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Robert Burress Oral History Interview

Carla Hilgert, Interviewer

Alton, Illinois

October 18, 2001

Carla Hilgert (CH): This is Carla Hilgert interviewing Robert Burress on October 18th, year 2001, at my home 522 East 8th street in Alton, Illinois. This is tape one of two, side A. Robert can you say and spell your last name, please?

Robert Burress (RB): Robert Burress. R-O-B-E-R-T, Burress B-U-R-R-E-S-S.

[recording stops]

CH: Can you tell me when and where you were born?

RB: Okay, well I'm not a native Altonian, I was born in Miami, Florida, March 28th, 1944, originally, I was to be born in Cleveland. My dad was in the navy at the time, and in fact my mom said she had the room picked out, but at the last minute my dad, who had been an instructor in the school there of diesel engines I believe, was reassigned to Miami/Key West, and when they say go, you have to go. So, we all took off, and in about 1946 we moved then back up. This is my mom's sort of area, she was born in Brighton, Illinois, my dad is actually from Tennessee, and let's see. After his dad died they moved over to the bootheel of Missouri, a little town called Hayti, and he came up here in the late 30s, and my mom went to nurses training at Alton Memorial, and as things would happen my dad went into the hospital for an appendectomy, and my mom was his nurse and cupid's arrow did its uh, [chuckles] did its job. My mom and dad couldn't get married though, it was against the nursing school's policy for any of their young students to get married, but that didn't stop mom and dad. They eloped, and actually my mom and dad were married twice. My grandmother supposedly, I guess never did know that they'd actually been married. Once in Sullivan, Missouri. As I say, my dad was due to ship out, and so they went over across the river and got married, and then my mother had to borrow another friend's ring just so she'd have a ring, and then one year later in 1942, they made it official and they got married in March, and that's the one I think, I think they observe as their official. Isn't that something? [chuckles] Got married twice. We then, as I say, came and lived over on Birch Street, it's off Elm, it's a little tiny house, it's no bigger than a minute. Still isn't. I'd go by there and look at it, I think they've added onto it, and it's still a real small house. We lived on Birch until about 1947, '48 we moved to Upper Alton over on Park, we lived there until 1941, then we moved out to the Milton area when it was still part of Wood River Township, and to 804 Maurice Street, we lived there until 1957, moved further down on Milton Road, toward the top of Milton Hill, 453. Another little interesting, Doctor Van Winkel, David Van Winkel, used to be the superintendent of schools. I had his daughter in class, and I happened to glance at her address, and there it was, 453 Milton Road, and so I used to tease her about I know your house inside and out, and she'd look at me and I'd describe the different rooms. I don't think I ever told her that I used to live there, she probably though I was a peeping tom! [Laughs] (05:27)

CH: So she just thought you were a weirdo because you would tell her about the house but you never told her you lived there?

RB: That's right. I would describe, you know, different rooms. Anyway uh,

CH: You can get it trouble for that these days.

RB: I probably could, you're right. You're probably, yeah. My mom and dad stayed there until 1968 and didn't move down to Florida. That's really where my dad, you know when they were in service, I think my dad liked it, especially down there and he wanted to go back, and so he took an early retirement from Shell, and they moved down there and they remained in Florida until the early '80s, and they now live in Hot Springs. I went to school in Elgin, so that was about 1963, and so that's as far as living in Alton. Then, when I got out of college, I came back up here looking for work, and we lived in upper Alton on 1315, my wife and I, or my first wife and I, Mary Kate, we rented and then we found a place out in Godfrey behind the Melville Dairy, we lived there for one year. Then we bought a house, over on North Rodgers, 2497, then we split the blanket [makes ripping sound], and I bought out her share of the house, and I lived there for about three years, and I remarried, and I moved in with my second wife, she lived over on Brown Street, and we lived there until about 1997, 1998, and we now live out in Fosterburg.

CH: Now what year did you move to Alton with your parents?

RB: About 1946.

CH: Okay, and so you moved around quite a bit here in Alton?

RB: Yeah, what I was trying to say, is, you know, setting the stage for, you know, I lived here then, you may say, the better part of, and while I was away at school, you know, there was a gap, so I'm what, 57 and I would guess, yeah, I've probably been away about five years all total, so it's easy, yeah, 50, 50 some years, yeah I've been living in the area.

CH: Looking back do you have a favorite home that you lived in, from like a child point of view?

RB: Oh yes, the house on Park in upper Alton. Mm-hmm, it was, again, a small house, but the kids in the neighborhood really made a difference. The house on Birch Street, I was real little of course, like I say, and there weren't any kids evidently my age. Mom tells a story that to get these kids to come and play, I used to line my toys up, what few I had I guess, thinking, you know, they'd come over and see me, you know, to play with toys. She'd say something about they were either too big, or you know, they didn't want to mess with me. Then we moved to as I say, Park, and my gosh there were kids everywhere. We were the- actually we weren't baby boomers, baby boomers as I understand were 1946 to 1964, well I being '44, I would be, I guess classified a war baby, but uh, my gosh on Park in a two block radius, there must have been, you know, 25 kids. So you never lacked for anybody to play with, you know there were just kids anywhere and everywhere, you know. (09:39)

CH: Now was Park considered part of Milton area?

RB: I'm sorry, yeah. It's in upper Alton, it's right off College Avenue, it's, Worden is on one side, and these streets all off College Avenue just past the dental school. As you're heading east on College, you've left upper Alton and let's say you're heading for the train station, on the left hand side, north hand side of the road, just as soon as you pass the dental school there'll be Evergreen, my street, Park, then Worden. And as I say, within that, you know my gosh there were kids everywhere, it was easy to, you know, we walked to school, and we were in Kindergarten, first grade, went to Horace Mann School, I might add it was the old Horace Mann school, there's a newer one now I think that was built in early '50s, like '53, '54, but when I was there in '50 and in '51, it was an old building, big two, I know two, maybe two maybe three story, whereas now I think it's just one, maybe two, and it looks more like the schools that Alton built in the early '50s when they knew the baby boomers were coming along, I heard one of my principals say that they anticipated, and so they went on a big building surge in the early '50s, and Milton, Mark Twain, Fosterburg, North, West, Irving, Gilson Brown, Thomas Jefferson, and a lot of these older grade schools, Lincoln, Douglass, Horace Mann, Garfield, Roosevelt was the first high school I believe.

CH: Where was Horace Mann located? The one you went to.

RB: On Edwards and Clawson on one side, and on the other side Edwards and Seminary.

CH: And you said that, that school is not there anymore? Or they remodeled it?

RB: Yeah, it's been remodeled and it's one, I'm sorry, it's one of the few grade schools that has remained, whereas Fosterburg and Thomas Jefferson, some of those grade schools you know, they're in quarters now, and they've closed them down. Horace Mann actually has one of the highest attendance centers. It draws that whole upper Alton area, and I'm trying to think now, I guess it's in the same quarter, but don't quote me with Mark Twain, which draws the Milton kids. When I was growing up, I went to Milton school. It, by the way, it's closed. They sold it, and I don't know how many people have, you know, owned it since.

CH: Does the building still exist, Milton school?

RB: I know Milton Road and Fernwood on the north side, and uh, I'll say Edgewood on the south side.

CH: Is it used for anything today?

RB: It once was a glass...

CH: I know what school you're talking about.

RB: Yeah, it's on Milton road there, glass...

CH: That's a big building.

RB: Oh yeah, it's big. It was Robert Wadlow's grade school, when Robert was there

CH: And that was Milton. Yeah, that is a neat building, I've been in there for...

RB: Have you now?

CH: Yeah because they've had like, antique shows or flea markets.

RB: I think now it has, somebody has bought it, and yeah, it's used for flea markets. It was a great school, I liked it, but like I said, my favorite neighborhood though was over in upper Alton when I lived on Park, as I say. Now there's two Parks, like there's two Mills, there's two Maurice. When I lived in Milton, I lived on 804 Maurice Street. But there's a Maurice Street off Alby, until 1917 if I'm not mistaken, Upper Alton and Alton were two separate towns. And then when they merged, you had several duplicates, like a couple, there's another park in Alton. It's off of Pearl Street, so you have to kind of specify which Park did you live on. Just like you had to specify which Maurice did you live on, which Mills did you live on, and there's kind of a duplication.

CH: Now you said at Horace Mann they remodeled it, and when you went there it was, you said, maybe two or three stories high?

RB: Mm-hmm. Big old school, had a bell.

CH: At the top?

RB: Mm-hmm. And it sits out in front, now the new, well, the

CH: Remodeled.

RB: Remodeled, thank you. Yeah. (14:59)

CH: What's the remodeled version look like? More modern?

RB: Mm-hmm, 50s, ranch, well I always did say that it looked like, you know, a ranch kind of tan brick.

CH: Did they take off the top or?

