

Elmer Balko

Int: This is Elmer Balko. I'm Frances Durham, the interviewer for the Northville Historical Society and we're going to talk to Mr. Balko about growing up in Northville. He was born here, he lived here sixty-six years with the exception of three-plus years that he was in the service. I'm going to stop this now and check the tape.

Int: OK, the tape is back on and I was saying initially that Elmer, Mr. Balko, was born here in Northville, born in July of 1922. Did your father move here from somewhere else?

E. B: He was a farmer and owned a farm on Ten Mile Road and Wixom Road.

Int: Ten Mile and Wixom Road. What kind of farming was it?

E. B: General farming.

Int: General farming. Fruits, vegetables?

E. B: Dairy.

Int: Dairy farming. OK, very good. And how long did he own that farm?

E. B: That's a good question. I don't know. Probably about fifteen years, I would say.

Int: Were you born on that farm?

E. B: No, I was born in Northville.

Int: Born here in town, OK. As you recall *[tape stops]*.

Int: Mr. Balko had indicated, and I was just asking when I turned the tape off, whether or not he was born there and he indicated that no, he was born here in town. Do you have any idea how long your father owned that farm?

E. B: Not really. He owned it before I was born, so I really don't know.

Int: How did he happen to sell it and move into town?

E. B: He got sick and couldn't operate a farm anymore.

Int: What about brothers and sisters? How many members in the family?

E. B: I had two brothers and a sister. My two brothers have passed away.

Int: So they were older?

E. B: Yes.

Int: Were you the youngest of the children?

E. B: I'm the youngest.

Int: When your dad moved here into town, what did he do for a living then?

E. B: He started a carpenter business working as a carpenter.

Int: Working for someone else or as his own?

E. B: A Judd Hicks.

Int: What kind of carpentry, primarily?

E. B: Basically, they built barns, the old fashioned barn-raising. And then houses.

Int: Did you ever participate in any of that?

E. B: No, but I used to go to some of the barn-raising dances. They had some beautiful parties.

Int: These would be primarily on some of the neighboring farms, then, where these barns were built?

E. B: Yes, and the only one that I know is still around is the one on Eight Mile. The last one I knew they built.

Int: From what I've heard about these barn-raising projects was that they were kind of cooperative projects where the farmers from neighboring farms would come in and assist.

E. B: Correct.

Int: So then the women would prepare food, there would be a big meal.

E. B: Then after the barn was complete, they'd have a big dance.

Int: And the dance would take place right there at the farmhouse?

E. B: In the barn.

Int: Right in the barn itself?

E. B: Yes.

Int: What would they use for music?

E. B: They'd have a violinist, a guitarist, probably a banjo player, accordion.

Int: How many of those as you can recall did you actually see and witness?

E. B: I'd say about four.

Int: Do you have any idea how old you were at the time?

E. B: The last one, I was probably about fifteen years old.

Int: That would really be a form of entertainment, then, for the farmers.

E. B: Correct.

Int: I would assume that the farmers were very close as far as cooperating with each other and friendly, and friendly relationship between farmers. They helped each other out.

E. B: That's correct.

Int: While they might be in competition to some degree, raising products for sale, still when it came to something that was needed like a barn-raising or something.

E. B.: Or when they fill silos.

Int: Yes, crops, harvesting. Would they help each other?

E. B.: Yes, at harvest.

Int: Did they all own their own machinery or might they share some of this machinery?

E. B.: When it came time for thrashing, there was only one or two people around who had a thrasher and they would go around to different farms.

Int: And your dad was in the dairy business, primarily?

E. B.: Right.

Int: Milk or cattle?

E. B.: Milk.

Int: Milk. OK. Where were the dairies located around this area? Do you have any idea?

E. B.: I think most of the time we brought the milk in here to what they called a condensery, which would be on Baseline Road by the railroad tracks, which is now Warren Products.

Int: Warren Products, OK. Did Guernsey exist at that time or is that something that came along later?

E. B.: No, that came along quite a bit later.

Int: So then they would sell their milk to what you called the condensery and then it was bottled and sold from there?

E. B.: No it was more. It was condensed milk.

Int: OK, that might be made into a product that was sold in the store, condensed milk.

