

Oral History
George & Celeste VanHellemont

Interviewer: Jen McFall

I - I should say today is Dec 27, 2005. We're interviewing George & Celeste VanHellemont. OK.... Farm Crest! (looking at original newspaper).

G - This is when it burned down, right here.

I - And that's the original Northville Record? (G - Yes, that's original). And, wait, let's see the date... (G - And I'll show you pictures...).

C - Wait a minute, George...

I - Let me see the date, real quick.

C - The date is November the ...

I - Fourth, it says the fourth.

C - Fourth? Ah...

G - You see, it happened on a Tuesday. This is a Thursday. So it's actually November 2.

J - OK, OK, 'cause, yeah, it's still a Thursday paper.

G - of '65.

I - Oh my gosh. "Firemen battle to save dairy as flames engulf farm" - wait, where are the flames?

C - In the inside (laughs).

I - Oh. The entire barn section was gutted, but dairy and retail store saved. So this was the retail store...

G - That was the dairy.

I - And one of ten - this was the dairy?

C - That little bitty one in the corner.

I - And where's the retail store?

G - Right here. Right there's the retail - we just had a little one, just came in, on the end ...where people could get it - and they had drawers where they could just grab their milk...

I - Kind of like Guernsey's is now, a little bit.

C - Well, yeah, small little doors, you reach in...

G - All of our equipment here went to Guernsey farm when they built that new. I helped them set up the equipment and stuff.

I - Oh, OK,OK...I'm going to put this right over here so we can talk and I don't have to...I can't get both of you in here.

I - 65 years you've been married, that's amazing.

C - You ask him all the questions you want.

I - Oh, I have lots of questions for both of you.

G - You want to see pictures of the fire - there it is (open paper). This is me there and there's the owner.

I - This was you?

G - That's the owner right there.

I - Oh, and this is... Robert Haass. Is that how he spelled his name - H-A-A-S-S?

G - Yep, that's the way it was spelled. His father used to own Goebel Brewing.

I - "Hundreds came to see the giant blaze"?!

C – Oh, it was a big fire.

I – But I can see, wait a minute – so this is paved, the road was paved in '65, right?

G - Yeah, it was paved.

I – And they think that someone set this?

C – Oh yeah.

G – Well...

I – It can't be proved.

C – Well...

G - The guy was kind of a little bit nutty. When he came in there.... They got it on the telephone – the office, it was in the dairy plant, there was an office in there. And the woman got out of there because it was on fire – the building. This guy and made a call to his wife. And he disguised himself; he said :I think your husband went to help get the cattle out, and I think he got burned up in it". That was him – he was disguising. He even threw his pocketbook up on the ground so someone could see it. So state police took him up to Lansing, gave him a lie detector test, but they said it wouldn't work on him because he was a little nutty.

I – Oh, I see – he didn't burn it down because he was made at this – maybe he wanted to run away from his wife?

G – Nho, he was mad... He came down there for a job, they needed another hand for the cattle. And the herdsman - somebody told the herdsman, don't hire him, he's a little bit nutty.

C – (laughs)

G - He said, don't hire him. So, he kept, he went twice. And they said, no, they said, we don't need anybody. Well, he said, you had an ad in the paper. Yeah, he said, but we changed our mind, we don't need anybody. Finally came the third time; he seen somebody was there - a new man was there. So he was mad. And he took off, and that's when the fire started. This end of this big barn was all open, for air going through it. And all they had to do was go by and throw a match in it.

I – So that's where he started it, here. And how did it get on fire here?

G - Well, it went all the way across. They couldn't stop it. Them days they didn't have the equipment they got today.

I – (reading) It says "...and by dusk firemen were confident"... Oh my gosh, how long did this thing burn for?

G - How long did it burn?

C – 'Til the next day sometime...

G - Oh, gosh, I'd say... two hours , two-and-a-half hours. That they were...the next morning.

C All wood. All wood. That takes a long time.

G - That was loaded with hay and straw.... (C – Yeah, it was all full) All the top part.

I – “At five pm it was apparent that the barn was completely lost. Firefighters poured water on the smoldering hay from the top of a Detroit Edison ladder truck”... Is this the back, or the front? (C – That's the front) It says Farm Crest Dairy. Is it right here?

G – Yeah... That's the dairy plant you see here.

I – Oh. So this - the whole thing burned off?

G – The whole thing burned down, but they did stop it....

C - At the dairy plant.

G – I don't have a good picture to show you. But they did stop it at the dairy

I – Well, they must have stopped it right here.

G – Yeah, they stopped it right - I think they saved a little of that. They stood in here and shot the fire... water the other way, and they had that little bit left here. And underneath that was the dairy plant. And they did save the dairy plant.

I - What was everyone looking at? They're just standing around watching it?

C - That's typical, don't you...that's typical.

I - That people were just standing around watching it? (laughs)

C – That's right. That's typical.

I - That's strange.

G – So when they had done, all we got left was the silos. They didn't burn because they were concrete and tile.

I – So everything else burned?

G – It was all down here on Six Mile Road.

I - That's sad.

G – And the funny thing about this, when the state police released this guy. That night, he had a barn in back of his house with nothing in it – no electricity, or nothing. ...that burnt down.

C – (laughs)

G – But they couldn't do nothing, the guy...because he wasn't right.