RB: They tore the old one down completely, and, see I moved, so I didn't get a chance to really watch, you know, how they did it. Now when it came to junior high, am I kind of rushing ahead a little bit? We watched east as it is now being built. We'd go over and watch it over on Washington Avenue. If I had been one year older, I would have go to, what's the Annex now at Alton High. That was the original East Junior, which is the Annex. And I think that building was built in the '40s as a uh, or early '50s again, growing here as east junior. 'Cause at one time, of course, the high school is nine, ten, eleven and twelve just right on through. And then came the idea of junior highs, and east, west was built I know in the early '50s. So there really wasn't. North, same thing in the early 50s, and even central, which was Lovejoy, and now I think that Lovejoy has been closed over there on, is it off Johnson Street, and, oh it's over there by Rock Springs Park.

CH: I think that Lovejoy is still open.

RB: Is it still open?

CH: Lovejoy school?

RB: Mm-hmm.

CH: Yeah it's still open.

RB: Okay. 'Cause I knew the principal, Brent Schindowa[?], used to be principal there and then, I guess maybe he decided he'd go out to JB.

CH: But Lovejoy is on... it starts with a T. It's off of...

RB: Greenmount

CH: ...Central, Tremont.

RB: Something like that.

CH: Yeah it's Tremont, it's right off of central.

RB: It is Tremont? Okay.

CH: We have our Lovejoy Society meetings there

RB: Okay. Then who is the principal, I'm just curious?

CH: I don't know.

RB: I don't either. 'Cause Brent used to be. By the way he was my neighbor over on Maurice Street when I lived, that was the first house I lived in over on Milton, Maurice, little tiny street runs again between Hillcrest and Lincoln.

CH: Now going back to the first high school in Alton, I know you didn't go to that because that was, they stopped using that...

RB: Long time ago

CH: ...link in 1920 something. But here, I have a picture of it from this book called Alton, Illinois Illustrated in 1912, and it shows the Alton High School with Garfield beyond 6th and Mechanics Street, do you remember seeing that building when you were here in town?

RB: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

CH: What did they use it for once they stopped using it for a high school?

RB: Like I said, then I think it was like Roosevelt, a junior high for some of those kids that lived west, in this part, your part of, we always called it downtown. See I lived in upper Alton, like I said, or Milton, then there's midtown, and there's downtown. And there's pride in each of those sections, 'cause the kids in Milton, even though, I don't know, Mr. Anshlers used to think that, you know, there was something wrong with the kids, but a lot of the Milton kids were very proud. I mean you know, and we were, the

Upper Alton kids were proud that, you know, and when grade school when we'd have basketball games, and softball games, we had a strong rivalry. East and West used to have a terrific rivalry. East being Alton, west being downtown. Central, poor Central, it was midtown, and it was kind of small. North, well, that's where the plow jockeys, and they were. That was farming. It was Godfrey, North drew Fosterburg, originally, and Godfrey. But then Godfrey just took off, it just, you know, especially in the '60s, and when I started teaching there in '68, they doubled the size of the school, you know, the year before it was this big, when I got there it was twice as big, and it was still too small. Because Godfrey's just mushroomed.

CH: So, my area of the neighborhood here would be called downtown?

RB: Mm-hmm. And you're just about on the fringes of midtown, 'cause I'm not sure, I know Central, 'cause I had friends. Joe Bear, Perry Chester, Denny Wolf, those guys all lived in the midtown. We used to play over there at Hellrung Park behind Fast Eddies or midtown restaurant, but I'm not sure where, I guess Henry Street maybe, is kinda the, where downtown let's say started and midtown ended. Of course, years and years and years ago you had Hunters Court, when Alton, downtown, was even broken up, there was Quincy, I understand, then there was Hunters court, there was Dog Town. (20:39)

CH: That's the one I've been wondering about. There's, I keep reading in these history books about an area called Dog Town. I didn't know, I know St. Louis has Dog Town, I didn't know Alton had a Dog Town.

RB: Yep.

CH: Where was that?

RB: Okay going down Broadway. You know where the plaza is? What's left of it, bless its heart, there's not much.

CH: Where the Head Start is?

RB: Yeah good, that's it. Where the new police station, excuse me, Law Enforcement Center. We're not supposed to call it a police station anymore. But, by the glassworks, you'll, that's Dog Town. Heading east, between, let's say, between the glassworks and the steel mill, that area around in there was Dog Town, it always flooded, always flooded until they put the levy in, the berm highway in, and rumor had it, of course, that's where the real poor, I mean the real poor lived. And if things got too bad, they'd start eating dogs.

CH: They didn't really do that did they?

RB: I'll tell you what Carla. I used to go talk to a fella who was the oldest member of our church, he was 100 years old, Charles Marsh, he used to live on Grove and Liberty, and I'd go up and talk to him like we're doing right now. And he wasn't one to, you know, I don't think exaggerate, and he worked at the glassworks when it was still Illinois Glass, before Owens-Libbey bought 'em out in 1926/27, and he promised then not to get into the glass business for five years, so he and I believe Otto Shrim started Pine-Sol Motor fuels, and then when that five years that he promised he would, he went down to East St. Louis

to Obear Nester, and kinda, which is a glassworks, which is long since also gone, but when he'd talk about the glassworks, he'd talk about how those people in Dog Town, which is, as I say, next to the glassworks, and he said they were pretty poor, they really, well they were another expression, were kind of like river rats.

CH: I've heard that.

RB: See it always flooded there, 'cause there was no levy or anything to protect that, and those people used to, you know, their houses, they had dirt floors, they'd better, because when the river came up, here'd come all that. And he'd say, when we'd get desperate, we'd go down and ask, and they'd go around begging people to work he said, they had so much work or opportunity for work. They'd meet trains as they came in. The Vernardos[?] family, which is an old Greek family here in Alton. Uh I understand was not, Alton wasn't their destination, they were actually headed elsewhere in this area. Where there are other, you know, let's say toward Granite, in that area down around there. But they were talked into staying here, you know, come here to Alton because this is, you know, and it was, it was a growing town. Even, you know, well into the turn of the century, because, my goodness, all of that industry along Broadway was just getting started, and yeah, they were, you know, "Please come and work here." And Mr. Marsh was in that period when they got away from blowing the glass bottles to the mechanized aspect of it, and he said they really needed people, you know, to help 'em. And uh, he said the Levises and the Smiths started the glassworks, and Eunice Smith's father, and then of course the Levises being Preston, Robert, and those folks on that side, they were the um, they had as I said the boys, as I understand. And the Smiths, or Mr. Smith had maybe several girls, and that was the time as Mr. Marsh tells it. But um. one of the Levises, well they had child labor laws, which said you weren't supposed to hire these little kids, but they did anyway. And when they heard that some official from the government was coming around, he'd hide those kids. He'd say, "Oh you go up and hide now, 'cause technically you're not supposed to be here." [Laughs] He was really interesting, he really was... (25:46)

CH: I would imagine.

RB: ...oh man.

CH: Now can I ask you about this old Alton High school again, had you ever been in there, in that building?

RB: Uh-uh

CH: Now I heard that a Dr. Carrow owned it, and he owned a lot of buildings here in town, and he let 'em go into disarray, but now people, there's actually been two of his homes that people have bought and fixed up very nicely.

RB: That one over there on Henry.

CH: The one on Henry they're fixing up nice, and the one over here on

RB: Fourth, Fifth, right by the square

CH: On Sixth. Yeah on Seminary Square.

RB: Seminary Square.

CH: The Sittles own that, because I have the boy in class. I'm always asking him, "Elon, when can I come look at your house."

RB: It's in process isn't it, or are they about...?

CH: I think it's fairly done, and they've added in a built-in swimming pool.

RB: Well, well, well.

CH: I've even asked about when I can come swimming. But my husband told me that this school at one time was full of antiques and then it mysteriously burned down, do you remember?

RB: No, but I heard that rumor...

CH: That rumor as well?

RB: ...it's a shame, yeah. Uh huh. I know a couple of the older teachers remember, you know, first time I remember talking much about it was at Alton High with some of my teachers when I was there in the early '60s. And when they started teaching in the Alton school system, like my geometry teacher Ms. Gates, she started out there, and then when they built a new Alton high in 26, 1926, by the way, did you know Marquette was build the same year as Alton High, in 1926?

CH: No, I didn't know that.

RB: They're both, I was surprised. I thought Marquette was newer, but it was built in the same year, 1926, as Alton high.

CH: I know that something stood where Marquette now stands, there was a, something, I can't remember, that the nuns had built.

RB: Oh yeah, [unintelligible], sure.

CH: Something that they had there. Now when you went to Alton High, everything, all the buildings that are there now were there like the Annex building, and the

RB: The Olin.

CH: And the Olin.

RB: Was the vocational school. There was no JB. And the main, mm-hmm.

CH: And then you had the, and everybody always talks about how the cafeteria at Alton High was actually over in what's now the band room.

RB: Band room, mm-hmm. Yeah, that part of the Annex was added on in the late 60s, mid to late 60s. Yeah when we ate, we ate, yeah, in the main, in what's now the band room, yeah.

