

Northville Township Historical District Commission

Oral History Interview – Michael Green

January 16, 2007



Thayer School Student

Local Businessman

MG – Mike Green

Oral History—Michael Green

JC – John Colling
RA – Richard Allen

This is Tuesday, January 16, 2007, and we are interviewing Mike Green who lived in the Township many years ago and went to Thayer School. Right now, we'll do our customary voice check so the person doing the transcribing can get to recognize individual voices. I am Richard Allen. I am John Colling. My name is Mike Green.

JC. Okay, let's start at the beginning. You came here in the '40s.

MG. I came into Northville Township from Detroit in 1948 with my family, and I was enrolled in Thayer School in the sixth grade in 1948. At that time my twin sister, myself, and one girl from Salem Township was in the sixth grade.

JC. How many grades did they have?

MG. In Thayer School there was kindergarten through eighth grade in one room. Average two, three or four children per grade. Five or six sometimes, it varied from year to year. Interestingly enough, the school as you know was in Northville Township, however probably a third or more of the students were from Salem Township just because of proximity. I guess political boundaries back then didn't mean as much as they do now. So a lot of my friends and students at the same time were from Salem Township.

JC. Were they part of the Northville school system?

MG. I'm not sure how that was structured at that time. Salem did have a school, however, these children were not close enough to the village of Salem, to go to that school.

RA. Northville schools today takes in part of Salem.

MG. The high school does, yes. The high school annexed quite a bit of the area.

RA. Where did you live in the Township?

MG. I lived on Napier road, which is the Township as well as the county line between Six Mile and Seven Mile.

RA. That's about where your sister lives today, then?

MG. Right next door to it. The house is still there. We walked to school everyday and walked home.

RA. Do you remember the house number?

MG. 8762 Napier Road.

JC. I've always been curious about these one-room schoolhouses and the different grades. Did the teachers teach first grade, then second grade, and then third grade?

MG. Yes, I can expound on that a little bit. Our teacher's name was Carrie Dickinson. She lived in the Township also. She was married to Ivan Dickinson. She lived on Napier Road between Seven and Eight Mile Road. She would have a certain time set aside for individual classes: first grade, second grade, third grade, and so on which did not vary. It was the same each day. She would go through the lessons for those classes, and while she was doing the individual grades, everyone else was supposed to be doing their own studying. Study hall kind of a thing. Then we had our recess, lunchtime and all that. It was quite well organized. We had, I don't know what to call them, I was going to say intramural sports, but they weren't really that. We did have sports teams, athletic teams, football and baseball. We would compete with other schools in the area; Baseline School on Eight Mile Road was one of our competitors. Nankin Mills was another one. That's all that comes to me at the moment. There were two or three different schools. We would go play a couple of football games or baseball games with them.

JC. At that time, were there other one-room schools in the Township?

MG. Oh yes, the only one I'm aware of was Baseline School which was on Eight Mile.

JC. There was one on Franklin Road some years ago but I don't know when that burnt down.

MG. I was aware there was one there, but I didn't know anything about it. Baseline School I was very familiar with. I think it's on Maybury Property now, the park.

RA. Waterford would have been there because Charlie George was involved in the school board after he got out of the military. Waterford School was there in the late '40s.

MG. Yeah, it was there, but I lived on the other side of the Township and wasn't aware of what was going on over there. So again, I went to that school three years—sixth, seventh, and eighth grade. At the end of the eighth grade, they closed Thayer school and everyone went to Northville public schools. It just so happened the timing for my sister and myself was that we finished at that school.

JC. You would have transferred anyway.

MG. Right, exactly.

RA. Just to clarify things for someone who reads this later on, your sister is Jean Bemish who also did an oral history, so someone can tie the two of you together.

MG. That is correct. She still lives in the Township on Napier.

RA. I know her.