E. B.: Lloyd Moore might have been in the dairy business at that time. There were quite a few dairies around here, small dairies, individually owned. There was Bob Miller, Lloyd Moore, Twin Pines was out on Eight Mile Road, Cloverdale was out on Six Mile and Ridge Road, the Dickerson Dairy on Center Street at Walnut Street.

Int: Twin Pines had a plant out here then?

E. B.: Correct.

Int: Cloverdale is still around. Twin Pines is still around. So some of these dairies have been in existence for a long long number of years.

E. B.: That's right.

Int: So then your dad moved into town and went into the carpentry business. How many different homes have you lived in since you've been here in Northville?

E. B.: Two.

Int: Two. OK.

E. B.: This is the third one.

Int: You're pretty stable then. Now your dad, you say, was a carpenter himself. Did the home that you moved into when you moved off the farm, did he build that or was it an existing home?

E. B.: No, it was an existing home.

Int: Eventually, did he build another house for the family?

E. B.: No. He bought that in 1920 or 1922 and lived there ever since until he passed away.

Int: As you recall now, well, let's talk first of all about the school. Where did you go to school in Northville?

E. B.: On Main Street.

Int: And the name of the school? Did it have a name?

E. B.: We just called it grade school, which has burned down.

Int: Right. I've heard about that fire. How many grades were there in that school?

E. B.: Six.

Int: First through sixth grade.

E. B.: Seventh and eighth went to the high school.

Int: OK. So seven through twelve was in a high school building and then the first through sixth was in a grade school building.

E. B.: Correct.

Int: Are there any teachers that you can recall that you had a great deal of respect and that you really felt that you got a good education because of these teachers?

E. B.: That are still alive you mean?

Int: Not necessarily still alive, no.

E. B.: There's Ed Mollema, the history teacher, was a fantastic teacher. Miss Giltner was the business teacher who taught shorthand and typing. Mrs. Cooke would run the school with an iron hand.

Int: That's where the Cooke School came from.

E. B.: Mr. Ambler, who just passed away, was one of the best as the Superintendent.

Int: I've heard that many times.

E. B.: I don't know of anybody who didn't like him at all.

Int: What kind of a program, elementary school was, let me ask this question. Comparing the kind of education you got as a child and the kind of education that your children got, who went to school here in Northville. How do you feel the two educations compared? Was there a difference in standards and discipline?

E. B.: Oh yes. I think when I went to school the discipline was a lot better. I think the education was better. I think people might disagree with me. The teacher was law.

Int: And they got a lot of support from the home.

E. B.: Correct. Which they don't have now.

Int: What kind of a program did you follow in high school?

E. B.: Business.

Int: Business. OK. And then did you eventually, after graduation from high school, what did you do with that business training that you'd had?

E. B.: I went to Detroit Business School and then after that I went in the Service and when I got out of the Service, I went to the Post Office.

Int: How long did you go to Detroit Business School?

E. B.: About a year.

Int: And would you have continued if the War had not come along and you hadn't been drafted?

E. B.: Yes, I probably would have.

Int: Then you went into the Service and you were in the Army and how long were you in the Service?

E. B.: Three years.

Int: Did you receive any training there?

E. B.: What kind of training?

Int: Of course you went to basic training, but were you sent to schools or special training while you were in the Service?

E. B.: No.

Int: The war was going on. Were you sent overseas?

E. B.: Yes. I went to Southern France.

Int: And you were in the infantry?

E. B.: Right

Int: Did you see action while you were in the Service?

E. B.: Yes, very little. We went into action in November and I got hit in January, wounded in January, and they shipped me back to England.

Int: That pretty much ended your military career or were you kept on?

E. B.: They made me a Rehabilitation Officer and then they shipped me back to France. I was only there a couple of months and then the War ended.

Int: When you say Officer, were you a Commissioned Officer?

E. B.: Yes, I received the Battlefield Commission.

Int: Very good.

E. B.: I was a Sergeant one day and an Officer and a gentleman the next.

Int: And then when you finally were discharged from the Service, what rank did you hold?

E. B.: Second Lieutenant.

Int: Second Lieutenant. Very good. Why did you get this battlefield promotion?

E. B.: We were short Officer and I was doing an Officer's work. They found out it was better to make field grade Officers than it was to get them on up through OTC (Officers' Training Center).