C – He had six, seven kids, you know.

G - They couldn't prove that he burned it down. But it was in his backyard, where he lived.

I – That's too bad. So (looking at the original Northville Record) what were you thinking, here in this picture – you're saying, you're pointing?

G – Oh, we were looking at something, pointing, about something.

I - What were you thinking, when this happened? Oh, you thought, it's a small fire, we'll get it under control? Or you knew, right away it was all going to be burned down?

G – I knew they'd never get it under control.

C - You'd never get a barn fire down.

G – That was solid hay. And, all... everything in for the winter; you know, everything was in by November second. (I – Wow. OK.) And I lived half a mile further down on the farm.

I – Half a mile east?

G – Yes.

C – East, right.

I – OK. I brought a map. I wanted you guys to show me exactly where everything is.

G – Well, what's there now? Do you know where the old township hall was, is – the old one, not the new one? (*editor's note: where Meads Mill Middle School is now*). Well, that was our land right there. When they finally sold this for subdivision, why, Thompson Brown bought it and they donated so many acres for a Twp Hall.

I - Margaret (*Tegge, first Township Deputy Clerk*) told me a little bit about how... well, she told me how she remembered how the house got hit by lightning. And then the house went up in flames. And she said she remembered they carried a piano out and put it on the lawn, because the house was burning down and they couldn't get it under control. She said that's what she remembered.

G - Oh, that was the house that was the end of the barn, right up in here. Lightning hit it. (I – Yeah, yeah, she told me that lightning hit it). A guy seen lightning hit it. And he called me, and I run up, and we got hoses and everything. But when we opened up, to go upstairs, it was just an inferno up there. You couldn't, you couldn't go up there, you couldn't... Those days you didn't have the departments, the fire departments like they have now.

I - Did you carry the piano out? Do you remember carrying the piano out?

C – No, no.

G – I didn't, but some of the other guys did.

C – They did get the fire out... They got the fire out of that house.

I - But they never rebuilt it, right?

G - No, because the house was an old house, but a beautiful house. And they got everything down to the first floor, and there was nothing, nothing left. They tore the rest of it down, tore it down.

I – Is this it for the pictures? Are there any more pictures?

G – No, that wouldn't show you the house.

I - “Spectacular fire” – that makes it sound good. But it wasn't.

C - No, fire is never good.

G – So that's what it is.

I – This is great. It's wonderful ..These are my maps. I don't have the greatest maps in the world. This is an 1876 map, but... This is Waterford over here, I think....Five, Six, Six (Mile) is right here. This is Waterford... So you guys were – on this land right here, right?

G – There's the railroad. Our property – we're - this is Six Mile. Our property started from here, and went almost three-fourths of a mile on both sides of the street.

I –Three-fourths of a mile. It started...(G – At the railroad) at the railroad track and went down here.

G – Many times I was planting; I'd see them old trains coming with that the black smoke (laughs).

I – And you didn't go all the way down to... that must be Haggerty.

C – No, we didn't go... Haggerty's the other way.

G – No, we went down to the next farm, which would be Aldea's farm. In fact, where the old Twp Hall was, our line was just a little bit past, east of that.

I – OK, did Sessions originally own some of that land.

G – Who?

I – The Sessions? Because Margaret Tegge said they (the Tegges) bought some of the land from the Sessions.

C – I don't think so.

G – Yeah, but that - Session Hospital was on Seven Mile Road.

I – Yeah, they moved - she said they moved from here.

G – No, there was no hospital there when I was there – '67...

C – No, she don't mean hospital, she says 'people's name'.

G – Well, I don't remember any Sessions.

C – I don't either.

I – OK. Well, you can in '42

G – Yeah.

I – OK. How much did they (Haass's) own? Like how far up did it go? It went all the way up to Seven Mile, or no?

G – No. They, they owned on Six Mile road, from the railroad east, approximately three-fourths of a mile. And they owned both sides, and it went a half a mile. (I – Oh, a half a mile) Each side. And then the state hospital was from here on down back.

C – And they were in back of the farm. ... And that was no pleasure (I - Why was that?)... We won't go into that.

I – Yeah, yeah, it want to go into that. Was it - odd people would show up?

C – Sure, that's it, you know.

G - Yeah, (C – Walking people out there...) Odd people come around the house and stuff. And you wouldn't know what to do with 'em.

C – with baskets and... You know, knives laying in the basket, and stuff.

I – Really?

C – Well, certainly. You know, they just walked away from there.

G – One guy, one day I was going to the dairy, and a guy's there standing. He said, “Sir, have you got a light?” And it's raining, just pouring. He had a cigarette in his mouth, soaking wet. And he wanted me to light it (laughs)... I knew there was something wrong. I called the state hospital, and they come out and picked him up.

I – ‘Are you missing somebody?’

G – Oh, we called them several times.

C – They were always missing somebody.

I - So they never had...

C – Security, no.

I – But they never had – fences or anything, either.

D – No, later, the people who lived around them made them do that. You see, we moved away from there, after that. But, we lived around it, you know.

I – But did you guys live north of Six Mile then, or south of Six Mile.... At the time you were living there... You must have lived south of Six Mile Road – no wait wait wait wait...

C – North of Six Mile. (I – north of Six Mile) You know where that...what's that place's name on there...

