saline. Saline, City of Saline would come out.

W: Okay.

M: And we would call anybody in the township. We had to call Saline. And of course that's five, seven minutes away at the best, ah, to my house. If you go farther it is farther away, yeah.

W: So what if some people in...in, you know, in Pittsfield, they would assist the Saline fire people when they came out?

M: No. There was no...there was no Volunteer...there was no Volunteer in Pittsfield at all at that time.

W: Nothing available.

M: Nope nothing was available.

W: Then when we started, it developed into a feud...

M: Yep.

W: ...between Pittsfield and Saline. And it got nasty at times. Because they didn't...they didn't like us having a fire department.

M: Nope.

W: And they'd come into our territory. Well, you didn't get that many runs and you want...you know, you want to take care of your own, so to speak, and you needed that excitement to keep these people encouraged to...

M: Yeah.

W: ...show. So it...I remember, the first one I got into, we were on Maple Road and they built a fire of over there. And we sat over here at a meeting one night, and all of a sudden the whistle blew. You got...you have a fire on Maple Road, south of Ellsworth. So we go over there and these guys have built up a big fire. And Saline was there when we got there. And they were going to bill us and all that, and of course supervisor was with us and he said, ♦No, because you weren't

called. Yes we were. Well, you shouldn't have re shouldn't have responded , so it...and after that it really got nasty.

I:

What...what do you mean it got nasty?

C:

Just lit

I:

Was it verbal jousting or...?

C:

Yeah. Oh, yeah. Little thing that they...you'd try to slide into...

I:

They didn't slash your tires.

W:

No. No, no, no.

C:

But you tried to slide into each other's territory as much as you could, just take...take fires away from each other and...

I:

(laughs)

C:

And it were...there weren't too many kind words said amongst each of us either. For some reason.

M:

They had kind of a different situation. Romulus used to be a hick town, and Wayne was built up before. And the Romulus residents were always glad to see, you know, the Wayne the police department and the fire department extend their boundaries.

I:

Um-hum.

M:

No animosity at all in that situation.

C:

One...once we got into Mutual Aid...

W:

Yes.

C:

...then it worked out well. Then everybody became real good buddies and they...everybody...everyone cooperated with each other. But we had no police department back then. All we had were the Constables. There was four of us at one time. And then we relied on the Sheriff and the State Police, depending upon where the location was. So if it was in this area, you'd call up the sheriff's department for traffic control and such as that. And if it was over on the east...or on the east side, southeast side, you'd call the State Police because they had a post in that area. But...

M:

Where you have a Pittsfield Grange.

C:

That's...that's on the other side again. But...

M:

Same territory, same territory?

C: That's all Pittsfield.

W: That's...that's all right. Yeah.

C: See, and then you go on up to the next corner, and that's the end of the township.

M: Okay.

C: And that's Maple Road.

M: Okay.

C: But...we used Ann Arbor. Ann Arbor would not lower themselves to use a volunteer fire department. It was just that plain for years. And we finally broke...well, like you said, with Haven Hall, I climbed...

I: Yeah.

C: ...up on that building, I've got pictures. It took pictures of the people for the parrott and all that on it.

I: Yeah.

C: And it looked worse than a football game. You couldn't...I mean, it's just a mass, there's thousands of people there. It was...finals time as I recall, and this kid set a fire in the waste basket and...

W: Yeah, that's all it was.

C: ...and he was...he was flunking and he...he torched a perfectly good building.

W: Yeah.

C: But...

I: Tell me when that was? I don't...what was it near?

C: Ah, forty...

M: It was a school fire.

C: I want to say...yeah, that is. That...there you are. That was a school fire. You're right.

I: It is in '40?

C: Ah, '49 I think.

W:

'48 or '49. Yeah. I was...I was not at the newspaper yet, Carl. So...

C:
And she would...

W:
...and that would be before '48.

C:
Well, I was parked up there because I parked in front of a fire hydrant, and it works...well, she worked there on Liberty Street.

W:
Yeah.

C:
Thought, well, I'm safe because all the cops are going to be over there at that fire. So...

I:
Huh...

C:
But. So I would say '48 or '49.

W:
I would say '48, Carl.

C:
Um-hum.

W:
Yep, '48.

I:
Um-hum. Well, you have pictures of that and we're going to...

C:
No I don't. I've got those on prints. I always carried a camera with me. I always have carried a camera. And they get some weird shots that way, but, no, they're not on those slides.

I:
Um-hum.

C:
But then we got called down there to the 20th Century Bowling Alley, which became a restaurant and a nightclub. And we did them some good down there. So then they begin to call us periodically on various things. Of course, like Gallup-Silkworth.

W:
They had that Montgomery Ward fire about the same time...

C:
The Montgomery Ward, yeah.

W:
...the same time on there, on Washtenaw Ave. Or on Washington Street.