MG. So it was quite an experience to go to the one-room school. People find it very interesting when I tell them about it. I have to relate this to you. I always tell people that I finished second in my eighth grade class and they're quite impressed until they find out there were only two in the class, my sister and myself. Actually, there were three. Kids from Salem Township at that time went to South Lyon Schools. They didn't go to

Northville schools. Most of them went to South Lyon. Right about that time, buses came into existence, school buses. Although it wasn't the school bus we know today. Northville school bus was the Northville Coach Line owned by Tunis Biddle. He ran the school buses at that time back in '50, '51.

JC. I assumed you walked down to Thayer.

MG. Yeah. We walked to Thayer everyday.

JC. You went to the old Northville high school?

MG. Right, on Main Street. The building is still there. It's Administration Building now. People refer to the new high school now and I always think of the new high school as the one on Center Street.

RA. The new, new high school.

MG. I'm way behind the times. The new Taj Mahal they built there. But it was an interesting time. The Northville Coach Lines that I mentioned was a bus company that was located in the Township. The bus garage was where Rocky's restaurant is now on E. Seven Mile. That was Tunis Biddle; he owned it; and it was the Northville Coach Lines. They would run from Five Points, which is Grand River and Seven Mile, all the way out Seven Mile to Northville. That was their only run. Then they contracted with the schools right about the start of the 1950s for school buses.

RA. The school at that time, the classrooms were all on one floor? Because that's been cut up as a residence.

MG. Thayer School?

RA. Yeah.

MG. It was one room. There was a cloakroom in the back. There were two bathrooms attached to the building. They were not water facilities. It was just a hole in the ground, but in the same building. All on one floor with very high ceilings, and as I found out now, someone at that time had made it into two stories.

RA. Yeah, They had some bedrooms. It was a residence for a period of years.

MG. My daughter was friends with the people who lived there at that time. I was asking her the other day and she was in the house when it was a two-story configuration. But I never was in it. The people who lived there initially were named Sabbatora. I don't know what happened to them, but I think the building is empty now.

RA. The building is boarded up.

MG. Yeah. It was surrounded by the cemetery.

RA. The cemetery (Thayer) is on one side and the landfill (Salem Landfill, Onyx), across the road, occupies the rest of it.

MG. Beyond that was all of Roy Terrill's orchards. All in back of the school and across the street was orchards, apple orchards that belonged to Roy Terrill. They're all gone now because the landfill took over.

RA. The landfill owns the school at the moment.

MG. They do? Not the cemetery?

RA. No. Cemetery is still privately maintained.

MG. Well, that was 1948, '49, '50 when I was in that schoolhouse.

RA. What did you have for heat?

MG. It must have been fuel oil, because it wasn't wood, I know.

RA. You didn't have a potbelly stove?

MG. No, we didn't have the stereotype potbelly stove, wood fire. We didn't have that, I remember that.

RA. Because there was an old furnace in the back of the building when we were there.

MG. It could have been coal even, either coal or oil, one of the two, because there was no gas out there at that time. It was very cozy, very nice in there. I went there for three years.

JC. And there was just the one teacher?

MG. During my tenure, there was just the one teacher, Carrie Dickinson. Yeah. There were, obviously, different teachers prior to that. What's interesting we had a reunion about three years ago of all the graduates of Thayer School. It was held in South Lyon and my sister and I went to this function and there were about 30-35 graduates of Thayer School there, all different years. It wasn't just the one year, but all different years. A lot of them I knew who they were, but they attended years before I went there. There were a few people who showed up when I was there but that was very interesting to see these people after all these years.

JC. When you are going in this situation (course I didn't so this is why I'm curious) you get to know everybody there, those older than you and younger than you?

MG. Yes, of course.

JC. What about lessons? As you are in the lower grade, you hear the upper grade lessons being given?

MG. You could hear it, but you weren't dwelling on it. You were doing your own thing. A lot of times she would have the older students help the younger ones. It was very productive, I felt. I can't say it was better than a conventional school, but it worked. It was quite an experience.

RA. The grade school I went to, one-room schools were three years.