G – Winchester Road comes close

C – What's the name of that, factory, no... that little shop there? All them cars are parked there. That's where our house used to be. Right there next to it...Well, we were right west of the bank there now. That's where our house used to be.

G – You know the bank bought that property – there was somebody in there.

I – Wait, wait, wait – off of Haggerty?

C – No, all Six Mile Road.

I – There's a bank on Six Mile Road?

G – You know where Winchester is?

I – Oh, wait wait wait, I know where the bank is... On the south side of the road?

G – No.

C – All on the north side.

I – I'm trying to think where there's a bank.

C – No, it’s... the banks up further. We lived right next to that. There used to be a bank there, and they left there. There’s some kind of an outfit there.

I – Where is that in relation to Ward Presbyterian Church? Where WPC is now?

C – That’s too far. Motorola, you know that...factory, them cars - where all that Motorola sits?

I – No, I’ll have to look, though.

C – Well, look, and that’s where our house used to be right there.

I – So, in ’42 when you moved in, you got that house. And you didn’t have any kids then.

C – One.

G – We had 1 baby about six months old.

C – Oh, he wasn’t a baby. He was ten, twelve years old.

G – No...

C –When we moved here? Gerry was the only one we took, the rest of the boys were gone.

G – Oh, you mean here?

C – Yes.

I – No no no no no no – I’m sorry...

G – She’s talking about the other house (at Farm Crest) ... We just had a little baby...

C – When I moved there, my son was five months old.

G – Yeah.

I – OK, and so... You (Celeste) had grown up on a farm.

(C – Oh Yeah)

And you had grown up on a farm, right? (G – Yeah)

I - So, you... it wasn’t any big deal. You were just moving a couple miles down the road, right? (C – Yes) And to another farm? (C – Yes) OK. Well, what was it like – the daily life like?

C – Oh, don’t even ask! (laughs)

G – Well, I thought it was good.

C - Worked from daylight ‘til dark!

I – Really?

G – Yeah, You worked long hours.

I – Well you worked for the farm (to George) and got paid. Did you work for the farm also? But you kept the family and house...

G – No, but she had everything there on the farm. She raised chickens, turkeys, all that.

I - So they gave you... did they give you a little plot of land that you could...?

G – Oh, I could use want I wanted to. I had a garden, and she raised some turkeys. And we had ducks. I don’t remember whether we had geese or not. (C – No, no geese). We had chickens and turkeys.

C – I did them when I was home.

I – And you had well water, right?

C – N – yes. Yeah.

G – Well, yeah, it was from well water, but it was a great big well – deep, and by the dairy; and it furnished the whole farm. They had...

C – Seven houses.

G - One, two, three, four... four houses - five houses, with the Gunneson house. Five, five houses it furnished. They run lines through there, underground out to these houses. But the main house had a pumphouse not far from the dairy, and the wells were deep.

C - We all drank the wellwater. And still drinking it!

I - You have well water here?

C - Yup (laughs).

G - We got the city water line running across the front.

I - If you want to tap into it.

G - But we were happy with the well water and we still use it.

I - Well, it's worked for you guys, because how old are you?

G - What?

I - How old are you?

G - How old am I?

I - Yeah.

G - Well, I hate to tell you, but I'm 90.

I - You're 90. That's great. And how old are you, should I ask you that?

C -86.

I - That's wonderful.

C - I don't know if it's wonderful...

I - I think it is. I think it's great. So obviously that well water has worked for you.

C - Well, they say, that when the guy pulls the well, periodically, he'll say, a lot of magnesium in this. This is good for you; that's why you're still here. He'll say that. And magnesium is black; it's a dirty black-looking stuff, but whatever it is, in that water, I guess it helps people.

G - Well, you get a lot of minerals in it.

C - Minerals in it, yeah, iron, you know and rust, and all this...

G - Not like the Detroit water; it's all toilets and everything.. and all filtered out, and you drink it...

I - Don't tell me that - I'm drinking it!

G - I know, but that's the way it is.

C - I know that. We drink a little bit, too, sometimes. But, you know water's filtered. A lot of people wouldn't drink well water, but I think it's very good. It's hard water, you know.

I - I'm sure they test it. Obviously it's good, or they wouldn't let you drink it.

I - So you had well water there, and... there was electricity in the 40's... Was there electricity? (G - Yes). And you had, like washing machines, or no?

C - Yes.

I - You had washing machines... so it was all modern? OK. But it was a two-lane dirt road? Right, was it dirt?

C - At that time, no.

G - No, it was paved.

C - This was dirt, out here (Six Mile between Sheldon and Beck).

I - OK, how far...

G - I had been down that road before that, before it was paved, but it was paved when I moved there. (I - Yeah, because you grew up right around here, right?) It used to be dirt; and Six Mile road, if you know - coming east, they took a part of our farmland, or his

farmland, and they made it doge, and it went under the railroad. Well, before, it went straight right over the railroad.

I – It seems like that would be better to go straight right over the railroad.

C – No, it wasn't very good.

G - It wasn't good.

I – Why?

C – Icy.

G – It was icy, and then the railroad was built up. From there to Northville Road it went down like this, so you came down.

I – Actually, we have that same problem on Sheldon Road going down into town.

G – Yeah, you have that...

I – And I never drive that if it's icy, because people slide off the road.