C:
Washington.

W:
Yep.

C:
We were coming back from Chelsea and you can see that. Every now and then the electricity, you know, it shorted out and it just light up the sky.

W:
Yep.

C: That...that was a very impressive fire then. We've been...there's been a lot of impressive fires around there.

W: That Angell Hall fire when it started, it was just in one corner of the building. I'll never understand why...

C: How it got so far so fast.

W: Yes. So far so fast, because I was...I was there and watching it and it was in this corner, and all at once everything went, you know. And it was on fire.

C: First it was an old wood building. You know, the old wood...

W: Yeah.

C: ...floors and...and wooden walls that...

W: Like I said, some of the equipment down there at the fire department wasn't in too good a shape (laughs).

C: Well, we had a fire on Jewett.

W: Yes.

C: Ann Arbor had taken over East Ann Arbor. They came, then we called for assist, they came down. They brought a pumper, and they had front mount pump. They couldn't operate it. So Walt showed them how to operate it.

W: Yep.

C: In the meantime, I'd climbed up. Well, we pulled a two and a half, as I recall.

W: Yep. Yep. Because we had them coming, Carl.

C: The first time any volunteer fire department ever pulled a two and a half.

I: What's a two...?

W: Two and a half inch hose is...

M: Two and a half inch...

C: But it sucks water, it's gone, you know.

I: Thank you.

C: But we knew we had help coming.

W: Yeah.

C: So we pulled that, and I climbed up on the roof of the house next-door. He finally got that pump going.

W: Yep.

C: And then they didn't bring any water with them.

W: We didn't get any water, Carl. That's right.

C: They didn't lay line.

W: Yep.

C: And they should have laid line from like Frasier's Pub down. Because there's no hydrants. That's why we needed help. But...so and our...our equipment was all messed up, and I load it up, and I took theirs back to the station, too, which has been making the news lately.

I: Um-hum.

C: And the chief has those guys all lined up in a chair.

W: ♦Next time you go on a fire department call doing a rural area...♦

C: Oh, he was really racking ♦em.

I: (laughs)

W: Yep.

C: I got a walk in on there on that.

I: Did you see the closed sign on Station 2 as you drive by now?

C: No, I haven't gone back.

I: It's ♦Sorry, We're Closed.♦

C: Oh, well, they...naturally....

W: _____

C: ...naturally they'd play that one up.

W: Yeah.

I:

F: Oh, sure they would. Did you have a question?

F: I wanted to know what your personal gear was like as compared to the gear, say, wear now.

C: Um, my last gear was pretty much...

F: Yes.

C: ...the same.

F: Was it as heavy as it is now?

C: Yeah, yeah. The...we went from metal tanks to fiberglass tanks, it's got [air-demand facemasks]. That reduced the weight a lot. Once you geared up, put a tank on your back, you put on I think it was 78 pounds. You gained 78 pounds. Now, you're going in a building that's four, five, six hundred degrees. You're crawling around on your hands and knees, and you're dragging a hose, and when they're charged, they're heavy. But...

W: Carl, when we started...

C: Well, when we first started...

W: ...our coats...our coats were like raincoats.

C: Rubber coats. Yeah. Rubber raincoats.

W: Yeah, we had rubber coats and stuff.

C: And you had boots and you hoped you remember to pull them up.

W: Yeah.

C: And if you didn't they'd fill up with water.

W: That...that's what we had.

C: And you had old plastic helmet, and I've got a picture of that. That was just...

W: I've got one of those helmets at home, I think, Carl.

C: I still do too. I saved all my helmets. I've got them hanging up on a wall, much in my house.

M: Tell me about _____. _____ old fire _____. _____.

C: They've opened up a museum in the old Ypsi City Fire Station. I think most all of us have made donations of some sort. They've got some of my stuff in there. I took some from Pittsfield. Every department in Washtenaw County, they're trying to get a group to where each department, but

there's a lot of nice fire trucks. People get a chance you should go over there. Old time fire trucks and...and...

M:

In Depot Town?

C:

No. It's just before you get to Depot Town. On the north side of the road there.

M:

The next to the old High School?

C:

Yeah.

M:

Oh

C:

Yeah, it's on...it's further east than that a little bit. But it's just before you get to the bridge.

I:

Okay.

C:

At the river there.

M:

You know, the old school's been turned...

C:

Yeah.

W:

Yep.

C:

Yeah.

I:

◆into Condominiums.

W:

Yeah.

C:

Um-hum. Yeah.

W:

Yeah, I...

C:

But, oh, H&H Distributors. Howard...He married a Clement. Howard...Anyway, but I have a senior moment. Anyway, he bought into that and bought that building and put a basement under it and it's got under◆underground parking underneath now with ramps going down. They put three apartments up above that overlook, and then you come out and there's nice shiny railing where they can look down on all this fire equipment, but if you get a chance, give yourself 20, 30 minutes and go over there. It's nice.