Int: Do you regret your military service time?

E. B.: No. I could say that I enjoyed it. I learned a lot of things and saw places I'd never see again. I wouldn't take a million dollars for my experience but I wouldn't go through it again.

Int: I don't blame you. I was in the Navy myself. So then you were mustered out then, when? 1945? Did you come straight back to Northville?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: How old were you at that time?

E. B.: 23

Int: 23, and once you got back to civilian life, what did you do?

E. B.: I went to work at the Ford Valve Plant for a month, then I went to work for the Post Office.

Int: The Ford Valve Plant which is right here in Northville.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Now at that time, going to work for the Post Office, that's a Civil Service position today. Was it true then?

E. B.: Yes

Int: So you did have to take some sort of a test?

E. B.: Right, had to take the Civil Service Test.

Int: Civil Service Test. And then were you a mail carrier or were you a clerk working inside?

E. B.: I was a substitute mail carrier.

Int: How long did you hold that position?

E. B.: About a year and a half.

Int: And then what?

E. B.: Then I went to a regular position as a regular mail carrier.

Int: Where was your route located when you became a regular carrier?

E. B.: It would be the North side of Northville.

Int: The North side of Northville. I'm really straining your memory asking you some of these things, but how many houses – did that include businesses also?

E. B.: Very few.

Int: So primarily residential. How many houses would you have to deliver mail to?

E. B.: About 400 to 450.

Int: That's all your route? One carrier delivering all of those?

E. B.: Yes, twice a day. We walked our walk twice a day but we didn't hit every house twice a day.

Int: I'd forgotten that. So there was a mail delivery twice a day?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: I'd forgotten that. That goes back a few years. And you've already answered the question. You said you walked, which is somewhat different than some of our mail carriers today, who have vehicles to go back and forth.

You've talked about the North side. Before we turned this tape on, you mentioned that Northville is really divided into two separate sections, one was called the North Side, one was the South side and the South side was subdivided into Bealtown and Orchard Heights. Why did that come about? Do you have any idea why there was this kind of a dividing line in Northville?

E. B.: The only thing I can say was, from my feeling was that Orchard Heights was more the elite part of town, Bealtown was the working class. The same with the North side was working class, which would be North of Main Street. When we had any games, we played with anybody north of Main Street. Anybody south of Main Street always played together.

Int: It wasn't a rivalry, as such. It was still a friendly situation?

E. B.: Oh, yes, very friendly.

Int: There wasn't any ill feeling about living on one side?

E. B.: No.

Int: No jealousy, that kind of thing?

E. B.: No.

Int: Would you say that Orchard Heights would be newer homes than some of the homes in either the Bealtown or the North side of town?

E. B.: Yes, they were the newer section.

Int: They were the newer section and tended to be, probably, more expensive kind of homes?

E. B.: That's right.

Int: What about carrying mail? Did you know everybody on your route? Was there a personal feeling with your customers as far as being a mail carrier in those days?

E. B.: Yes, at that time you knew where they went to church, who they worked for, what their bills were, who they owed, who their children were. It was more like a family association. If you had an old lady on your walk, you would walk and pay her telephone bill for her so she wouldn't have to go down. Now they won't let you do it. We still had people in service, sons and daughters, and when the letter came in after we had delivered our routes, one of the carriers (there were three carriers, Joe Litzenberger, Harry German and myself), we would deliver it on our way home.

Int: So it was really a very personal, close relationship between the mail carrier and the customers on his route.

E. B.: Correct.

Int: And you said there were three mail carriers for the entire area of Northville?

E. B.: Yes, in the city proper itself.

Int: Do you have any idea, what would you say was the approximate population of the City or Town of Northville at that time?

E. B.: About four thousand.

Int: About four thousand, OK. And so pretty much, everybody knew everybody?

E. B.: Yes

Int: Even though they may live in the North side or they may live in Bealtown or they may live in Orchard Heights, they still, when you went into downtown Northville, you would say hello to people you knew?

E. B.: You spoke to everybody.

Int: You spoke to everybody, OK. Now let's see, you graduated from high school in 1940, then went to business school and you were drafted in 1942 and you were in the Infantry for three plus years. When we were talking earlier, you characterized Northville as a "bedroom community." What do you mean by the term "bedroom community?"