MG. You know what's it like then. I would guess that the students that attended that school when I was there, pretty much came from a two-square mile area bounded by Chubb Road in Salem Township, and Ridge Road to the east, maybe half-way between Seven and Eight to the north, and Five Mile to the south. Maybe a little more than two square miles...maybe five square miles. It was all geographically close.

RA. It was, basically, walking distance.

MG. Yeah. Nobody had buses. Very few people had cars. Obviously, children didn't drive. They walked; everybody walked back and forth. Snow, rain, or nothing. You went everyday. There was no such thing as school closed. I can't believe they close the schools today for this. It's nothing. No, they never closed the school.

RA. I have no comment.

MG. You must feel like I do. That was pretty much my take on the whole thing. This has nothing to do with the Township, but I went to a parochial school in Detroit, and I moved out here, and it was quite a change for me going from a big grade school to a little one-room schoolhouse.

RA. I heard you say that you moved up north for a while. When you came back did you come back to the Township or...?

MG. No, I moved back to Redford after that. I was divorced then and remarried and moved to Redford. I never moved back to the Township. I'm familiar with it and am there a lot, but I don't live there.

JC. You did have a business in town?

MG. Yes, I did. I owned a service station on the corner of Beck Road and Seven Mile (West Seven Service). My brother (Robert Green) and I were partners in that business. The property was owned by Robert Hopper who lived right nearby there. It was a service station before my brother and I took it over, but it was just a little shack on the corner, literally, a shack, wooden, with the two gas pumps. Bob Hopper built a brand new facility there and we leased the land and then ran the business for about five or six years. From 1957, probably into the early 60's.

RA. We moved here in '74, and it was a Texaco station at that time, but it was pretty run down.

MG. It was all run down. Yeah, that was the same building. You saw the same building, basically your two-bay gas station. Now they've got some big kind of a convenience store there now that sits on the corner. But, of course, business was very different then.

RA. It's a gold mine.

MG. Probably, yeah, it's interesting. Kitty-corner from that business was a little, it's still there, it's a little home on the corner. It was built to look like a little barn with the silo on the little house. That belonged to John Coleman who was the president of Burroughs. He came out there on weekends. It was his hideaway, kind of a getaway place. It was empty all week, but he lived there on weekends. A lot of people never knew who lived there.

RA. It's been for sale, probably six or seven years.

MG. It's been for sale many, many times. Behind that gas station was one of the gravel mining companies. Across Beck Road from there was another one owned by John Waskins, Northville Sand and Gravel. And then Van Avery and Thomson were further up the road west of there off Seven Mile.

RA. What was the gravel company...Thomson was off of Seven Mile...who was off of Beck, south of there.

MG. John Waskins was his name.

RA. It was a smaller facility, I know that.

MG. Oh no, it was the biggest one. And then they built those condos in there.

RA. I know it was kind of ratty looking for a long time.

MG. Yeah, he was on both sides of Beck Road eventually. He opened up on the east side of Beck in later years when things were petering out on the other side of the road. But it was called Northville Sand and Gravel and was by far the biggest operation. Thomsons came in pretty much after John Waskins sold his, closed it actually, when they ran out of gravel.

RA. Every summer you could hear the gravel trucks going down Beck Road hitting all the potholes at 5:30 in the morning going bangity, bangity, bang.

JC. Were the roads paved then at that time?

MG. No, Beck's only been paved for a few years.

RA. Probably ten years now.

MG. I went to school with Donnie Thomson. It was his dad's business and then Don took it over when his dad died. I think he may still be around. He owns that car wash, oil change place.

RA. I think his son runs that now.

MG. A lot of years have gone by.

RA. He moved to Florida and he had a place in South Lyon.

MG. Don? Okay. So that was our business, and we opened up another one in the city of Northville, right next to what eventually was McDonald Ford. It was across from, back then what was the Bel Nor Drive-In. I owned a service station across from there in the late 50s, early 60s.



“Northville Speedway”, on Seven Mile at S. Northville Road. Building in the background is Rathburn Chevrolet. The future site of John Mach Ford is on the right.

RA. What brand of gas?