C – Well, you see, we have a problem, now, since the county fixed this road. Our driveway was flat and we drove right out. Now we gotta go up.

G – Now you gotta go uphill. They built that up about two foot, on account of the hill up there. .So now it's not as good as it was. But what are you gonna do?

I – So, you (Celeste) took care of the kids, and then you ended up having five children?

C – Three boys. No girls,

I – Oh, three boys. And what kind of stuff do you remember doing? Like your daily routine? You guys would get up in the early morning....

G – Well, we had ten dairy stores at that time. So I used to go to those dairy stores and maintain stuff on the farm, and make sure everything was all right, and...

I – What, like, did... How did the whole Farm Crest start? Was it already going on when you moved here? I mean, it was already established – it was an established farm?

G – We put a lot of additions to it.

I - When you first moved in here, they didn't have any stores, it was just a dairy; or they had all the stores?

G – All we sold was milk. Milk, cream, and dairy products. That's all, no groceries or nothing.

I – Well, did you sell ice cream?

G – What?

I – Ice cream?

C – No.

G – No, no, we didn't handle ice cream

C – No. You had to have a certain kind of cooler to keep it cold. We didn't have that kind of stuff.

G – We had big coolers in there, but that was just for the milk and stuff. We didn't get into the ice cream end of it.

I – Ok, but when you first moved here in '42, how many people were working there?

G – Oh, there was John, he was running the dairy... and... oh, probably 3. It wasn't very big.

I – You had three people working there?

G – It wasn't big then. They only had about half a dozen jerseys left; or eight, ten jerseys... and all they did was milk them. They didn't have anybody working the fields at that time. Joe Denton - I took Joe Denton's place. I don't know if you know Joe

Denton. (I – I’ve heard of him) He was the police chief in Northville for years. Well, he was - I took his job, down there. He decided to go into the police business.

C – And retired.

G – So I took his job.

I – So then, at the very end, like in ’65 when it burned down, how many people were working there?

C – Seven , I would say.

G – Oh, we had a secretary, there was two in the dairy, that’s three; and...two or three in the barn, is six... probably about seven or eight people year-round. And then when summer come, we used to get the young boys out of the high school, at Northville.

They’d send some out, and we, they helped us put up hay and stuff like that.

I – But it’s amazing to me that only a handful of people could do all that work on that farm. That’s why, maybe, why you had to work so hard.

G – There was only two of us doing the planting and stuff. Myself, and another man...

C – You have to get up early.

G – We had two tractors. When I first come there, they only had a broken-down tractor with three horses. (Celeste laughs) Well, we used horses for a year or two. Then we modernized (laughs); and got into tractors and stuff.

I – But, see - I’m not a farmer. And I’ve never lived on a farm, but it seems like...

C – Well, see, then you don’t understand any of that stuff; and that’s hard, that’s hard.

I – No wonder you worked so hard, though.

C - No, but that’s part of life, you know.

I – Now, did they – like, they had...and most of the people lived on the property, right? Was it five houses? (G – Yes.) So all the different families lived there? And, like, did everyone, like, eat together, like you see in the movies?

C – No, each had their own home.

G – Each had their own home.

C – You went home to your own house.

G –When they put their certain hours, when they put their hours in, they went home, that’s all. They didn’t have to walk far, on the farm. There was a house there on Bradner Road, and Six. And there was my house, and one across; we had three there. And one back, where the pumps were... It’s four houses. The fifth house was the owners’ house.

I – OK; I have some more questions... Someone told me there were polo fields.

C – Yep.

G – That was polo field there when I came. We took it down, because Phil Grennan, that really owned the farm to start with, he was a polo man. And he had, I would say, what , about a thirty acre field, I think. He had a rail around it, all the way around – steel things, and they played polo in that field. Well then when he died and Haass married his daughter, and they came over here, well, we had no use for the polo field, so we plowed it up. Well, it was just grass before, anyway, but we plowed it up and put crops in it.

I – OK. And then... Well, part of the Farm Crest was over here, and the other part of it was over where I live, right? (the Woodlands, northwest corner of Six and Sheldon)

G – This is... the end of my property, here, was the end of Farm Crest. Right here about 75 feet, 80,100 feet. Was the end And then it run (east) to Gibson’s farm.

I –To the edge of Gibson’s farm?

C – Yeah.