I:

sounds so.

C:

And it'll get better as it progresses...it's new so they're still growing...they've got a long way to go.

I:

Yeah. Did...did you have to buy your own equipment when you first started out?

C: Yes. We bought...they had boots, helmets and coats. But where I lived, I usually wound up with size 12 or 14 boots.

I: Uh-huh.

C: And you'd go to turn and your boots would stay and your feet'd turn and you'd wind up flat on your face. And so first thing you did was you bought yourself a pair of boots that fit you, and then you got yourself a helmet because you got tired of all the tar and stuff running down your neck. If you went to...those working fires and the hot water, and so then after that then they decided it was time to furnish us...furnish us gear.

I: Um-hum.

C: And then we went...eventually we went to bunker pants and coats, so when you're sliding your pants, your boots are already in those. And then the materials changed over time. And as the materials changed, our gear changed. Then it was just more heat resistant and it was like three or four layers you could snap them all out and there was a insulation layer in for heat, and one for water, and...but there's been a lot of...done a lot of study and improvement on that. But weight wise, it's...they're still all pretty much the same, except like I said the Scott air tanks. They did lighten those up.

M: How big was the transition going from negative to positive air packs?

C: Nothing really. It was neat because you didn't have to fill them, and like I told the guys, if you'll talk to yourself or sing, you're not breathing, and your tanks will last longer. And once they caught on to that...Otherwise, you know, you get into a fire, the first thing you do is you start breathing hard. You know, excitement, adrenaline and all that. So you feel like...you just talk to yourself, okay, I want to do this or I think I'll crawl here to there. And as long as you're talking, you don't...you don't breathe, so you can drag the time out on a tank.

W: We only had a couple Scott air packs originally. We had these MSA packs. They were those ones that were charcoal, you know, they're supposed to filter everything for you, but I guess they found out they didn't filter everything so weren't good for you. Well, so we went to Scott's then, yeah.

C: When we first started we had, like you said, one or two Scotts.

W: Yeah.

C: But you had to go down to get them filled down here on State Street near State Circle, and they finally rigged up where they put this huge tank up next to the gate and the fence and we had them adapted that we could go through there without having to have them come down and open up, and we could fill our two tanks, so we seldom used them. But back then, you had basically paper, wool and...what am I missing. Cotton. Then they went to synthetics. You know, your...that was a whole new program. Then you had, like you said these...we'd go up there to Army Surplus or War Surplus, and you'd get these little [charcoal filter] packs that you could hook inside your coat and just take this little mouthpiece...

W:

Yeah.

C:

And put it in your mouth and breathe through that, take it home and throw it in the oven and dry it out. It had a color code on it, and so if it was red or blue, and you'd get it back to the color you so desired and start all over again. But then the state banned those, and all those, with all the synthetics that you could no longer use them. But it was such an inconvenience to use those tanks that you very seldom did until we finally were forced to. And then they bought, they bought a number of them. And like you said, then when we went to positive pressure, those were great. Ah, the other ones just gave you air all the time. They were pumping air into you, where with positive pressure, was a demand system. If you breathed in, it gave you air. If you didn't, it didn't. It wasn't there. So...and they were...they were nice. There's no doubt about that.

M:

How has drying hose changed over the years?

C:

They bought a lot of hose that didn't have to be dried, quote-unquote, to keep it from rotting, because they used [the same hose all the time]...all you had was the hose you had on your trucks. So you'd take it back and drain it, scrub it down with soap and water, curl it back up, and put them back on your trucks so you're ready to roll. Then as we got a little more money available, monies available, then of course, they went to Towers where you could hang them up and start drying them. And then they rotated them and kept track of the numbers so that if you had hose number 23, they would tell you exactly what date that was used and for how long. And then the next day it was used, and they kept track. Then we had a better idea of how long the hose last, but...but that helped a lot.

I:

Did you...I mean, it's such a dangerous business fighting fires. Did you lose anybody from the volunteer force over the years that you were involved?

C:

Two injuries, but no one...

W:

Nobody no...nothing serious.

I:

Right. Were you ever injured? Did you ever...?

C:

Yep.

I:

Well, do you want to talk about that.

C:

Well, my first one, I stepped on a nail. I remember that. And these boots have steel plates in them. And I stepped on a nail. And so they sent me to University Hospital the second time when the Carpet Barn caught on fire. I got my eyes full. We were up in the bucket (coughs) -- excuse me -- and I got my eyes full of all that ash that was up there. We just couldn't get out of it. And they took three of us up to St Joe there, cleaned us out.

I:

Hm.

C:

They tried it here and HVA tried to clean us out and couldn't. And the third time I got hit with a hose pretty bad at another school fire.