MG. Speedway. Not the Speedway you see today, when there was a Speedway corporation.

RA. Speedway is part of Marathon today. In those days it was standalone. Aurora Oil, if I remember correctly.

MG. I ran that for four or five years, and I sold that and went back to college. I was out of the township while I went to school, and when I came back I built a home on Napier next to my dad’s house was—between my dad’s and Green Ridge Nursery which was next to me. I lived there for about seven years, and that’s when I left. Next to my home on Napier Road was a really big business, Green Ridge Nursery. I don’t know if you’ve run across that. John Miller owned that. It was a really thriving, very successful nursery. In fact he did a lot of the landscaping, all of it along Main Street in Northville in the city and did many, many homes that were being built at the time.

RA. Green Ridge turned into a tree-trimming company that became Mountain Top.

MG. Well, not really. Green Ridge still existed, and a fellow by the name of Don Beret took over the tree trimming company, and it's called Mountain something out on Chubb Road.

RA. Mountain Top.

MG. He sold it to whoever calls it Mountain Top now. It's a completely different business, but it originated as Green Ridge, because Green Ridge originally was the nursery as well as the tree service—same business for many, many years. Green Ridge started out on Ridge Road just south of Seven Mile, and then John needed more property, so he moved out to Napier Road and located there for many years.

MG. All of the property back in the late 40s, early 50s as you know now, with a very few exceptions, were farms. There were farms along Seven Mile. Orchards, Foremans' Orchards between Ridge and Napier. There were farms across from there, but there were only two farms in that whole mile back then. Glen Angel and Orlo Owen owned a place, but he wasn't a farmer. He lived on the farm.

RA. Milan George is the only one left.

MG. I knew Milan when I was growing up.

RA. He went to Thayer School also.

MG. Yeah, but he was a little older than me. I didn't know him in the school. I knew him after. I knew him just as a neighbor rather than a school chum. But there's quite a few people along where his farm was that went to the school, all along Six Mile between Napier Road and Ridge Road. There were a lot of kids who went to Thayer. Along Ridge between Six and Seven, there were no big farms but quite a few residences. Quite a few for that time, maybe five or six different residences along there on small parcels. Further east to Beck Road there was the gravel company, and a few residences, no big farms there. There was a big farm on the corner of Six Mile and Beck, on the northeast corner, Joe Holman. You may know his name from different interviews. A lot of his kids lived along there for years and years. They built their own homes.

RA. Eventually Laphams took it over. For a long time, they had the only lighted softball field in the Township, and it was loaded with a gazillion mosquitoes.

MG. Yeah, that was over where Stinson had his business. I'm talking about the northeast corner of Beck. You're looking at where Stinson was. It was right close to the gravel pit, between Six and Seven. I think there was a park in there at one time. Is it still there?

RA. No.

MG. Okay. It was a ball diamond as I recall. But that was many years later. But that was many years later, in the 70s, maybe.

RA. By some chance, do you know of anyone that might still be around that worked for Stinson?

MG. No. No. In fact Stinson was closed in '48 when I moved there. Some of the buildings were still there. He sold out to Piper. I'm a pilot myself and I flew out of Mettetal Airport for quite a few years back in the '50s. Stinson was very well known by the people I knew.

RA. The City historical commission is trying to do some research on Stinson and they're running into a bunch of brick walls.

MG. Oh yeah, Eddie Stinson, they would probably. Maybe at that time, I'm trying to think who would know. Again, even before '48 before I got there. Late '30s was when he was there. In fact my first airplane ride was in a Stinson back in probably early '50s.

JC. The Salem Airport was there when you were young.

MG. Oh no, I was grown up when that opened up. There's an interesting story in the Salem Airport. Again, it's Salem Township. Shoebridge was the person who opened that airport and that was probably in the '60s when he opened that small airport. Then they wanted to enlarge the landfill there and they bought the property. They found out later that you couldn't have a landfill within a certain number of feet of an airport. I forgot who owned that landfill. But he wanted that landfill, okay? He gave Shoebridge a million bucks for that airport and closed it the next day just so he could have his landfill.