G – Yeah, to Gibson’s farm. You know where the big white house is left on that side?
I – Yeah, oh yeah.
G – That was Gibson’s. He had it on both sides of the street, too.
I – So he had a portion west of Sheldon, where his land ended.
G – Yeah, the edge of his land, Farm Crest started.
I – Well, that was probably, then, the edge of where the high school ends, right? So, I’m living –I’m east of the high school, so I’m living on the Gibson property.
G – Are you?
I - I think. Right? And then where the school started was the Grennan/Haass property?
C – I think you’re right.
G – How far - From the end of the high school... property, you lived east of that, didn’t you?)I – I do, right now) well, then you’re on Gibson’s, then.
.I – You know, the Grennan – that ranch is still there. Do you ever drive and see that?
G – Oh, you mean the log cabin? Oh, yeah, I did a lot of work in that thing.
I – Ok, what was the area like out here, then? Was it for raising crops?
G – Yes.
I – So it was all...
C – No houses
I – So,, no houses but no trees?
G – Oh, there were trees. There was a patch of woods about ten acres of woods in there. From years before that they had a big, maple thing... making maple syrup in the woods.
I – Are they still there?
G – No, that’s not there. Subdivision tore that all out.
I – We have some – it’s very small, but we have some wooded areas.
C – Not too much, no. Because when they went in, in back of us, they went in and just started tering it down. All the big trees, just tearing everything down.
G – I can’t remember any wooded area in Farm Crest - I mean on Gibson’s... on the north side of the street.
I – Well, then it must be part of Farm Crest, though, because we have...
G – Well, Farm Crest didn’t have any right at that spot either.
C – They had a lot of woods in the back of it.
I – Woods in the back of it.
G – In the back.
I - In the back of the subdivision, before... where those big mansions are....
G – Gibson might have had some woods in the back end. I don’t remember.
C – Yep, it was woods.
G - But they had mostly all apple trees, they were in the orchard business.
C – That was here.
G - That was an orchard on both sides of the road.
I – On both west and east of Sheldon?
G – West of Sheldon, but north and south of Six Mile Road.
I – Was...
G – Apple orchards. Apple, pears...
I - But did the Gibsons sell some of that land to Wayne County, for the Home for Feeble-Minded Children?

G – No, you're talking about Wayne County Training School. That used to all the way here, on the front.

C – That was a separate deal.

G – Went all the way up, and Gibson's had a hunk of land. This was Sheldon Road. Gibson's came about, like this; and down here. And all the rest of that area, that Sheldon Road - is Wayne County Training school. They had a farm in the back end, there, keep those kids doing stuff. The silo is still there, yet.

I – It is?

G – Yep. Right across here.

C – Two silos are together, I think there is.

G – The silo is still there. They kept the silo. When the subdivision bought that, from Wayne County, they put all these homes in, but they kept the silos. The silo is still there. You can see the white silo in there.

I – Really?

C – (laughs)

I – Will you take a ride with me and show me where it is? I - I never noticed that.

C – How you never noticed that...

I – It's such a big subdivision. I get lost.

G – I get lost, too, in a lot of it. But I know how to get from here to Five Mile Road.

I – That's better than me. Because I can't do it.

C – You gotta think, I gotta go right straight – don't make all these turns, just go right straight, and you come out...

I – Are you sure? They still have the silos there?

G – I remember the barn, they had a nice barn there. And the barn was all torn down. But they left the silo. I don't know why. But it's still there.

C – Aren't there two of them there?

I – Can you see it outside?

G – Not from here, you don't. You have to go down the street.

I – OK, I'm going to try to see it.

C – Well, you gotta go down there. It's a little difficult, but there's no problem with them, there.

G – No, you can see it.

C - When you make that little... thing, by that golf course, they're on this side.

I – That's interesting. So, did any of those kids ever wander up to Farm Crest?

C – No.

G – Yes. Once in a while. They used to break into the old log cabin, back here, that belonged to Haas. (I – And do what?) Well, they just... one time he had a gun, a revolver in there. They stole that and shot holes in the damn refrigerator. And they used to steal the liquor – he had liquor cabinets.

I – I believe that. (laughs) They were probably boys.

G – (laughs) But outside of that, they didn't do too bad.

I – So, when you moved out here, did you feel kind of weird, because you were surrounded by all these different facilities?

C – There was nothing out here.

G – There was nothing out here.

I – Well, Wayne County Training Center was out here.

C – (laughs) If you could live in back of the state hospital, you could live any place. I'd just as soon live by the prison.

G – That state hospital was on the other side of Seven Mile Road.

C – No, we was never... no, that didn't bother us a bit.

I – OK... When were you born; what was the date when you were born?

C – Oh Jesus...(laughs)

G – 7/4/15 – July 4.

I – Well, that's Fourth of July, never forget that. When were you born (Celeste)?

C – Oh... 11/16/19.

I – OK. And how did you guys meet?

G – Well, we - her folks had a farm, on Seven Mile and Newburg.

I – OK, but it's not there, because they built a subdivision there... (G – Yep) Would it be on the southeast corner?

G – It would be the northeast corner. You know where Brose Electric is? (I – Yes). Well, right there, that corner.

I – Is it - on the tape, you said that the house was still there, and your brother was there.

C – The house where I was born is still there. It's a big white house. There's my brother Bill lives there. And he's got antiques of all kinds. And he sells them. He's an antique boy; he bought all kinds of stuff from lanterns to you-name-it, he's got it.

I – How do you get to that house – is it off Six or off Newburg?

C – Off Newburg.

I - I mean Seven or Newburg.

C – Seven & Newburg.

I – You get to it off Newburg.

C - There's Brose Electric ,then there comes a bunch of stuff in there – that they tore my dad's house that I lived in when I was six years old. And then, my brother's house is next to it. And then the white house I was born in is still standing there.

G – The old farm house would go back probably to the 1800's.

C – Yep, that goes back a long ways.

I – But your brother doesn't live in that one?

G – No. He built the one next to it.

C – No, he has a small house. With a bunch of wagons, and stuff all around there.

G – You can't miss it. If you ever want to go over there, someday I'll go with you. I'll show you, you see all the stuff... He's got old hearse, he's got lanterns. He's got stuff – basement full, barns full, you never see so much stuff.