CH: Now, another school, I wanted to ask you about, I guess not really a school, but sort of along those lines with kids, is the Catholic children's home. Do you know when that was built or anything about that, on State Street?

RB: We always referred to it as the orphanage.

CH: The orphanage.

RB: Yep. I mean, now being politically correct you have to call it the children's, Catholic children's home, but it was the orphanage, and I knew some kids who'd been there. But no, again I just did not get over really to downtown State Street, was not a foreign, but we just did not get over, because to get around we'd, you rode on your bikes. Now that sounds a little, of course we got cars later on and then we knew kids, but you know if we wanted to do something up until high school, it was always in the Upper Alton, Milton area. We just never got over this way much.

CH: Okay now talking one more thing about schools and being politically correct. I found here in this 1912 book of Alton Illinois Illustrated, the girl's department at Beverly farm, they call it the home and school for nervous and backward children.

RB: [Laughing] Isn't that something.

CH: So, I'm guessing Beverly farm was around when you were here.

RB: Yeah, it started actually in the 1890s, I'll guess the late 1890s, yeah. Yeah, we knew about it, and again, we knew that those people had mental problems.

CH: Is it still in the same place where it was, where it started out?

RB: Yep, it's been private all those years.

CH: I guess I'm wondering, I guess the buildings have just changed, probably. 'Cause does this building even look familiar?

RB: No.

CH: See it doesn't, because I've been out to Beverly farm and that doesn't look familiar to me either.

RB: No it doesn't, like Monticello, you know when we were in high school, you know we knew that they were the Monti girls as we called them, and, they were, that's a prep school, Western Military academy, that was for the boys and for the girls was Monticello, and I lived real close to Western Military Academy when I lived on Park. I could hear taps; we'd go over to the school, and they had a pond there, and we'd skate on it. And once in a while we'd go poking around campus, you know and get into a little mischief and all. But the cadets would every weekend come uptown and they'd come in-

[End of Tape 1 Side A]

[Start of Tape 1 Side B]

CH: Now I understand at Western Military academy a lot of that looks different, like there used to be a lot more buildings there than what there are now.

RB: Right, right. It in the early '70s, my brother-in-law worked there for a while, and it finally closed in the early '70s. I went there, they had an auction. And I'll bet 1970, '71 for sure. And then as I understand now it's the little Christian...

CH: Mississippi Valley...

RB: Mississippi Valley Christian school.

CH: Let me ask you about, since you grew up in the Milton area, about shopping up in the Milton area.

RB: Right.

CH: The only restaurant that I know of up in the Milton area is Block's

RB: And what a place it was. It was the place to go when you were in high school. Kids from all over. Wood River, East Alton, Upper Alton, Downtown, Godfrey, and I can say, I only lived two blocks from there, so I mean it was nothing for me to go up there and hang out. And the thing then, was, I guess you, you know, you could say cruising, you'd come in, go through, check out who was there, you know, be seen, how's that, you know, be seen with somebody, and then pull through and of course they had carhops, you know someone would come out and would. Yeah that really was the in, quote quote, in place.

CH: And now, Block's is not open in Milton anymore, it's since closed down, but what is there is the original isn't it?

RB: Right.

CH: The original little, and it's fairly small.

RB: I know, can't believe it can you, but back then it was crowded, I mean boy, I mean traffic was a, you know, somehow we didn't worry, you know it was just, you know, it was a gold mine for him. He, Mr. Block, came here from Champaign, and during the depression, my sister went to school with Diane, and there's another daughter, I think her name is Susie, but, and my sister was friends with Mr. Block's daughter Diane, and the story goes he came here, as I say, from Champaign-Urbana in the '30s and started the original Block's in Upper Alton, and again it was an ice cream parlor. And then he hit on this idea of starting a drive-in, it was soft ice cream, now he had hard ice cream in his Upper Alton one, but at the one in Godfrey, Midtown, right across from the Midtown restaurant that used to be a Block's. Did you know that?

CH: No I didn't. That's now Fast Eddies Chicken?

RB: Was once a Block's. And he was pretty shrewd, he knew, same thing, different locations, the Midtown, Godfrey, Milton area, plus his Upper Alton one, and he did very, very, very well. Very well. The Upper Alton one was very popular in the '40s, '50s, started to lose its appeal in the '60s.

CH: Now where was the Upper Alton one located?

RB: Uh, today I think it's called McBride's furniture store; Upper Alton has changed a little bit. What was once the Clark is now Phillips, you know, service station, well there were other buildings there, and then as I say right next to that gas station, if I'm not mistaken, there's this wood, like wood furniture, and I think it's McBride. But that's where the Block's, kids used to of course come from out of high school, walk up town, and in the '50s it was very fashionable of course to go and get a soda at a fountain, and Kerr's drug store was just, and kind of bugs you, but they finally closed the door. But they were the last where you could go in have a quote quote soda jerk, you know, fix you up and Block's did that, Williams drug store did that, Kerr's drug store. (05:14)

CH: Well here, I've got a picture of Upper Alton so maybe we can kind of see where Block's was, it would be on this side of the street.

RB: Yep.

CH: It's kind of hard to see.

RB: No, I can... Okay right in there is Kerr's, you can see Block's was just kind of right across the street. Mm-hmm. What year is this by the way?

CH: Um

RB: During WWII? Cause that's the kind of cars in there.

CH: Maybe this was before Block's moved in there. Do you remember when Block's opened?

RB: Yeah, he started there in the late '30s.

CH: Oh okay.

RB: Yeah, he was in there, but as I say he is kind of tucked in.

CH: Okay now is that building still there?

RB: Uh huh.

CH: And it's the McBride.

RB: Yeah furniture, Yeah, mm-hmm, that kind of, mm-hmm. Some of those places aren't there anymore 'cause I say they tore 'em down to make the gas station.

CH: Now let me just stick with Block's for a minute, what I like about Block's is the way it looks, with, it's kind of got the big glass windows doesn't it?

RB: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

CH: All the way around, and didn't it have a neon sign?

RB: Mm-hmm. It had the name Block's spelled out in blocks, and they were kind of tipsy, you know, they weren't neat, they were kind of tipped, mm-hmm.

CH: That's, I remember when I first came over to Alton, and Paul drove me around, and I saw Blocks I thought that was such a neat looking place, I wanted to go...

RB: It was. It was.

CH: Eat there. And it's a shame that it's closed down now, and I didn't, there was another ice cream place in there, but I don't think.

RB: Annie's?

CH: I don't think it opened back up this summer.

RB: It didn't, I don't know why, I thought it did pretty good business. It had custard. I'd make a special trip to go there, 'cause then I think it was partly out of just, you know, déjà vu, you know, remembering going there but like I said, back, it well through the '70s you could still go there and a car hop would, you know, maybe even to the '80s, I'm pretty sure, yeah through the '80s, you could, I think in the '90s then the car hops began to... Funny thing is, you know Sonic, those guys used to come out on roller skates in the original Sonic, now it's been a while since I've been to Sonic.

CH: They don't do the roller-skates anymore.

RB: No I think they got away from that frankly. Alton had a Sonic, a while back in the '70s. It left, then the one came back if I'm not mistaken, of course there's one out on Godfrey road.

CH: And there's one out in East Alton.

RB: Mm-hmm, down in, and we call that the Islands down there, uh huh.

CH: Now, what other sort of businesses was there in the Milton area?

RB: Milton? Sportman, Barbershop is now, used to be a uh, they called it Evans Bakery, it was a bakery, just a little bit down from that was a variety shop called Notalies[?], it was just like Ben Franklin's Five and Ten, but it was not a chain associated with, you know any... Grocery stores and gas stations all up and down, really it was unbelievable the number of grocery stores and gas stations.

CH: You almost wouldn't think that today because there's nothing...

RB: There's nothing hardly there. There, I don't, a guy tried to start a little, back up a grocery store, and I remember going in there and talking to him. There was a hardware store along, it was called Joiners, then there was Don Leches[?], as I said kind of right next to it. As I say you want to go back, Gordon now, I think he's a dance studio, that used to be a Tri-City grocery store.

CH: Oh, that was Tri-City.

RB: Mm-hmm. Then it became Goodwill, Goodwill. And now it's Gordon.

CH: Craig's Game Studio.

RB: Yeah.