RA. I kind of recall that.

MG. Now that was quite a few years later. It happened in the '70s.

RA. It happened after we moved there.

MG. I knew Ron Shoebridge too, and he really fell into it, I tell you. His property wasn't worth a million dollars. He says, "Yeah, I'll sell it for a millions dollars!" So the guy says, "Okay, here." I'll tell you what property cost in '48 because my dad bought 20 acres and that farm on Napier Road for \$12,000 in 1948. It's for sale today, the house and 2 3/5 acres for \$448,000. In fact, I have a brochure on it. It's just amazing what's happening. I enjoyed living there. We had horses. A lot of people did. My sister still rides; she still has horses.

RA. There are several people up and down Napier Road who ride because the horse people come to Township meetings. We all know who they are: Debbie Brown, etc.

MG. The presentation the other night (History of Northville Township presented by Dan Schneider) touched on Maybury Sanatorium and I knew quite a few of the people who worked there because they were customers of mine in my gas station. We used to go over there and get their cars and bring them back and service them. Of course, that closed up in the mid-60s.

RA. We interviewed the man who was the pediatric physician for Maybury.

MG. Was his name Klopfenstein?

RA. No. Romanik.

MG. I know that name. The only one I knew was Dr. Klopfenstein.

RA. He lived in one of the houses that is now part of the state park. In fact, he lives across the street at the moment.

MG. The residences that I was aware of were on Beck Road.

RA. There are three houses there, maybe four. One house is gone and another's about to be gone. The other one they're keeping.

MG. Yeah, that was quite a facility. It was beautiful back there with all those buildings. This was back when it was still operating as a sanitarium. I'm not sure if it was a sanitarium or a sanatorium.

RA. There's been a lot of discussion about that. I finally looked it up in the dictionary one day and they're interchangeable. At the least the dictionary I had said they were. Because some people said, "No, it's not sanitarium, it's sanatorium."

MG. There was an entrance right at the corner of Seven Mile and Beck Road. There was another entrance closer to Ridge.

RA. There's a group called The Friends of Maybury Park that just put together a walking trail at Maybury and have placards where all the various buildings used to be. You can take a self-guided tour. You go into the Park off of Eight Mile and go to the easterly parking lot, and there's a kiosk there with a map on it that shows everything with a scaled down version of the big Maybury sign that used to be at Beck Road. You go back and there are signs telling you of the facilities and pictures.

MG. Oh, that'd be interesting. Toward the end, they closed the east gate, which was at Beck Road and just used the one off of Ridge instead of maintaining both of them. That was when they were shutting it down. It was not occupied that much at that time. I'm not sure when they did close it, but it was probably in the '60s-'70s.

RA. In the '60s somewhere. It was gone when we came here. Was DeHoCo in operation when you were here?

MG. Yes, DeHoCo is interesting. It was along Five Mile between Beck Road and Ridge Road. On the south side of the road was the men's division and the north side was the women's division. Never the twain shall meet, so to speak. They did a lot of farming there. Those guys, we would see them go by everyday in the summer, and they had a lot of their crops grown on the Maybury property. They would ride a wagon pulled by a tractor up to the Maybury property and do their farming stuff and then ride back at night.

RA. When I was a kid going out Eight Mile, I saw them work the farms just west of Beck.

MG. Yeah. But DeHoCo, we always called it DeHoCo. We never called it the House of Correction. Everybody knew it was there, but it was no big concern of anybody. We were told, and I don't know whether this is true or not, that these guys were just in there short term and they weren't really dangerous and witness the fact that they were riding by the house in these wagons. So it was quite a well-run facility.

RA. In those days they believed in hard labor.