C – People have bought a lot of his stuff...

G - Some of his doctors he went to go to visit his house just to see all the stuff.

C – He sells some of the stuff. He's a little older now, he says, "I've got too much stuff," so he's started selling a little bit now, getting rid of it a little bit...

I – So, who owns the original house where you (were born)?

C – I don't know. My brother and his wife lived there, and they moved to Idaho.. And after that, different ones bought it.

G – It's changed hands a couple of times.

I – So, you lived there. And where did you live?

G – I lived on Seven Mile Road, about, oh, three quarters of a mile east of Newburg, on the south side.

C – There’s a church right there – George, there’s an Orthodox Church where you used to live.

G – Well, that’s on my folk’s property. They named a road after him, Van Road is right there. They named that after my dad.

I – That’s neat. How many acres was your farm?

G – Well, where he was at, they had eighty acres was all.

I – What did he grow on it?

G – Oh, over there? He was in the truck - garden business.

I – Oh, perennials...

G – He had perennials, for flowers; pansies - I remember taking truckloads of pansies, sweet Williams, and English daisies, all to the Eastern Market. Back in them days.

I – Did you guys go to the same school together, then?

C – No.

I – You just knew each other because you were kinda neighbors?

C – Neighbors, that’s it.

G – So did all the kids, all of us was young...we all played together...

C – You walked. You’re sixteen, seventeen years old, you want to see somebody, you walk a half a mile down the road. Your brother usually goes with you to meet the girls; after that, he doesn’t give a darn. You know how that goes? (laughs)

I – Yes, it’s funny. Because we live right by the high school, and a lot of people don’t like to walk... I’ll have to tell you afterwards my good story about that. But - so, you guys were neighbors, and what schools did you go to?

G – I went to Detroit schools. We didn’t move out here until, about... right after Depression, I think in 1931, ‘32. My folks lost everything they had in the Depression; the banks all closed.

I – So you were already out of high school?

G – I was out of Cass Tech.

I – Really? Wow. Where exactly did you live?

G - I lived on Forest and Second Boulevard then.

C – (laughs)

I – What’s that like now?

G – Cass Tech was about a mile, a mile & a half towards town more.

I - Have you been there recently?

G – No, but they tell me they put a new Cass Tech up. (I – I heard that. I did hear that.)

Yeah, they said it’s a beautiful one. The one I had was a beautiful one - it was Seven stories high.

I - I remember seeing the old one; I don’t think I’ve ever seen the new one.

G - We had foundry on the seventh floor. We used to melt iron and everything up there.

I – It doesn’t sound very safe.

G – Yep.

I – Wow. So, you had already graduated, so you must have been in high school?

C – No, I never went to high school. I went as far as the eighth grade and that’s it.

I – Wow. (C – That’s it.) Where did you go to, like, it was a one-room schoolhouse?

C – A one room school. And when you got there, done with that school, you wasn’t good enough to go to high school. They wouldn’t even take you.

I – What school was it?

C - Briggs School, Six Mile Rd and Newberg.
I - Is it Livonia?
G - You had to walk at that time.
I - So you walked a mile.
C - Oh, a little over a mile we hiked it down through there. Snow, mud, rain.
I - You went just to the eighth grade?
C - A lot of people never went any further than the eighth grade. My dad only went to the fourth grade, but he could figure in his head better than anybody could with a pencil. Some can do it, some can't.
I - Isn't that funny, though, that now you're - you said one son is an attorney - they keep going and going and going to school. You probably think they're crazy.
C - No, they're independent, they've got their own... they've all got their own jobs. They don't work for nobody, they work for themselves. That's pretty good.
G - Yeah, in them days, when that Depression come, I had to quit and go to work. I was putting in lawns and stuff for ten hours for a dollar. Ten cents an hour.
C - You ain't lived until you lived then. And I'll tell you something...
G - Any time you didn't want the job, there were four guys waiting to take your place.
C - Things look pretty bad right now.
G - And you didn't have anything. The little bit I'd make, I'd give it to my folks to live on.
I - Because you had a huge family, right?
C - No... there was five of them...
G - Well, I had four sisters
I - Your family was bigger (to Celeste)
C - That's right...
G - She had the big family
C - Everybody could... you know, and my brothers, they could fix stuff. They never needed a mechanic. They never needed - they could build little things, fix things. You do it because you have to do it, and you learn more about anything else by doing it yourself.
I - How many kids in the family?
C - What?
I - How many children in the family?
C - There was nine of us
I - Wow.
C - That's quite a group. That's quite a group.
I - So then you guys met? And then, when you first met, did you know you were gonna get married?
G - No... no.
C - Are you kidding? We're all a bunch of kids, fifteen, sixteen years old...
I - Did you like him, though?
G - (laughs)
D - No, not exactly...
G - Not at the time (laughs)
C - We just went - because he had sisters, and the other guy had sisters. And, that's how you...you just walked to the house, and maybe you played cards. Or one had a piano, or

something like that. Or you just went there, and sometimes you'd go to the show, once in a while, but that was a rarity.

I – Where would you go to the show?

C – To Redford. Or to Northville; they had a theatre in Northville. You didn't get very far, lady!

G – We went to Irving Theatre, in Brightmoor.

C – The boys went there.

G – Because we used to live right there by Five Mile Road.