CH: There's also a video store in that little plaza, I think. (09:43)

RB: Right. That used to be a doctor's office, named billings, and behind it in the tiniest little thing was the Sweet Shop. And kids at Milton, 'cause Milton is just right next to it, going to be right there on, as I say, Edgewood, we'd get to leave, whether or not we could over to the Sweet Shop, or on your way, as I say, to school, you'd stop in there and get, I was thinking about that the other day, candy stores, you know I mentioned Vernardos[?], that's what he started when he came to Alton was a candy store, and he made a living, you know, making and selling candy. That's all it was, and this little sweet shop, I don't think they made so much, they may have, you know, but they had ice cream and candy in there, and that was their business. There still is a nursery there, and I'm trying to think of, darn it they were in the paper the other day, but it's been so long since, they're still on Milton Road. There used to be a pool hall, which we weren't supposed to go into, but we did anyway, it was called Uncle Si's[?] Pool Hall, and right next door to it, there was a street called Freighner[?] so right across the street sort of was the closest thing that Alton had to organized crime. A dude named Dominic Tedero[?], he owned a place called Domino's, it was down on Broadway, close to the steel mill, and as I say there was Uncle Si's[?], and Uncle Si's[?] had pool tables in the front, but what went on in the back, this was when Milton was unincorporated, Milton when I moved out there was part of, well we didn't have Alton police, we weren't part of Alton. We were unincorporated, and if something happened, Madison County, we had volunteer firemen, caddy-corner from Block's was the fire station, and at 6 o'clock, you knew it was 6 o'clock, 'cause the whistle would go off at the volunteer fire department, like Godfrey today has volunteers. We weren't part of Alton, we were unincorporated. St. Matthews church had, you know, really just kind of started. I think it got its start in the '40s, but Milton was just, you know, kind of a neat little place to live, but then it started growing, and I think some things happened. You know, some, let's say a rash of crime, you know, so Alton made a bid or made an offer the people in Milton couldn't refuse, and they chose to join Alton, and Milton then became, we were already in the Alton School District. One of the things the kids used to get a kick out of was, I'd say on the Alton School Board there's four townships represented, I don't think people realize that. There's Alton, there's Godfrey, Wood River Township, and Foster. They all make up Alton School District. Wood River Township, and there has to be somebody, there has to be, each of those four townships has to be represented on the Alton School Board. You have to have, you know, somebody from at least one somebody, I mean, maybe Alton gets to have two, but. Somebody has to be from Fosterburg, somebody has to be from Wood River Township on the...

CH: Why do they want it like that?

RB: Those townships are represented, there still is a Wood River Township.

CH: But they have their own school now. Their own school district, right?

RB: But would you, do you know where Wood River Township is? It's not far from the state hospital.

CH: Is Wood River Township not Wood River?

RB: Wood River is in obviously Wood River township, but believe it or not, there's part of Alton in Wood River Township.

CH: Oh, I didn't know that.

RB: On Fosterburg Road there, I don't think any more moonlight, but I know a fella that goes to my church who lives, Bob Long, just go back down Fosterburg and sort of right across from the state hospital, and I doubt the state hospital is in Wood River Township, it might be, but there was a time when the state hospital, moonlight, you know all of that out there, that wasn't part of Alton. Alton had been kind of, is getting more aggressive now.

CH: Taking land?

RB: Yes, and they started marching down Humbert in Godfrey, pretty soon picked up that we better do something as an unincorporated area, because Alton was starting to kind of nibble away at unincorporated areas. Edwardsville is doing the same thing in Mitchell, they're going after little Mitchell, and Granite City wants Mitchell, South Roxana wants Mitchell, and definitely Edwardsville wants Mitchell, that's an unincorporated area. (15:25)

CH: Is it to bring in more revenue and more people?

RB: Mm-hmm. There's a huge warehouse that Dial put up, and they want to grow. Alton wants to grow, and I think the direction of course Alton is going to grow now is towards Fosterburg, they'll just keep marching out, and pretty soon they'll do like they did in Wood River for Wood River Township, or they offered to have Godfrey join Alton. People in Godfrey about ten years ago had a choice between remaining as they were, under a township supervisor, his name was Dwight Rule[?], remain as you are unincorporated, become part of Alton, which Milton did when we were in Wood River Township, or do what they ended up doing become the village and become incorporated, have a mayor, which they had in Lars Hoffman, he was their very first, and here's the town Godfrey, goes back back back back back to when Benjamin Godfrey starts it, but all those years it was unincorporated.

CH: Now, talking about Milton again, does Milton eventually turn into Brown Street?

RB: Mm-hmm.

CH: Okay.

RB: Good. Right, that's a tricky thing, where does Brown stop and Milton start. At the foot as you're coming down Brown Street and you make a turn gradually to the right, that's where Milton Road starts.

CH: Now, were there many businesses that you talked about on Milton Road, were there many businesses that went on Milton as you're heading down towards Broadway, 'cause that's kind of, there's nothing kind of down there it seems like now.

RB: I lived at the top of the hill, Milton Road used to be tremendous amount of, a tremendous amount of traffic, but then they really sort of directed, and they took a little street called Come In, widened it and today Come In is a huge road, Milton just once it gets past Mark Twain, it makes a bend to the right, and like you said it goes down to Broadway, and there's a huge stop there, Loan Tractor, Laclede Credit Union, is right there. That used to be some little old tiny road that went down there, and if you were going to let's say, East Alton, you stayed on Milton, you went past my house, down the hill, you went over an old bridge, there were two separate bridges, one bridge taking you into East Alton, and another bridge taking you back in from East Alton into Alton, two separate bridges. Today, that's not the case at all when you get ready to leave Alton and go.

CH: Now it's just paved road.

RB: Yeah.

CH: I can't even imagine bridges going there.

RB: There were two separate bridges there. It was really something. A lot of traffic on Milton. There was a grocery store right across from where I used to live called Rodgers, then it became Kitty's, and then when they, it, all of those mom and pop grocery stores. There was a grocery store at Come In, it was called Groves Grocery Store.

CH: Those buildings area all now gone, aren't they?

RB: They're all gone, that's what I mean. All their businesses that somebody just put a house in, but what's really interesting is the, there's not hardly any gas stations on Milton Road, and there used to be, like I say, Phillips, Shell, Standard, Sinclair.

CH: The only one I can think of is the one that's up there at the corner of Brown and Washington, right?

RB: Okay, that one up there, that bud likes to go to, that was a Shell station for a long, long time, well into the early '80s. Ollie McAfoos, there were oh my, the McAfoos again, Milton, Milton. They had about seven kids, and I was one of the, if not the oldest boy, Stan McAfoos who used to be coach at Alton High in basketball...

CH: I have a McAfoos in class now.

RB: Wendell McAfoos, and his lovely wife Barb, and, oh my, there's Dwight, and see this is the first time at the city hall, I'm trying to remember how many boys, there's Alan. (20:12)

CH: I think that's the McAfoos's dad that I have.

RB: He married one of the Block's.

CH: Oh, is that right?

RB: Mm-hmm. He married Susie, remember there was Diane, I told you there were two Block girls, Diane and Susie. Well, Alan married Susie. Mm-hmm. Yes.

CH: Now what about, um, Upper Alton? What did uh, you know 'cause College Avenue, from looking at this picture from the book, the Best of Alton by Charlotte Stetson, Upper Alton looks fairly busy. I mean not that Alton's still not busy today, but it's really changed.

RB: Right.

CH: For example, over here to the right side we've got Rexell Drugs, which is now, I think that's probably..

RB: DJ's.

CH: Is that DJ's?

RB: That's DJ's. That was Rexall drugs, then it was Rockpool, what you don't see here was a Ben Franklin store.

CH: Which is now Ricks.

RB: Ricks, yeah. Now in between, somebody told me again Mr. Marsh was saying or was it Mr. Kerr was saying, something that was there before, it was Ben Franklin, and I can't remember, but Dale Newbeckers[?] Insurance, which is on this corner at that intersection, that used to be a Sinclair service station, Harold Hart, which still has a gas station there, but it's called Pins Oil[?] and it's not a, you know he's not affiliated with Standard like he was for so many years. Yeah, Upper Alton used to have a lot of people shopping.

CH: And you said there was the Block's in there.

RB: The Block's was in there. If you want to go down the street here, right on the corner was a cobbler. Um, Wilson. He owned a little Cobbler shop and another, get this, another Wilson lived there, he did the papers. I was a paper boy and his, he and his brother Ben and Woody, the two of 'em were the distributors for the Telegraph, they'd get the papers out to us in the Upper Alton and Milton area, next was a barber shop, McDonald's Barber Shop, and then there was a Potter's paint, and then there used to be a little old tiny Cafe called Deluxe Cafe, it was just long and skinny, skinny and long, I don't know how many booths, but it was well into the, I think mid '60s, maybe late '60s it was still around. Then there was Stork's Cleaner, then you got Block's

CH: Now Stork's Cleaners, did they later move to North Alton?

RB: Mm-hmm. See when they built that big gas station, they bought all of those places I just mentioned out, mm-hmm. And Storks moved out there, yeah. On State Street out there. I don't know, what do they call that, Pins Oil[?] out around there?

CH: Now I thought I had a picture of Stork's that I want to...

RB: It's an old family, yeah, they ran a cleaners, and they kept it in the family for a long time. You know, how grandpa or dad started it, and the sons kept right on operating it. mm-hmm.

CH: I had my wedding dress preserved at Stork's Cleaners, and then they closed down, and I think it's where the CVS is now in North Alton.

RB: Mm-hmm, that's it.

CH: Where it was.

RB: Mm-hmm, that's it.

CH: Now, here's the picture, here's an old picture of it.

RB: In Upper Alton?