E. B.: Well, there was only one or two businesses in Northville. One was Ford Motor Company, and most of the people who worked there were from the City of Northville and that was about it for commercial activity. The rest was all, the people worked either in Detroit or in the surrounding areas.

Int: So that was the Ford Valve Plant.

E. B.: That's correct.

Int: Do you have any idea how many people they employed when it was going full-tilt?

E. B.: They used to run three shifts for roughly, say, four or five hundred people.



Int: OK, so that was a pretty good sized operation and it employed a lot of people who lived in Northville.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Now you mentioned a Foundry, did that come along later?

E. B.: No, that was way earlier.

Int: How big an operation was this Foundry and what did they manufacture?

E. B.: They made furnaces and then they made the Northville Bell, that's quite famous. In fact, they shipped them all over the country. When I worked in the Post Office, we got a letter from a family in India, they had a church that had a Northville Bell, and they wanted to know about the history of it.

Int: So these bells were primarily church bells?

E. B.: And school bells.

Int: And school bells. OK. Was there a bell on the school that you attended?

E. B.: No, we had the bell system.

Int: And the furnaces, what kind of furnaces did they manufacture? They weren't residential?

E. B.: Yes, they were coal furnaces. Coal fire furnaces for homes.

Int: Was that was a pretty good-sized industry in Northville?

E. B.: Yes, they hired quite a few people. I wouldn't say it was a large enterprise, and as the coal furnaces went out and that went down the drain, it closed.

Int: Where was that Foundry located?

E. B.: That was at the corner of Cady and East Main Street.

Int: So that's pretty much close to the down town area now.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: And that's long gone.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Were there any other businesses or industries in the early history of Northville that were there, besides the Foundry and the Ford Valve Plant?

E. B.: There was Stinson Aircraft that made Stinson Airplanes, and then years ago they had a furniture, which was quite close to where the Foundry was, that made church pews.

Int: I understand there was a fire?

E. B.: Yes, that burned down.

Int: That was destroyed by fire. Would that have employed some of the Northville residents?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: And what others that might employ Northville people? Did Stinson Aircraft employ Northville people, as far as you know?

E. B.: You're getting way beyond me, but yes, I know some that worked there.

Int: So Stinson was there before you came to Northville?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: But you do know that there were some Northville residents who worked there?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: So, as far as employment in Northville, then, those that lived in Northville, they could work at the Ford Valve Plant, they could work at the Foundry, they could work at Stinson Aircraft, or they could work at this Furniture...I knew the name of that. It wasn't Globe Furniture?

E. B.: It was Globe Furniture.

Int: Which was eventually destroyed by fire. Were there any other?

E. B.: They also had the institutions, which were outside of the City of Northville.

Int: I'm glad you mention that. What institutions?

E. B.: Maybury Sanitarium which was a tuberculosis sanitarium, and the Detroit House of Correction which was a penal institution, and they had Wayne County Training School which was a home for wayward children.

Int: And these were outside of the Northville city limits, proper, but were in this area.

E. B.: In Northville Township, yes. Detroit House of Corrections, part of it was in Plymouth Township and part of it was in Northville Township.

Int: So some of the residents of Northville may have worked there.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Speaking of that House of Corrections brings to mind that one of the interviewees told me about the Wayne County Fair and how some of these inmates at the House of Correction used to make furniture and they would also grow fruits and vegetables and would have these on display at the Wayne County Fair. I'm assuming that you attended those Wayne County Fairs.

E. B.: Yes, and also then they had registered dairy cattle, too, and took quite a few prizes. The Wayne County Training School did and the House of Corrections did, too.

Int: They did raise dairy cattle, then?

E. B.: Yes. It was a big farm and they raised all their own food out there.

Int: So this gave these "inmates" (not a word I like to use) something to do then. They raised their own food.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Let's talk for a few minutes about, as a young boy growing up, what you would do for recreation in Northville.

E. B.: Well, like I say, it was divided into North and South. Young people on the North side, we used to play kick the can, duck on the rock, capture the flag, we made our own recreation and it was nothing planned. It was spontaneous. If you played baseball, you had an old ball wrapped with friction tape, because you couldn't afford a good baseball. Basically, that was about it.