I – In Detroit?

G – No, Five Mile Road, just east of Farmington. It's called Hubbard Road now. The house is still there. A stucco house. When they come from Detroit. And they (George's parents) got that ... up there.

I – The house that used to show the movies?

C – No no...

G – No, the kids in that neighborhood would get together. And each week some kid would drive. And we had a quarter to spend: fifteen cents for the theatre, and ten cents for a great big hamburger. And that was our weekend.

C – Now, that was just the boys. Not the girls.

G – No, just the boys.

C – Just the boys went there. My brother, him, and whoever.

I – Did you go on that Interurban, or what would you do? No, you said somebody would drive.

G – No, we drove. One time we'd take my parents' car, another time another guy would take the car.

I – Well, so it sounds like they were doing OK, because, I mean.... Even though they had nine (kids)... (to Celeste) Did your parents have a car?

C – Oh, yeah.

I – Wow. OK. Wasn't the interurban around here?

C – Yeah, but that was on Eight Mile.

G – There was one on Eight.

C – You take Newburg Road to Eight Mile. That was in interurban streetcar. It went right to Northville, into Plymouth.

I – And if you wanted to go somewhere else, you'd have to.

C – Well... Let's face it, you didn't go very far... There was no place to go.

G – That quit, too, in about the 30's, sometime.

I – Oh, it did? Let me check on my tape... (C – Are you taping all this stuff?) Yes.

C – George, you're sorry (laughs)

I – No, I'll delete anything you don't like. I will. I'll delete it if you don't want it...So, is it - how do you feel about, you grew up, and you're living, and your whole life's been within a few miles?

G – A mile.

I – And it's changed so much?

C – Yes, but you just grow up; you don't pay attention to that stuff.

I – Did you never want to travel?

C – Oh, we traveled. Not a lot, but we do. I don't live in a car, like other people, but we do. When we had the farm, we had a week off, the end of August. We'd go up north and rent a place on Houghton Lake. We come back home, were all back in the harness.

I – You have a place up on Houghton?

C – No, we used to rent a place. When my youngest son was two, that's the first time we went. And he is now fifty. Nobody - most of the farm people don't travel. They stay home. And where do you go in the wintertime? No place.

G – No, you just worked all winter, that's all.

C – Yup.

G - You didn't do much chasing, back in them days.

I - And you guys were married 65 years ago?

G - 65 years in August, last August?

I – You were married in, what, '40?

G – Yep, '40

I - August what?

G - August 31

I – August 31, 1940. So when did you decide you were going to get married?

C – Oh, I don't know. Don't even ask us that. I don't remember!

G – Yeah, I don't remember.

I – Do you have a picture from back then?

C – I don't know...

I - I've only been married eight years.

G – How long?

I – Eight years. (C – That's a good start.) Eight years and three kids.

I – It is a good start. What did Six Mile look like when you moved out here?

G – This was all dirt from Sheldon Road west. They just paved this about three, three to four years ago.

I – I heard that.

C – On account of the high school being put there..

G – When the high school come in here

I – The last BOT's meeting I was at, they were talking about - they're going to be widening Six Mile to five lanes. I don't know how far out they're coming. I don't know if they can come past the railroad. Because the railroad... (G – No, they can't go past the railroad.)

I think five lanes, and then down back to two.

C – They talk about a lot of things, but they don't have the money.

G – They just talk. Like they're going to put an overpass in, on Sheldon Road...

C – You know, they don't need it. Six Mile Road's good, but the only time it's busy is 7:30 in the morning for maybe an hour, and at 2:30 in the afternoon when the kids are outside

I – What was it like, there was Farm Crest Farm, and the other side of Six Mile it was fields...

G – No, the other side of Six Mile was farms

I - It was the polo fields, the it was the farm, Farm Crest. Then what else was there? The one-room schoolhouse was there.

C – That was in Waterford, though.

I – A little further west – like, I’m mentally driving down the road. Like, when you first moved out here... in 1942 what was at Six Mile and Haggerty – nothing? Or was there houses?

G – No, there was nothing.

G – Finally, that was later, there was a gas station there. But there was nothing – that was farmland, too. Ace Crum, yeah, he bordered our land. There were more farms than open land. But there was no houses. Only one house, it’s that white one down there.

I – Where?

G – At Six Mile Road. It’s still there. And AceCrum’s farm house was there. And they tore that down because he died. They sold that – but they kept that little white house? It’s just a little thing. That’s still there today.

C – That’s right by that church there.

I – I never noticed that

G – Ace Crum’s father, John Crum. His daughter wanted a little piece of land to build a house on. He gave him a little piece of land, there. Now there’s a church owns that little house. You go by it; you’ve got to see it.

I – I know. But sometimes I just go by it, but I must not be looking at the right things.

C – Maybe.

I – Pasteurization plant.

G – Yeah, oh yeah, sure.

I – how much, like - did they make milk, and did they supply that milk to Wayne County Training Center...

G – They had nine or ten dairy stores.

I – So they did, like, take milk and deliver it to people?

I – So the bakery came first. And Farm Crest...

G – They had their own stores. They didn’t own them, but they leased them.

G – The bakery used to take the milk, at one time. But the bakery, after about three or four years, they couldn’t keep the milk. I those days, they didn’t have tankers that were all refrigerated and stuff. They could buy powdered milk at the bakery. So then we had all this milk. So they opened the dairy farms.