CH: And this is well-

RB: Yeah, see.

CH: This is from Alton Illinois Pictorial History.

RB: Yeah, John College Avenue. That's what you were looking at here, is College Avenue.

CH: Okay so this building here that I'm looking at

RB: Used to be here on College Avenue.

CH: This area here?

RB: Mm-hmm, yeah, mm-hmm.

CH: That's hard to imagine 'cause there's nothing next to it.

RB: Yeah, that too of course it looks like horse and buggy, and this I think was probably, but that's, they were always in Upper Alton, mm-hmm.

CH: Now, what, do you know what this building is here on College Avenue in Upper Alton that has sort of like, the little.

RB: That's Williamson Drug Store, mm-hmm. Above there, you could, I had a friend whose dad buy that building from Williamson, and he had his appliance and charters, in the early '70s, Homer Harter had an

appliance center there, he sold not only televisions, but washers and dryers, and they lived up above it.
(25:12)

CH: Oh

RB: That was a neat place. What's hard to see here is just right past it was a firehouse.

CH: I knew that.

RB: Yeah, then you know they tore that down.

CH: I have a picture of that, I'll ask you about that in a minute. Now, is that building still there with the little tower? Is that little tower bit still on there?

RB: Mm-hmm.

CH: I guess we don't notice it. What's a shame I think about all these buildings here and like the ones downtown and on Broadway is they're not very used, as much, and they're pretty, and nobody really uses the upstairs.

RB: That is interesting. It's a shame because I always thought that'd be the neatest place to have. Then above Ricks, he tells me that, well bands used to practice up there.

CH: Yes, in fact above

RB: Didn't Andy once have

CH: Yes, well you know right here, beyond Kerr's there is the little side alley there.

RB: Right, there's a little alley there.

CH: And it goes back to like some furniture, upholstery place, restoration. But the building that is there on the corner...

RB: Mm-hmm

CH: ...up above there is where my friends' band, Andy would practice and we would go upstairs there and it looks, the wallpaper is so old up there.

RB: Right about there I used to take piano lessons

CH: Upstairs?

RB: Upstairs again. Ms. Pettingew[?] had her little... studio, right, down below was a bakery and I'm sorry I can't think of, by the way you should talk about a cleaners, that was one of the last cleaners to finally go, what was his name, Rudy. Rudy Squagins[?] had a little cleaners there next to a photographer, and as far as I know the photographer is still...

CH: Oh, there is a photographer still there.

RB: Yeah, well right next to it is Rudy's, and then of course there's Lambert's, you know, Floral, but Rudy finally I guess couldn't make any money out of it, but if you notice there was a door next to Rudy's between Lambert's and Rusin[?], I'd walk up those steps for my piano lesson and, with Miss Pettingew[?].

CH: Hmm. And you know in that little area now they've got a, or maybe it's in the little next section of the building, now they've got a pet grooming place now.

RB: Yeah that's, I think that's, is that what's in that photographer place, or are they sharing it? It's called Prairie, it's been a while since I've been to Upper Alton since because we live in Fosterburg now, but yeah.

CH: On the corner there I know is the, the place where they sell the vacuum cleaners, I think.

RB: Mm-hmm. That is where my friend Homer, that's Alton Vacuum and something. That used to be Harters Appliance, but before that it was Williamson Drug Store. Mm-hmm. Yep. There are a lot of drug stores in Upper Alton.

CH: Yeah, and it seems like all around too. All sorts of 'em. Now also in Upper Alton, and unfortunately none of the books that I looked at showed any pictures of looking at Washington Avenue.

RB: That's too bad, yeah. What's going on there?

CH: In Upper Alton, well I know there was that big set of buildings that they then took down to build the Walgreen's for. Which is why I boycott the Walgreen's.

RB: [Chuckles] Good for you. Gravenger[?], Jack Gravenger[?] had a bar and it was called Gravenger's[?], he was along there, there was a Bill's hobby shop then it became Wade's Western. Today it's that little movie video, it's about the only thing that is still.

CH: That building is original.

RB: That's original. Yep, that was there a long, but as you say going north on Washington, you went to Gravenger's[?], and then there was a Men's, a United Men's store I used to go in there every once in a while and get a shirt or a pair of socks or something, there used to be a movie theater, there used to be two movie theaters in Upper Alton, today where the Hardee's, that used to be the uptown theater, then it became the Cameo, but that was a popular place for kids, and well into the, well I wanna say '60s, '70s, and '80s go to the Uptown. But a tiny little old theater called the Gym used to be up there, not far from Fashion Lane. Fashion Lane is exactly where Walgreen's is now, right on the corner.

CH: Fashion Lane?

RB: It's called Fashion lane.

CH: They sell clothes there.

RB: Yeah. Right next to it was the most popular place for kids from Alton High to eat. Boyd's Sandwich Shop.

CH: Now that was still there when I started teaching at Alton High eight years ago. And that's on College Avenue.

RB: It is, yeah. And it was knocked down, and so was Fashion Lane, and like you said, around the corner then heading south back down Washington to make, yeah.

CH: That was a neat little place too, that's too bad.

RB: Bob Boyd is the one that told me about Mr. Block's, they both lived in Champaign-Urbana, and Mr. Blocks talked Bob Boyd into moving to Alton with him. Bob Boyd was just, you know, right out of high school and all, and he said, "Won't you come to Alton with me." You know, it was during the depression, I guess there wasn't much going up, he couldn't afford to go to the University of Illinois 'cause it was very expensive, you know, and he, hardly anybody had, you know, you were glad to have a job so Block said, "You come on..."

[End of Tape 1 side B]

[Start of Tape 2 side A]

CH: Now you're talking about Bob Boyd, and

RB: Nice Guy. He, Bob Boyd is a good guy, yeah.

CH: Now, you also said in Upper Alton there used to be a fire station, and of course I have no picture of the fire station that was on College Avenue, and it was a neat fire station because I remember that was here, I've got the one on Second Street, State and Wall Street, Second and Henry Street, Central and Finny[?], State Street.

RB: For the life of me, I don't know why, other than the fact that, see, that's Alton and the fire station you and I are talking about is Upper Alton, that's a different town altogether, mm-hmm.

CH: I guess that maybe that's why that's not in here. But that was a neat fire station too wasn't it.

RB: Yep, right next to it was, a for a long time, a gas station of different, you know, again, it was a Phillip's for when, you remember, in the '80s and during the '90s, but before that it had been another gas station. Right next to it used to be an auction house called Jewett's[?] Auction. It was a neat place, you know, as, neat little, you know.

CH: Now can you tell us what that fire station up on College Avenue looked like? Do you remember?

RB: Mm-hmm. Like that Williamson drug store, it had a kind of a crown, or, that's not the word I'm looking for, sloping. Upstairs, of course, is where the firemen lived, and they had the pole, and the horses, when they still had horse-drawn, they had,- and long since of course, you know, when I would walk by the, coming home from school of course, there'd just be a regular fireman. But at one time they kept the

horses in the back, and then as I say there was a couple houses, this was an alley that ran behind the fire station, you didn't know that?

CH: I was thinking doesn't it still run back there?

RB: There may still be a little alley that runs back, but, where the Hong Kong...

CH: House

RB: house, that, there used to be the Hong Kong, there used to be a barber shop, and then there used to be a jewelry. That's where I got my class ring when I was a senior in high school. But, sort of behind all of them, there was another place that used to be where they kept the horses, they told us. And it was, I don't remember seeing the horses, but at the fire station was, as I say, that whole block is what CVS is.

CH: CVS, right.

RB: But that used to have all these different, by the way, back to Block's. He lived right next to the fire station.

CH: Oh really.

RB: Yeah.

CH: Now see, because they tore down all that building for CVS, that's why I also boycott CVS.

RB: Do you have a drugstore to go to? [laughs] You go to a little drug store?

CH: I go to Walmart or Target, well actually yes now, we've been going to Rinderer's out in Bethalto.

RB: Mr. Marsh, his grandpa's name was Ebenezer, and he started a drug store in downtown Alton, where the old First National Bank on Piasa and Third, now that old First National Bank is what, some other, I dunno, a thrift[?] store, a mercantile, those guys, you know, they got bought out by, but the old First National Bank before it was... His grandpa even helped start one of the first insurance companies. Mr. Marsh's mother was at the Lincoln-Douglas debates. And she told him how, [in high-pitched voice] "Lincoln's voice was kind of high pitched," and Douglas was of course an immaculate dresser, and he had this booming voice, you know, he was a great orator, and how Lincoln, as I say, just didn't, it didn't fit. You know, he had this, she also would see Lovejoy roaming around Upper Alton, and his brother Owen, there was Elijah and Owen Lovejoy, the two brothers.

CH: 'Cause Owen worked for the Telegraph.

RB: Mm-hmm.

CH: Not really a rival newspaper, because it was more political whereas Lovejoy's was religious, now again back onto Upper Alton and Washington Avenue, what used to be in what is now where they have that nail salon, do you know what I'm talking about? Around the corner from where you said your friend's shop was. Like if here is College going down to the high school around the corner here going on

Washington, like across the street from CVS, there's some little buildings along there, do you remember anything about those?