Int: You made your own entertainment then.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Now I do know that there was a theater here, what is today the Marquis Theatre. The original theater, as I understand, burned down. Maybe that's not where the Marquis was. Somebody told me that there had been a fire. I also know, somebody told me there was an opera house here at one time. Do you recall?

E. B.: Yes, it was on the corner of Center Street and Dunlap.

Int: Now when they say opera house, would they in fact bring legitimate theater into Northville for performances?

E. B.: Yes. This was way before my time but they did. In fact, Henry Ford was negotiating to buy it to move it to Greenfield Village, but the deal fell through for some reason. In fact, the last time I was in it would be back in the early 40s. The stagecoach was still there.

Int: Was this opera house on the second floor of a building?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Kind of unusual to have an opera house on the second floor but you were actually in that building?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Was it still being used then or was it just standing vacant?

E. B.: No, it was standing vacant. A few stores would be in there once in a while, there was a feed store in there for a while.

Int: Did you play sports in high school?

E. B.: Yes, I played basketball and baseball.

Int: Basketball and baseball. I heard quite a bit about the rivalries between Northville and Plymouth. I'm assuming that was true.

E. B.: Yes, it was. Sometimes it got a little heated. The Northville kids did not have much to do with Plymouth and Plymouth didn't like Northville too well.

Int: I understand that Northville gave a good account of itself.

E. B.: Once in a while.

Int: So then you were on both the basketball and the baseball teams.

E. B.: Yes. Sports was not a big thing in school, not like it is now. Most of it was on education, studies, not the sports. But if you didn't get passing grades you didn't play sports. Teachers did not upgrade your grade, either.

Int: You had to maintain that eligibility to play.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Where did you play your baseball games?

E. B.: Baseball games were played in Cass Benton Park.

Int: Just in one of the diamonds that were there in the park?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Who took care of Cass Benton Park at the time? Was it a county park?

E. B.: Wayne County

Int: Wayne County took care of the Park.

E. B.: The only better baseball diamond in the state was Tigers' Stadium (Briggs Stadium, as it was called at the time).

Int: So because the school used Cass Benton Park, the kids didn't go there and mess it up? It was taken care of?

E. B.: There was a man by the name of Mr. Hodgkins, he ruled it with an iron hand. There was no fooling around in the parks.

Int: That's good. And then the basketball would played, I'm assuming, there was a gym in the high school?

E. B.: Yes, it's still there.

Int: Now there were two different high schools, the school that you went to is not the same high school that the students today go to.

E. B.: No.

Int: What happened to the earlier high school?

E. B.: They're still using it, I think, for special ed. classes.

Int: Now I do know that there was a fire in one of the elementary schools. It wasn't the school that you went to was it?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: That was the school destroyed by fire. After that fire occurred, do you remember what grade you were in?

E. B.: I was either in seventh or eighth.

Int: So you were already up in the high school. I've been told that the elementary kids had to be shifted around.

E. B.: Yes, to vacant houses.

Int: And the new building was built by the W. P. A.

E. B.: Correct.

Int: Let me see some more questions here. As far as social activity and recreational activity, you made your own.

E. B.: Well, for social activity, maybe no one has mentioned this to you, Saturday night was a big social deal. People would drive up town, park their cars, and then at night they'd do their grocery shopping and that's where you met everybody. The farmers would come in out of the farms and used to shop once a week and that was on Saturday night.

Int: OK. And, of course shopping in those days, what kind of stores would they go to shop? Right in town, I'm assuming.

E. B.: Well, at that time there was the [Wolf?] Grocery Company and the C. F. Smith Store and that was about the grocery stores in town at that time back in the early thirties. The owner of the grocery store, the manager, they had a little counter in the center and that's where they stood and you went off and picked up your groceries off the shelves.

Int: The farmers would come into town and the residents of Northville would be in it.

*[Tape stops.]*

Int: We turned it off just for a minute. We were talking about Saturday night was a big night in town. So not only the residents of Northville would be in town, but the farmers would come in too. Now did I hear about a community band? Do you recall anything about a community band?

E. B.: That was before my time. They did have a community band.

Int: That would play on Saturday evening when they were in town?

E. B.: Yes, they used to have a band stand right in the middle of Main Street and Center Street, a band shell.

Int: So they might play when people were in shopping on Saturday night.