MG. Oh yeah. That's the way it should be. These guys now sit there watching television sets. Put them out with a hoe and shovel and put them to work. Oh yeah, we'd wave at them as they went by and they'd stop to talk with us. I was just a little kid at the time. It was not a big deal at all. They all had their distinctive blue pants with the red strips on them and the shirts were well identified. Occasionally one would walk away, but we never had a concern because these people were from Detroit. If they escaped, where are they going to go? Right back to Detroit. They weren't going to come out where we lived and bother us. The state hospital (Northville Psychiatric Hospital) was a different story. When they got out, you didn't know what to expect.

RA. That mostly affected those who lived on Seven Mile.

MG. I didn't live that close to the state hospital, but that was more of a threat to people than DeHoCo. It was quite a thing, that hospital. It still is, as you know, it's a big topic of conversation to that Township. I've been back in there but not to any extent. I was back in there when it was running, but not since it was closed. Yeah, DeHoCo was interesting, and of course the Wayne County Training School was a big, big facility back then and in full operation too. It was younger children.

RA. There was a Phoenix Correctional facility on the Township side of Five Mile. How did that tie in with the Women's prison?

MG. That was, to my knowledge...I never heard of Phoenix Correctional facility. I heard it the other night for the first time.

RA. That was the part they tore down to become part of the Community Park that was located just immediately west of Scott (prison).

MG. Again, back in my tenure, I don't remember that name ever. I do know the Women's Division—they called it the Women's Division, Men's Division—was on the north side.

RA. It might have been renamed. The buildings were pretty ratty. The State finally tore them down.

MG. I know that the residence of the warden of the whole facility was on that side too. In fact I knew him and his son; I went to school with his son. His name was Goss. He ran the whole House of Correction back in the '40s, '50s. So I know for a fact he was on the north side of Five Mile. The Women's' Division, which was much smaller than the Men's, was on the north side. We never saw the women out and about on the farm wagons. They all worked in the facility. Phoenix, I never heard that term until the other night.

RA. I think it switched names along the way somewhere.

MG. So that was a lot of what was going on in the west side of the Township—the extreme west.

RA. You're right on the margin.

MG. Both the county and the Township.

RA. I did quite a bit of research on the Thayer Family.

MG. Rufus Thayer? We knew about him primarily from his gravestone out there. There's a lot of Thayers in that cemetery.

RA. My wife and I indexed that cemetery, and, actually, the oldest grave in there is not a Thayer.

MG. Is that maintained now?

RA. There's an association that maintains it, and they have an endowment that supports it. They're having a struggle at the moment because the people in the association are getting up in years, and they can't find anyone who wants to take it over.

MG. I see. What will happen to that eventually if it's not maintained?

Tape turned off.

Tape back on.

RA. The cemetery does a good job, and they keep it up well. A family used to live off Seven Mile who ran the cemetery, but they've left town. Our kids went to school together.

MG. Do you live in the Township? Whereabouts?

RA. South of Main Street between Beck and Clement.

MG. I knew a lot of people. You mentioned Laphams earlier. They lived on Main further in toward town. Are they still around? Jim and Chuck.

RA. Chuck is in Blue Heron and Jim lives in the city just south of Eight Mile.

MG. I went to school with them. They ran the clothing store for years. Charlie Freydl, I don't know if he's still around.

RA. He died a long time ago. I used to buy all my clothes there, Freydls.

MG. I knew a lot about what was going on in town, but that's being covered by a different group.

RA. We're trying to cover both. The City had an oral history program about fifteen years ago that kind of fizzled out. We're picking it up. Basically, the emphasis is on the Township but it's not exclusive.

MG. I see. There's a business that always intrigued me on the corner of Rogers and Seven Mile.

RA. The gas station?

MG. Right across from there was Northville Laboratories.

RA. They changed ownership several times.

MG. Back then their claim to fame was that they made all the vanilla for the Sanders' stores back in those years.

RA. Before they had good emission control, you could go by there and smell it. I haven't smelled it in years now.

MG. Bill Asher owned that gas station for years. I think he's still running it.

RA. His kids do. He's there. He's retired, but I think he's in there five days a week.

MG. Is he really? We were very good friends—competitors, but friends. He started out on Main Street where the service garage is—across from Atchison's flower shop (Sparr's).