RB: That's what, yeah. Oh boy. There was always it seemed like, some kind of a either beauty shop, yeah. Something along there. (05:44)

CH: 'Cause they're small shops.

RB: Yeah. At one time there was a grocery store. I think, I left out a grocery store, believe it or not that used to, when I'd bring my paper money in the late '50s to Mr. Wilson, I'd go across the street, and actually there was a little grocery store, and he was doing very well, it was hanging in there, even though, as I say, there were supermarkets. A&P was once in Upper Alton, of course they went out all across the country. But there was a little grocery store right across from Block's too, and it stayed in business well into the '70s, 1970s and '80s.

CH: And it's on College Avenue?

RB: Mm-hmm, next to Kerr's. Well, really kind of next to Kerr's used to be St. Peter's Gift, but right where that alley is there, that was a, oh, it's an Irish name I can't remember, but it was a little grocery store.

CH: Now what about up on Washington there, next to the video place there's an, like an old white, no because next to the video place is the Hardee's now, but next to the Hardee's then is an old white building that's now my dentist office, but [unintelligible] told me it used to be...

RB: Streeper's Funeral Home.

CH: Is that right? Now I've got an old picture here of Streeper Undertaking Establishment from the 1912 book on Washington Avenue, and it looks nothing like that.

RB: Yeah. Isn't that something.

CH: Do you remember seeing that building at all, so I guess they must've taken that down and rebuilt.

RB: Yeah, that's, that's in Upper Alton, you know, that's way, way, way, way back yeah. But yeah,

CH: That's a neat looking building.

RB: Isn't it though? A lot of those old buildings were really pretty. A man who used to go to our church, his name was McPhillip's, he owned a lot of real estate in Upper Alton. I don't know if you know Matt Kelly, he's a driver's ED teacher, it was his grandpa, was McPhillips, was his mom's maiden name. And by the way she was a teacher too, Ms. Kelly. Out at Milton, a fifth-grade teacher.

CH: Now how long do you remember was Streeper around?

RB: Well into the '70s. And then I don't think anybody wanted to follow, so that's where Elias Smith began, see they were also sort of competitors of Streeper.

CH: And that building is actually pretty small, I can't imagine that being a funeral home.

RB: Isn't that something.

CH: 'Cause that's a, it's a two-story building, a two-story white brick building, but that's tiny.

RB: Yep.

CH: And then Elias Smith is up around the corner, isn't it? And that's on Brown?

RB: He kind of has parking lots on Brown, I think most of his space is Edwards.

CH: Okay.

RB: When you want to go in, you get on Edwards, yeah and you go in, but he just about has that whole block. Yeah. But he's enlarged now, and funny thing is, see he started when, his name is Elias, and at one time Smith was really, you know of the two, I think Elias ended up buying Smith out, and Smith took Elias in as a protege, and it was really Smith's funeral home and Streeper were your two big funeral homes in Upper Alton. Gent was your funeral home for North Alton people.

CH: And that's still around.

RB: It's still around in North Alton up there on State Street. Downtown you had your friend right over here, Burkes.

CH: Right.

RB: And for this kind of, this area, and then if I'm not mistaken, the Roman Catholic's had their own funeral home right over by Marquette. It's still there.

CH: It's still there, I know which one you're talking about. It's a brown building.

RB: Yeah, and it's funny how, you know, again, you know areas of a town would go to that particular funeral home.

CH: Right.

RB: You didn't go right over there on Henry, Quinn.

CH: Fine-Quinn.

RB: Yeah well Fine came in, but that was for, I went to school with his daughter, Donna Quinn. And that was Quinn funeral home. But isn't it interesting, yeah, that it's that close to Burke and that close to, oh, I can't think of the name

CH: I can't think of the name either, but now you know Fine and Quinn have merged with Burke.

RB: I didn't know that.

CH: Yeah. So, they've got the funeral home right here on Langdon and Eighth and then you've got the funeral home over here on, I think it's like Sixth and Henry.

RB: Henry, mm-hmm. Yeah, and funny thing is, Milton, I think, and don't quote me, I'm trying to remember a funeral home out there, and for the life of me.

CH: Was there a funeral home out there? (10:57)

RB: Yeah see I'm going up and down Milton road and I don't think, no I don't think they had a funeral home.

CH: Now there's also a funeral home, Williams & Sons funeral home over on Central as you're heading down towards, right off of the circle. Now I know the William's family, they're not very, I know the Williams family who runs it now, they're not very old so.

RB: I think it's their

CH: Relatively new.

RB: Yeah. I don't know if that's always been theirs, or if there was a funeral home there and then they bought it and changed it. Yeah, again I'm sorry. The circle has kind of changed too, there used to be a little nursery on the circle, and then there was always a watering hole there.

CH: There still is. And then I remember when I moved to town, and what is now the phone or the cellular paging place where you can get pagers and cell phones, it used to be Hog Heaven or Pigs-

RB: Barbecue.

CH: What was that called, do you remember?

RB: Pigs something or other, yeah. But it wasn't always, no it wasn't always a restaurant there. No. Sorry, again that just, didn't get over to that much. We, 'cause again 20th Street was always kind of hard to travel on. Had such a bad intersection, and that circle, I just didn't get out to St. Anthony's that much, you know.

CH: Was it, were there any areas uptown that were off limits to you as a kid, that your parents told you "don't go."

RB: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm [chuckles] around Salu.

CH: But that one isn't even really too, well that's not too far from you if you lived in Upper Alton.

RB: Yep, see when I was growing up...

CH: Because that's just down Washington isn't it?

RB: Yeah, see a couple times kids in the neighborhood, we ran away from home, you know how you when you were little you run away from home, and we got as far as Upper Alton, and then that was it. My

church I went to was the Upper Alton Baptist Church. For a long time, before Alton and Upper Alton merged, it was First Baptist church, and Lovejoy street which is just one block on College Avenue, you know, toward Upper Alton and right across the street from my church was Shurtleff College which is today the dental school. As I say we lived right over there on Park, so I mean that was my, I knew that area, but once I got into Upper Alton, I knew, you know I'm kind of pushing my limit, and definitely I wasn't supposed to get over around Salu.

CH: And today Salu is still I think the same way, you probably don't want to

RB: Well, it's better than it used to be.

CH: Is it?

RB: Yeah, 'cause it's, you know, we used, when I'd go see my grandmother, we'd take off and go down. Funny thing is, Humbert isn't what Humbert is today. There used to be, by Popeye's, and Bowl Haven. There was no Bowl Haven. The beltline is really an interesting situation, there was nothing on the beltline 50 years ago. They just started to put the beltline in as, Homer Adams Parkway, as a way to get around Alton. If you wanted to go from, you know, north to south, and you didn't want to bother to go through Alton, you could take the beltline, and that would take you bypass. Well the merchants didn't like that of course, because you weren't going through, but it killed Upper Alton, the beltline killed it. It hurt some other businesses downtown. When Homer Adams as a developer started, you know, but I can remember going down the beltline, and there was hardly any, any businesses on it at all. (15:22)

CH: Betty Siemer told me that in front of, what is the bowling alley that's on the beltline?

RB: Bowl Haven.

CH: Bowl Haven. Then in front of that there used to be sort of a, a dairy sort of place.

RB: Yeah, it was Logan's. Morning start, I mean it was outright dairy. Something funny is, you didn't go much further north and you were at Sherbern's[?], another dairy. Downtown had Noll's, N-O-L-L-S, you can still see it on one of the buildings right across from St. Mary's, if you look real close, it says Noll's Dairy and Bakery.

CH: Oh, I read about that, I know.

RB: Yeah, Noll's bakery. We had a big bakery here in Alton into the '70s, and boy it smelled good to go downtown, the old colonial bakery, oh boy it smelled good to go down there.

CH: Another place I wanted to ask you about uptown, Upper Alton, is what's now the village cafe. How long has that been there?

RB: Okay. Again, that's Diane Block's. I don't know, he may have owned it. You know, her dad. But she has it now, Diane. And it started out, deluxe. I told you there was a deluxe cafe, there was another real small little cafe across from this Jewett's[?], and across from what CVS now, well it used to be the collector's coin shop, and it's a barbershop now, but that used to be a little cafe in the '60s, '50s. It was

called the Windmill. So, here's Upper Alton, has the Deluxe Cafe, the Windmill, and then the Village, Mr. Block's kind of started it, because there was another, where there's a floral shop, is that Dick's?

CH: Dick's Floral.

RB: Okay, that used to be called the Harp. The Harp, and that started in the very, very early '60s. And the village kind of was a spin off from that, and Block's again, as I say, you know, the Deluxe. I think, in fact, Mr. Brown, who had that little Deluxe Cafe used to work at the Village for a while, kind of as a manager. I went away to college and some things, you know, when I got back some things had happened, but that's kind of what it was like in the '50s, and then there was like in the late '60s.