E. B.: And also they had what they would call a free show. Merchants would buy a film and they would show it outside and it was all free. Salem had one and Novi had one.

Int: Now when you say show them outside, where would they show them?

E. B.: Out in a big field and they would have a screen up, set on the grass and watch the show.

Int: So it was almost like the precursor to the drive-in movies that became popular later on.

E. B.: That's right.

Int: And the merchants sponsored it.

E. B.: That's right.

Int: And what about refreshments? Would they sell things for the participants to eat?

E. B.: No, we didn't have any money to buy anything.

Int: That's unusual. I hadn't heard that before. So that would be a popular activity then. Just go sit on the grass and watch a film.

E. B.: I think Salem's was on Tuesday nights and I think Novi's was on Thursdays. If you had enough money to buy gas, you could go to two movies and it didn't cost you.

Int: Did Northville do anything like that?

E. B.: Not that I remember.

Int: Now you went to work for the Post Office as a substitute mail carrier, then a regular route. How long did you carry mail?

E. B.: About ten years.

Int: On that same route?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: You had the same route for a ten-year period. And then what was your next job with the Post Office?

E. B.: Then I went inside as a clerk.

Int: And how long did you work there as a clerk?

E. B.: Five years.

Int: During that time was Northville growing?

E. B.: Very slowly. We'd have maybe one or two new houses at a time.

Int: When did the real growth in Northville start?

E. B.: I would say the sixties.

Int: Why did people then start moving out to Northville? It was a bedroom community, there wasn't any particular great industry out here, so did they move just to move out of the city to come out here?

E. B.: Northville had excellent schools, a great school system. Northville is a pretty town. It was a small town but it was pretty. Everybody was friendly, you could stand on the street corner and speak to 99 percent of the people who walked by. I think, basically, because it was friendly and the school system.

Int: The school system had a very good reputation?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: How long, do you recall, was Mr. Amerman the superintendent here? I know he had been a principal and then the superintendent died, and then Mr. Amerman became acting superintendent but then eventually he was appointed as superintendent.

E. B.: It was years. I couldn't tell you.

Int: Several years then. And he was a highly respected educator?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: Very good. You worked for a clerk for five years?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: And still, it was that situation where you knew everybody in town. Did a lot of people come in town to get their mail or was the mail usually full? What about the farmers? Was their mail delivered to them?

E. B.: Yes, we had two rural routes at that time back in the late forties. It was kind of strange. We went into three different counties. We were about one of the only post offices that went into three different counties to deliver the mail. We were into four townships; we went into Salem Township, we went into South Lyon Township, Novi Township, Northville Township. And we also went into Livonia Township, which now is the City of Livonia.

Int: Was this primarily because they didn't have their own post offices?

E. B.: Salem had their own post office but they did not have a rural route out of it. Novi had their own post office and they didn't have any rural routes.

Int: So rather than coming into town to pick up their mail, the mail was delivered on a rural route to the farmers?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: And after clerking for five years and you were still with the Post Office, then what was your next position?

E. B.: Then I became Assistant Postmaster.

Int: As Assistant Postmaster, what was your primary responsibility then? You probably had many responsibilities.

E. B.: Running the Post Office.

Int: Running the Post Office, OK.

E. B.: The Postmaster job was a political appointment.

Int: Strictly a political appointment?

E. B.: They did not do too much work.

Int: You told me that now the position has been done away with or has a new title now?

E. B.: Yes, it's called the Supervisor of Postal Operations.

Int: That's what used to be Assistant Postmaster?

E. B.: Yes, that's right.

Int: Let's talk a little bit about, because you mentioned politics, let's talk a little bit about government. Of course, probably until you got out of high school and came back from Service, you probably didn't have too much interest or knowledge about the kind of government operation there was in Northville. But as a small town, did they have a Mayor, did they have a Business Manager?

E. B.: They had a Mayor and a City Council. The Mayor would vote if they had a tie in the Council. It was a weak Mayor situation.

Int: Was it a volunteer position or a paid position? Full time or part time?

E. B.: It was part time. At that time, I think we got something like five dollars a meeting and we met once a month.

Int: I'm assuming that once Northville started growing then they had to go to a different system of operation.