RA. He spends a good deal of time there.

MG. Oh yeah. He's been at this location for many years.

RA. Anything else, John?

JC. No.

RA. Anything you'd like to add?

MG. Not unless you have any questions. As you know I was on the extreme western side of the Township. Anything happening on the other side of town, I wasn't that close to it. As you indicated, the Franklin school. I was aware of them, but didn't know much about them. The Baseline School on Eight Mile was a one-room school that we talked about.

RA. That might have been what's called the Wash-Oak School. 'Cause Wash-Oak is in Mill Race.

MG. I've heard that name, but I don't know anything.

RA. It was a combination of Washtenaw and Oakland counties, so it was right in that vicinity, but I don't know where.

JC. Eight Mile and Currie?

RA. Could be.

MG. Yeah, you're right. There was a school out there.

RA. It's called Wash Oak. Okay, thank you.

MG. Okay, I hope it's some use to you.

RA. Oh, it will be.

Continued after all...

MG. Do you know about when they drilled for oil and found gas? Did you ever hear of it?

RA. Yeah, basically they drilled for oil and the caverns were for gas storage. Everyone living along Ridge or Napier got free heating gas.

MG. That's true. They came into town about probably in the early 50's. The fellow's name was Taggart, out of Big Rapids, Michigan, and he was buying up everybody's oil leases on the western side of the Township, both Salem and Northville. He was, basically, a wildcatter, and he went into Salem Township and drilled what turned out to be the best oil well in the state of Michigan at the corner of Napier Road and Seven Mile. Then he expanded into Northville Township and drilled a few wells, but it never produced that much oil. There was a little bit of gas there, but not a lot. As you indicated, they wound up with a gas storage field. The compressor may still be on Napier Road between Seven and Eight.

RA. It still is. Consumers' has a big station.

MG. Back then it was called Michigan Gas Storage Company, and they sold out to Consumers. They used to, maybe they still do, they'd bring gas up from Texas all summer and store it in these empty wells.

RA. I think they've abandoned these fields now. I kind of recall they are abandoned. There is a compressor station that is alive and well.

MG. There's a lot of wells still in that section behind where my dad's place was, between Napier and Ridge and Six and Seven. Now they may be all shut down now, but it was a going concern in the '60s.

RA. The biggest thing they had when they routed their gas lines, they did not bury them well when they went south of Seven Mile, because they built what's called Steeplechase in there. They had all kinds of problems with these high-pressure gas lines sticking out of the ground.

MG. It's interesting when I built my home in Northville on Napier Road. I lived there for seven years. When I was trying to get a mortgage, it was quite a problem because the banks had never run into this problem where someone else owned the mineral rights for that property. So they were scratching their heads for a few weeks until they finally sorted it out. They gave me a mortgage but it was a big thing back then. Everybody thought they were going to get rich. There was only one guy that ever did, Roy LeMaster, but he was in Salem Township. He did real well, but that was many years ago.

RA. There's a couple wells on the state hospital property. You've probably seen in the paper that they want to drill a couple wells behind Costco in Livonia.

MG. Yeah, they're still dabbling around with it now, but most of it came out gas. They went into the Niagara formation and then deeper into the Trenton formation, and that's where they found the oil. But they drew it out too fast, I think, and it dried up after four or five years. My dad had free gas to heat the house, but I don't think they have it any more.

RA. No, they've taken that away. When we first moved here, if you went up and down that road you'd see a sign on the "for sale" sign—Free Gas.

MG. We used to get royalties in addition to the free gas. They would communize a gas well on 160 acres and oil on forty acres. So anybody who owned property within those parameters would share royalties and the free gas.

RA. Free gas is worth a lot of money today.

MG. It wasn't dried though; you had to dry it yourself. There's a lot of moisture in gas when it comes out of the ground, and it causes a lot of problems—pipes freezing up and everything.

RA. Okay, thank you.

Approved by Mike Green on: February 20, 2007

Transcribed by Patricia Allen on February 18, 2007.