CH: Now what about, um, taverns that you went to in town, did you go to any?

RB: [Laughs] Yeah.

CH: 'Cause Betty Siemer told me about the, some places that, there was the Sandbar, the Red Garter, Irene's Tavern, Forkyville.

RB: Mm-hmm, Forkyville, oh my. That's unincorporated area see, that, I go by it every day on the way...

CH: Does it still exist? She said the building still exists.

RB: The building is there, but again when I, uh

CH: Where is Forkyville?

RB: Okay, let's go back then to Mr. Marsh, okay. He was telling me stories that Alton used to have a public swimming pool, and soon as you head out of Alton on 140, and you're heading east, you know, again the beltline used to end, and you know now it extends on down to East Alton, but the beltline used to stop right there. There used to be a huge drive-in theater called the Starlight, where those doctors' offices and all, and right across where Howard, Holiday Inn and used to be Stobbs Tire. I knew the people, they went to our church, but now you keep going. You left Alton and you're down by the quarry, you know, now you're, technically you're out of Alton, and that's that unincorporated area again, and Forkyville was one of those, it was a road house, and it was off limits, and my gosh it's kind of like Uncle Si's pool hall, cops kind of knew to stay away from there. They'd serve underage kids, and that's where we'd go out, you know. It, you talk to the older people, and you know, somebody would pay somebody off, and they just left it alone, yeah. But yeah, you could go there. Sandbar was where that turn to down on Broadway, again right across from the steel mill. Guys would come out, oh my gosh, of course on Broadway when all the industry was going, there were taverns.

CH: There's still a few taverns. (20:35)

RB: Oh yeah, but I mean there used to be, I'm not kidding you, every corner, literally there was a tavern. Just, Bon Air, of course, is just taking off today. I mean it's, but there used to be, and you remember that Little Wedge.

CH: The Little Wedge, have you ever been in there?

RB: Yeah, it was so small though, I mean that's what I mean, you know. Everything in the past seemed so small, but of course to you it seems, you know. But it was just, you know, a neat little watering hole, you went back, the glass house, a lot of the guys from the glassworks would go there, it's still there. Or is it called My Moms, or something, it just started to go up.

CH: Oh, My Mom's, yeah.

RB: Yeah, that was called the Glass House...

CH: Oh I didn't know that.

RB: ...that was, again you'd stop in there and they'd, you know, sometimes if you knew somebody, they'd give you a drink or, actually Upper Alton didn't have, it was

CH: Fairly dry?

RB: Fairly dry. Gravenger's[?], um, he may have gotten. Now I'm just saying, legally, I'm sure some stuff was going on illegally, but there just weren't many taverns in Upper Alton. There really weren't.

CH: Now what about Midtown Tavern, did you ever go to there, the one on 7th and Central?

RB: Many, many times. Yep, my brother-in-law used to tend bars there. Nice place. Katie used to work there.

CH: Here's an old picture of it, did it look like that when you went there, or had it changed?

RB: No, that's about right, mm-hmm. It changed a little, but Midtown, neat place yeah. Of course, that's long before...

CH: Yeah, doesn't look like that now at all.

RB: Yeah, what's his name, he just sold out and those guys didn't make it did they.

CH: No.

RB: Oh, it starts with... Metzker. Bob Metzker had it for a long, long time.

CH: Right, says it was run by the late Russell Elsner, and then Bob and Dorothy Metzker.

RB: Took it over, mm-hmm.

CH: Now, do you remember much in the way of buildings down on Broadway, not like down towards the factory end of Broadway, but more down on the...

RB: Downtown?

CH: Downtown Broadway? Do you remember, one of the buildings that I'm interested in is the old Elks Lodge that the Telegraph tore down...

RB: It's too bad.

CH: ...which I think...

RB: Yep, pretty old building,

CH: ...it's a shame.

RB: It is, it was a real pretty building, yep. When I was taking piano lessons, there used to be the tiniest, there we go again, tiniest little old place, big as this room maybe, and you'd go in there and get, she'd always send me down there to get my piano, you know, sheet music or books I'm using, little old tiny thing, by the Mineral Springs. Just right kind of across from the Mineral Springs, but that Elk's building, yeah it's kind of a shame, yeah.

CH: It was beautiful, 'cause it was a big brick building and had like that, I guess that's called a cupola there on that front corner, and then it seemed it went way back and so many stories high. Then next to it, it had two row houses, and I had heard that they were some good examples of row houses but again the Telegraph took those down as well.

RB: Yeah, as I say, I'm trying to, yeah, that's, why do I remember the Elk's, because it was like you said, such a pretty building like Snyder's downtown, that beautiful, that Bert Wuellner finally took, but that was a nice example, like so many places, it's an antique today.

CH: Had you ever gone into the Elk's building?

RB: Mmm-mm, no, that's a, you know, a fraternal lodge.

CH: What about, in talking about fraternal lodges, the Turner Hall was on Third and Ridge Street, do you know what I'm talking about?

RB: Mm-hmm, yep.

CH: 'Cause that's just nothing now.

RB: It's a shame.

CH: I hear that the people from Central Electric own that, but it just sits there.

RB: It just sits there. It used to be really, I guess from what Mr. Marsh said, a lot of stuff went on there. I mean good stuff; you know what I'm saying. Like on Broadway, Jack Dempsey, the famous heavyweight boxer in the early '20s was there, they'd put on plays along there, either at the Turner or there used to be an old, um, oh what was that hotel along there, and it was infamous. After a while they had to tear it down because it had a bad reputation, ladies of the evening would um... (25:29)

CH: Is that on Ridge Street you're talking about?

RB: No, that's, I'm shifting ground, Turner Hall is on Ridge, you're right. Now on Broadway, closer to where the Telegraph is but across the street, there used to be an old hotel along there and I'm trying to think...

CH: Illini Hotel?

RB: Now that's the Stratford.

CH: Oh, that's now the Stratford.

RB: Yes, that's a relative of mine, Jim Lockyer bought that and fixed it all up and renamed it since he was from England, he dropped the name Illini and put Stratford.

CH: Oh, like Stratford-upon-Avon.

RB: Mm-hmm, yeah Jim Lockyer. In fact, he didn't live too far from you here on Langdon for a while, and he gave the land for West Junior, that was all his, he really did well. He came over here.

CH: He was a relative of yours?

RB: Yeah, my grandmother's maiden name was Lockyer.

CH: So, what happened?

RB: [Laughs] Like my dad's side story, you've got a minute?

CH: Yes.

RB: My dad's dad, my grandpa should have had a nice little sum of money, but one of his brothers, Collins, rooked him, stole some money. They sold, where my grandfather is buried, that used to be Burress land, and now there's an arsenal there. It sits right there in Tennessee, remember I said my dad came from Tennessee over around Milan, Humboldt, and, oh, Idlewild, these little old tiny towns, the biggest town really is Jackson and Dyersburg and then of course the big town Memphis. But that land was sold by eminent domain, and the Burress boys were supposed to divvy it up, Collins, Henry, and Joseph, and Henry is my grandpa, and he didn't get his share. And don't bring that up around my aunt Ruby, she just goes ballistic. What Ruthford and Collins did to rip off us, but we were owned a tidy little sum of money on my dad's side, and this Lockyer. He didn't share much but, you know, he kind of helped my mom a little bit when she was in nurses training, but there's some little wealth that never got passed down or trickled down to us you know.

CH: Aw, that's too bad.

RB: Yeah [Laughs]

CH: You know, talking about downtown still...

RB: Yep

CH: ...what about this H. K. Johnson Hardware, I'm having trouble...

RB: Neat place.

CH: I'm having trouble figuring out where that was.

RB: It's today right across from the Flour Mill. Literally it's where that tourist information, it's got that, you're coming down Broadway, there's the bell, there's the flour, and if you look straight, you know you continue on, Johnson's Hardware store was right there, and then as you made your turn to go down Piasa there, there was Kresge's and now you're on Third street because those...

CH: Were right at the intersection.

RB: But Johnson's had a hardware store and, on the corner, and as I say on the other corner is the flour mill. You know, it's just, and today it's where

CH: Is it

RB: It's where that information, tourism

CH: Okay, 'cause I'm looking at a picture of it here and I'm having...

RB: Yeah here is...

CH: ...I can't

RB: Yeah, here, you make the turn, see there's the Flour Mill there

CH: Right

RB: Okay, yeah it was really kind of a neat place, yeah. It's kind of hard to picture, I don't know.

CH: Yeah. What street is this?

RB: Okay this is going to be Broadway like this, and this is going to be State Street.

CH: Okay.

RB: So you're starting to go up the hill like that.

CH: Okay. So now where is Ralph's in connection to this picture, what present day, Ralph's is that restaurant. Is that like up over here?

RB: Yes, right, exactly.

CH: Up over there. So, this actually is also kind of just maybe parking lot.

RB: Yes, they tore all that down.

CH: The parking lot by that house.