E. B.: They went to a City Manager.

Int: City Manager and then also had a Mayor.

E. B.: Yes.

Int: City Manager and a Mayor, which is still true today.

E. B.: Which is still true today.

Int: I understand that the early Police Department was a one man Police Department. At the time that you were growing up, was there more than one police officer?

E. B.: Well, you had the Chief of Police, which was Bill Safford at that time and then we had a Night Watchman. They called it a Night Watchman. And then over a period of years they've had quite a few Chief of Police. Joe Denton was a super one, kept a tight rein on the City of Northville. But there was not much crime here at that time. A little speeding and a little drinking but that was about it.

Int: OK, now Night Watchman, what would his responsibilities be? Was he in a car just patrolling the area, or was he in a station?

E. B.: Most of the time he was walking and he would check the businesses to see that the doors were locked. That was about it.

Int: Today's Northville Fire Department is still, I think, a volunteer department?

E. B.: Yes, an excellent department.

Int: And that was true then, it was volunteer?

E. B.: Right.

Int: Somebody else told me that if there would be a fire at night, the gal that worked the telephone office, her responsibility was to call the volunteer fireman. Do you remember any of that?

E. B.: They still have the sirens. They used to blow the sirens and they had, on the four corners of Main and Center Street, if they wanted the policeman, they used have a red light up there. They would turn the red light on and that's when they knew he was wanted on the phone. This was before radio was in cars.

Int: OK, that's right and that's how they took care of, if they needed a police officer, if they needed a fireman, then they had to contact them.

E. B.: Right.

Int: Let's see what else we can talk about here. Now you have how many children?

E. B.: I have two boys and two girls.



Int: Have any of them stayed in the Northville area?

E. B.: I have a daughter who is a nurse. She lives in Saline and works at St. Joe's Hospital in Emergency. The one son lives in Walled Lake, my oldest daughter is a Major in the Army. She's in Germany at the present time. The other son is in California.

Int: So none of them stayed in Northville although two of them have stayed fairly close.

E. B.: Fairly close.

Int: If I was to ask them what they felt about Northville, how do you think they would answer me in terms of the changes that have occurred in Northville? In fact, I'll ask you that question. Northville now, we have Northville and then Northville Township and Northville has grown. You've said it started to grow in the 1960s. How do you feel about the changes that have taken place in Northville as opposed to the small town where everybody knew everybody. You, as a mail carrier, knew everybody, even as Assistant Postmaster, you probably knew most of the residents.

E. B.: I don't think it's for the best. You could, like I said before, you could walk down the street and you could speak to everybody and you knew, not their personal business, but where they worked, where they went to church, or if something was wrong. You knew and you cared. People don't care anymore. You don't want to get involved. Maybe because it's getting bigger and I just don't like to see changes. I think back in the forties it was a lot better.

Int: But you've continued to live here in Northville and you retired when?

E. B.: 1977.

Int: 1977, so you've been here twelve years since you retired. I'm assuming you still feel Northville is a good place to live?

E. B.: Oh yes.

Int: Despite the changes?

E. B.: Yes.

Int: You've spent your life here and this is the place you want to stay.

E. B.: I still know a lot of people and that makes a difference.

Int: OK. Let me see, do you have any particular interests or hobbies? Besides carrying mail, what did you do for hobbies or interests?

E. B.: I used to do a lot of hunting. In fact, when I lived on Baseline just east of Center Street, I used to walk out the back door and start hunting. Now that's gone down the tubes. Mostly I go camping now in my trailer.

Int: When you were hunting what did you hunt for?

E. B.: Rabbits, pheasants, squirrels.

Int: So you didn't have to go very far and you had woods where you could go hunting?

E. B.: Anything north of what we call Eight Mile Road now, was all open land. It was all farmland.

Int: Now did you have to get permission from the farmers to hunt on their land?

E. B.: No, because you knew them. There was the Miller boys and you just didn't have to ask at that time because nobody did any damage.

Int: OK. Now you mentioned the Miller boys, what about some of the prominent names in Northville? And as a mail carrier, you would certainly know some of the families and what their contributions were to Northville. As you can recall, mention some of them and why they were prominent.