I:

They keep coming to him as you...

C:

At Eastern that...when that...they lost that building over there, I got hit with a...with a two and a half and it laid me out, and they decided they better take me up and x-ray me and check me out.

I:

How about you, Walt. Did you say you survive unscathed?

W:

Yeah. I...running...running the engine is not too dangerous out there. So that's where I was most of the time. Had one experience over in Ypsi, they...we got a call at the bank over there and I happened to be here at the hall at the time, so...I think it was Rich Payeur I took the International, that newer one we had Carl in. Took it over there. Well, by the time I got there...there...some other people had been there so I got about a block away from the fire and I get my engine all hooked up and I'm running away there and all at once this fellow came up to me. He was a black boy. And he says, ♦ I need some money. ♦ I said, ♦ What are you talking about, I got no money. ♦ He reaches over in my pocket, hits it like this, and of course my change rattled, and he says, ♦ You got some money in there. ♦ About now I'm reaching for the radio. I'm going to need some help back here. And I said, ♦ Just go away, I'm busy, leave me alone. ♦ Well, he finally left, but I said, if I ever went to Ypsi again I'm going to have a policeman with me.

I:

Oh.

W:

Yeah. That was...that was an experience for me.

I:

Yeah. I'm sure that there are a lot of...a lot of elements to standing around in the middle of the night in different places. You don't know where you are.

C:

We went down there three or four times, and they would escort us out.

I:

Really.

W:

Yeah, it's...

I:

Really.

C:

They would wait till we were all...all ready to go.

I:

Yeah.

C:

Then they'd escort us out of the area.

W:

Yeah.

I:

Well, um, I thought that maybe...we've been going about 45 minutes here and maybe we can have the slides, so about ten minutes worth of slides.

C:

Yeah. I don't know if it'll create any questions or not, but like I said, I'll go through them real quick, because some of them don't really mean anything. They're just...they're in there and I left them in there. Um, some of the are more...and some of them are, like I said, the corner of Ellsworth and Carpenter Road where Meijers sets now and State and Morgan where that little white house was up there that is in Industrial Park now.. Down at the prison we burned some houses for the prison down there. And I don't know where else, but like I said, ...

I:

Well, I'll switch the microphone around and maybe we'll be able to pick stuff up. Okay.

[break]

I:

I have been...I have been told that I neglected to get your early background.

C:

Oh.

I:

To ask you some questions.

C:

Well...

I:

Were you born in Pittsfield Township?

C:

No, I was born in Second Street and raised on Third in Ann Arbor.

I:

Oh, were you.

C:

I always joke, I was raised on Third Street when it was still gravel.

I:

Oh.

C:

Um, I went in service. I come home and I was the last of four children, so we had a big house up on top of Third Street Hill, which they needed no longer. So in '47 my dad bought the house out there on Carpenter Road at 2730. And they lived there and my mother passed away in '68, dad in '76, and then so I had, other than service time, we moved out there. And I got married in '50...

I:

Um-hum.

C:

...and moved out on Dwight Street. And then from Dwight to Hawk, so I've been around since '47, and...

I:

Okay.

C:

That's pretty much it.

I:

Yeah.

M:

Where'd you go to school, Carl?

C:

I went to Bach School, and then Slauson and then Ann Arbor High, the old Ann Arbor High on State Street.

I:

Um-hum. Well, ah, was your wife from Pittsfield Township?

C:

She's from Plymouth Township.

I:

From Plymouth.

C:

And it was funny, when we got through, her father was a captain on a fire department and was also a constable. But...

I:

Oh, for heaven's sake.

C:

...yeah.

I:

Isn't that amazing.

M:

And we never had a chance to ask about the constable issue.

I:

Yeah, I wanted to ask about the constable part too. What did you do as a constable?

C:

Um, basically now it's just liquor inspections.

I:

Oh.

C:

When I was with the Fire Department, they all worked together because I could... I could do legal work along with the, you know, fire-fighting. Because like I said, I was...I was an arson investigator and I worked, worked out of the county. I worked for the Sheriff's Department.

I:

Um-hum.

C:

And we got invited all over. You know, Wayne County, Livingston, and Lenawee, and they'd get something major and they...they'd want to have extra help. So I worked with the State...State Police quite a bit, the Fire Marshall Division.

I:

Um-hum.

C:

But that was a long time...that was a University of Michigan...For all our courses I ever took pretty much were Eastern and Michigan, so I established quite a few credits before I got through.

I:

Yeah.

C:

But...it was interesting work.

I:

Um-hum. Well, it sounds that...Well, thank you so much. I really appreciate both of you being here today.

C: Well, thank you for your patience. Like I said, we just hope it doesn't get too repetitious.

W: Yes.

I: Oh, no, not at all. Not at all. Thank you.

C: Thank you.

The End