RB: Yeah, all that, yeah there isn't, Johnson's. They had a fire. By the way, Johnson's sold out and was a Biederman's Furniture store afterwards, then Biederman's left downtown, guess where they went? Out to the beltline. And then it burnt down when there was a little racial problem in the early '70s, Biederman's was right on the corner there of Seminary and the beltline, and for the longest time, Morgan had those little storage bins next to the old Venture where Seminary heads north on the beltline, well. We had this big furniture store called Biederman's.

CH: And then I know also downtown there was also, what was that big furniture store, um

RB: Oh dear

CH: It was a person's name...

RB: Not, no

[End of Tape 2 Side A]

[Start of Tape 2 Side B]

CH: Now we were saying that downtown on Broadway was Jacoby's Furniture store.

RB: Yep, now you know about the Halloween parade?

CH: Yes.

RB: It was started by the East End Development, all those merchants along that part of Broadway wanted to get people to come, you know, out, so Jacoby's was one of the, of course, leading, and for, oh how long? Long, long, long, long, long time. The Princess Theatre, I noticed you had a picture of it there, that used to be, and then there was a Gibson's, and still may be a Gibson's Furniture. Yeah there's the old Princess, yeah, there used to be a drug store along there.

CH: Looks like Nichey[?] Drugs-

RB: Yeah, Nichey Drugs was the Drugstore.

CH: And Jacoby's was next to this Princess?

RB: Back this way. Yeah. Back this way.

CH: Now those buildings still exist but

RB: The Princess is burnt down.

CH: Oh is it?

RB: Mm-hmm, it's gone.

CH: Is there just a gap there?

RB: Yep, there's nothing there now.

CH: That's too bad.

RB: It is. Yeah, what it really says is one-time Alton used to, again had lots of places to go see movies, not one now. Not one.

CH: I know, that...

RB: Isn't that something? There was the Grand, which still is there, but that's where the best movies always came. Then the Princess was a decent place, on Broadway where, by that Temple Theatre as you come off the bridge, and you have to stop, there's a Temple Cleaners. Did I say Temple Theatre? I meant Temple Cleaners. Right next to it used to be a little movie place called the State. It's gone. There used to be, where Depper's is in North Alton, the Northside or something like that, there was a movie theater in North Alton, again the Starlight.

CH: What movie theater did you mostly go to?

RB: Uptown, oh yeah. I don't think we hardly missed a Friday or a Saturday. It was an easy place. See my dad would go to the auction, and he'd dump me at the Uptown to go watch a movie, and he'd go down and go to the auction. Saturday afternoons it was, you know, your parents gave you a, now this sounds stupid, but get you a quarter and you'd go watch a movie. I remember, you know, you could, I mean it was a cheap place, and they didn't have the movies that the Grand or the Princess had, but they, you know if you waited a while, and you know it would come to the Uptown, but Friday nights all the kids would, and we were, you know, kind of rowdy and all, but it was, you know, a neat place to hang out, and that's where you always took your girlfriend.

CH: So, you know, one theatre that kind of competed?

RB: Oh yeah, the nicest was the Grand, next nicest was the Princess, of course Edwardsville had the Wildey, I mean if you were talking about it. But people used to come, I think really from, I know from Brighton when my cousins would say, "We're going to come," they'd come down, and it was a big deal.

CH: Did you have to, you said the Grand was the nicest,

RB: Oh it was nice.

CH: Did you have to get dressed up if you went there, as opposed to going to the movies uptown?

RB: Uptown. Well you could, but you didn't have to get as dressed up, I mean you had to be clean, you couldn't.

CH: Right, but at the Grand you had to be dressed up.

RB: Oh you definitely dressed up.

CH: So that was for maybe the more wealthy people in town?

RB: Or if you were like me, about a junior or senior in high school and you wanted to take your date out for a nice movie theater, I mean you dressed up nice.

CH: With suit and tie?

RB: Suit and tie, whereas if you went to the Uptown, you'd be more casual, but you'd be nice, you know, you'd look nice. Mm-hmm [chuckles]

CH: And they had a balcony at the Grand?

RB: Sure did, now I didn't remember going up there. The Princess, they had a balcony, I remember going up there, but the Uptown did not have a balcony. It just wasn't, you know, as nice of a, but Joe Goldthorpe[?] owned it and he did alright, he made, you know...

CH: Now would you say you have maybe a favorite building in Alton? Maybe just architecturally, the way it looks?

RB: Schneider's.

CH: Schneider's? And that's now Tootie's antiques.

RB: Mm-hmm. That was the neatest building, we'd go there, of course you, again, showing our age, but if you want to go shopping, frankly you went downtown. A cop would stand down there, and I saw a picture in the Telegraph of that dude.

CH: I've seen pictures.

RB: He was directing traffic, you know, but my gosh you could, well into the '70s, you could still do all your shopping downtown.

CH: They had a Sears down there next to Schneider's. (05:21)

RB: Yeah, and even though that wasn't a, it was called a B store, this friend Harter, I was telling you about, that had the appliance, his son Bud was my age, and Bud worked for Sears. And it was called a B store. When they built the mall, when Famous Bar that is part of the Maid Company, and when they, and Venture was too, by the way. And when they built the mall in the mid to early '70s, the anchor store was Famous Bar. It was, you know, the big one at the south end. There was supposed to be a Sears go in up there, but Sears said no, we've got an A store over at Jamestown, and we don't want to, and it's true, where did a lot of the people go, over to Jamestown. We used to flock over there, this poor mall, I had people who in class whose dads had businesses there, you know Alton people don't shop a lot there, most of the customers who shop at the mall come from north, you know a lot of the people and the kids, ask them where they shop, they don't go out to the mall. They head across, you know, or take off to Fairview Heights or something, you know.

CH: Now what kept you in Alton? I know you said you got a job here, would you say that's been the main thing?

RB: Well, I wanted to get away to go to school. I started college at SIU where the old Shurtleff was. And before Edwardsville, that SIU Edwardsville was in Edwardsville, it was in Upper Alton where the dental school is, and a lot of guys my age who went to college went up there, and so I started there, but I kind of wanted to get away. And after, I met my first wife in college, I again didn't really want to come back here, and when I got my teaching certificate, I applied to Florida, California, Michigan, Upstate. I didn't really want to, and I had offers, well like most people do. When I, I went and got my teaching certificate at McKendree, my gosh O'Fallon, Edwardsville, Alton, I applied to those, and they all made offers. The only reason I chose Alton is they offered way more. 6,000 dollars is what I started at in 1968, 6,000 dollars, isn't that something? Edwardsville was 5,500, O'Fallon, was uh, O'Fallon ain't what it is today.

CH: No, O'Fallon is known as the highest paying one now.

RB: Oh I could kind of, you know how you say, "Boy I could kick myself," because all of those are growing in leaps, and poor Alton is going the other way, and Fairview Heights, when I lived in St. Louis and went to McKendree, I'd get on highway 50 and go through Fairview Heights, and it took nothing to get through there. There was just one big Saint such and such Roman Catholic church, and that's all there was to Fairview Heights, it just, [makes 'shoop' noise], but now it's, well all kinds of stuff's out there in Fairview Heights and O'Fallon, yeah. But that's fine, you know.

CH: So, the job kept you here?

RB: Yeah, frankly, you know, and I had grown up, so I thought, "Okay," you know. By the way, I went looking in Florida, and they only offered 2,000 and something, because it didn't cost as much, but southern schools just, southern states didn't pay as much. I could have gotten probably a little more if I had gone into upstate Illinois, but cost of living's more. California, that was getting a little far away. I don't think my first wife, she wanted to go back to Michigan. That's where she was from. I wanted to go to Michigan. I liked it up there, she said no, she had enough of those winters, and she also liked, I think, this area.

CH: That's one of the things I find interesting about Alton High, is a lot of the teachers now who teach there graduated from high school there. All of them around your age.

RB: Yeah, we did, and it really was, and this is no lie, and it sounds [unintelligible], but it was a good school district. I mean if you got hired on at Alton, you know, you were doing good because it paid better than anybody. (10:15)

CH: Unfortunately, it's not the same today.

RB: I'm afraid not, I'm afraid not.

CH: But like you and Sharon Cabs[?] and Betty Siemer, Roger Caps[?], Darrel Lambshore[?].

RB: Darrel Lambshore[?]. Herman of course, was, he's ahead of me a couple of years.

CH: But he's from here too?

RB: Well, no I shouldn't say here. He was just up the road a little bit...

CH: Up the road a little bit.

RB: ...sorry.

CH: But you all kind of

RB: Frasier, from Jerseyville- that's what I'm saying, you know, and they knew-

CH: Jane Hill.

RB: Yeah, she, yeah, that's right, she was two years older, yeah she was, Jane Raimy[?], Jane Gitchall[?], Jane Hill. Yeah.

CH: Right.

RB: Mm-hmm, yeah.

CH: Well I think this wraps it up. I do have a lot more I could ask you.

RB: Okay [laughs]

CH: But we should stop here for now, and so thank you very much.

RB: Sure.