E. B.: Well, there was the Yerkes which started the Northville Lumber Company. Don Yerkes was the last Yerkes to own it. Then there were Eatons and Brians. Mr. Brian worked for Ford Motor Company but he also had Northville Real Estate. There was Pete Ely who was Mayor of Northville. He worked for Detroit Edison. That's about the only prominent ones that I can think of. There was the Schraders who owned the Schraders Funeral Home, which is out of business now, and Schraders Furniture. And then there was Casterlines which started the Casterline Funeral Home in 1938.

Int: Yerkes probably would be the most prominent name of those that you mentioned. Did they all own land around here?

E. B.: Yes, they owned the land which would be north of Novi Street. In fact, Novi Street cuts right through the farm now. Novi Road was the east boundary and Grace Street was the west boundary. This area where we are right now, north of Baseline, was owned by the Yerkes at one time. I think the Yerkes owned four or five farms and most of it was north of Baseline Road.

Int: What kind of farming did they do?

E. B.: That was general farming.

Int: General farming which might include dairy?

E. B.: Dairy and cash crops.

Int: Cash crops. There were some fruit farms out in this area. In fact, I think they still exist, don't they?

E. B.: Yes, there's Foreman's Orchards, which is out on West Seven Mile Road. They were the big ones.

Int: There's still some horse farms around here and I'm assuming the horse farms came about because of what eventually became Northville Downs. Back in those days it wasn't like it is today. And the Wayne County Fair, as I understand, was held down where Northville Downs is now. And I also understand the football team used to play their football games there in the middle of the field.

E. B.: That's right, inside the track.

Int: Inside the tracks.

E. B.: But the surrounding area was all farms and it was general farming: dairy and cash crops.

Int: OK, let me just turn this off for a minute here and take a look at our notes.

*[Tape stops]*

Int: I turned the tape on because there are a couple of interesting things that I thought we should put on this tape. We talked a lot about Elmer and his growing up in Northville but haven't talked much about Mrs. Yerkes—I mean Mrs. Balko. I asked the question how did you happen to meet and you said that was kind of an interesting thing. Why don't you tell us about that?

E. B.: My folks and my wife's folks were friends for years and when her brother got married, they had the reception at the American Legion Hall on Main and Dunlap, Center and Dunlap. I had nothing to do that Saturday night so I decided it's a free meal, so I'll go. That's how I met my wife Ruth. After that we started dating and got married in '49.

Int: How long did you go together before you were married?

E. B.: Two years.

Int: Two years, so it wasn't any rushed thing, then.

E. B.: No, it wasn't a rushed thing.

Int: Well that's great. You went for a free meal and you ended up with the girl you'd eventually marry. Now this house that you are living now--you've lived in this house ever since you were married?

E. B. That's right. My dad and I built it. My brother helped and Judd Hicks, who my dad worked for, helped a little bit.

Int: This is a very nice house and your wife was commenting about how well-built this house was, so I think there would be a little difference in the standards of home-building today than the standards of home-building in those days.

E. B. Yes.

Int: Now you told me that you bought a double lot and the lots were owned by whom?

E. B. The lots were owned by Harold Church, who at that time worked for Knowles Lumber Company. He owned the whole street at that time between Baseline and Eight Mile.

Int: At one time, was this property part of the Yerkes Farm?

E. B. Yes.

Int: Part of Yerkes Farm, eventually sold off.

E. B.: Well, someone bought it and then it went back for tax sale. That's when Mr. Knowles bought it and then Mr. Church bought it from Mr. Knowles.

Int: So it was a tax sale, then, when the property was acquired.

E. B.: That's right.

Int: And you mentioned, I don't know if you might have mentioned it on tape or not, how much you paid for the lots and how much they'd be going for today.

E. B.: I paid \$450 for one lot. Now they would be in the category of about \$34,000. They sold one just about two blocks from it.

Int: And what size are these lots?

E. B.: 80 by 125.

Int: These are big lots.

E. B.: In comparison to new lots now.

Int: Well I can understand you saying you want to stay here because you have a nice house and a nice piece of property to yourself. That's great. Anything else that you'd care to mention?

E. B.: Not that I can think of.

Int: Well, I appreciate this interview and as I said, this is the Oral Histories Project and I'm Frances Durham and I do appreciate you taking the time to speak to me.

E. B.: I appreciate you stopping by.

Int: Thank you.