I – Can you walk me through, what was, like, the layout of the--

I – Is this, right here, Six Mile?

G – Yeah, Six Mile? There was a circle drive, right here, they don’t snow it.

I – So mentally walk me in it. You go in.

G – This was the dairy plant. Underneath it here.

I – And when you say “dairy plant”...you mean things to make a lot of milk.

G – They had pasteurizers...where you didn’t have those \$200 vats. It just

I – And it ran on, coal, you said?

G – What?

I – How did they - did it run on electricity?

G – Yes.

I –

G – When I first come down there, this wasn’t there. Me and Schlessy’s brother, we built that. Because he wanted more cows. He had a horse barn here.

I – You didn’t need. Because you had...

G – No, Grennan did. He loved horses.

G – So we built this, so we had dairy cattle
I – What was in here?
So this was the main part? Was there any more – other than the main houses?
G – Bigger than them, a lot bigger.
I – Were you sad, after it all burned down?
G – Well, everybody was (laughs). We had to take all the cattle – we found a big barn on Ten Mile and Novi Road rented a barn and Novi Road, they went out of business. We rented that, until we got organized. So the barn was still there.
I – You figured they wouldn't rebuild, right?
G – What?
I – You figured they wouldn't rebuild, right?
G – I think the law was, at that time, if it was 60% damaged, you couldn't rebuild.
I – That's not fair.
C – Nothing's fair in life.
G – They didn't want – they were already complaining. We spread manure... the township was down on it, they didn't want to farms. Although they were her firsts.
C – They keep picking on you and picking on you. You know, that's what it is today. The big crowds the little one out.
G – They're gonna have trouble – people keep building out here and building out here.
I – And then where did he go?
C – He lived right back here in that ranch house (former Grennan farm, log cabin in Hills of Crestwood)
I – The lady that lives there now – Ruth Hahne?
I – Do you know Jean Bemish?
I – Because I was interested in seeing if she knew anything about the history of that house.
G – Well, first it was a cabin, and then the owner - when things burned down here. He had a big section built. He had a big addition built to it. Have you ever been down there?
I – I've look at it.
G – You can see down there.
G – So they lived there for a while?
I – And that picture right there (pointing to Township History book) is the driveway to that? So, where did it come out on Six Mile?
G – Right here – before that first street on Six Mile Road
C – Right into the house. You walk up that sidewalk, you walk up into the house. I walked down there many a time. Me and my little dog.
G – You see, we had fences on both sides. He used to keep that all mowed, all nice and neat, all the way back.
I – He loved to ride his horses. Because Margaret (Tegge) said her son used to ride back there.
C – I knew her son.
G – New barn, new horse barn.
I - And then when Haass took it over, it was almost like work-related stuff
G – Well, no, they still had; well, this field next to here

I – It is really hilly. So it was like that?
 G – We just to drive... and later we used to drive them down.
 G – Nice big crick, went right through there.
 C – Oh yes, it's still there.
 I – That would be nice to live by there.
 I So where we're sitting, right now – your house is...
 G – No this side of it. As you go that way, you'll hit... it's before you go to the road, that way, I'd say two hundred feet.
 I – So after it burned down, he moved - Haass moved into that log cabin.
 G – He used to have it before
 I – But they actually moved there.
 I – Wait a minute
 G – They used to ride them up there.
 I – So it was his second home.
 I – So how long did he stay here before
 C – He kept it a long time, a long long time.
 I – Well, all those subdivisions have gone in within the last ten years.
 G – Farm Crest went
 I – Well, where did he move?
 G – Then in the winter, he'd go to Florida
 I – Did this make a lot of money, Farm Crest?
 G – No.
 I – Where did he get all his money?
 G – And his wife owned Farm Crest bakeries.
 I – Because he never even considered rebuilding anywhere else, right?
 I – Well, he gave you this land, right? Well, he must have liked you, to do that, because he didn't have to do that?
 G – Well, he did... because
 I tell ya what I'll do. If you stay, I'll give you a piece of land. 35, 36 years ago.
 I – Ok, so this...
 G – He said I'll give you in the wintertime. I had a friend, he roughed the house in. That's all he did. I got a bricklayer, on Six Mile road, to brick it.
 C – There's the house Haass lived in (pointing to page of Township History Book). The barn is here.
 C - You don't have to get us in there. We don't need that... wreck the camera
 G - You don't want to wreck the camera
 I – Shush!
 I - When you said six hundred was the total acres, that included the Polo fields?
 G - Yes – up here and down there
 I - What do you think was so important about Farm Crest
 G - I suppose the most important thing was they had a Guernsey. And we processed the milk and sold the milk that's what it all
 C - A lot of good memories, that's all that's left
 When you moved out here, it was mostly farms. But was it all dairy farms
 C – Whatever they cropped they fed to the animals

G - There was a farm here before the Training School, but that burned down before we moved here

(talking amongst the group, off-topic)

C – Maybe it was a cold strike. Years ago, when I was a kid, a cold strike wouldn't

G – Cold strike will knock a few boards off, or something. Hot strike

I – So whatever happened to the retail stores in the bakery?

G – We were separated from the bakery years ago. He decided to sell the property. And then when Guernsey farms moved out of Northville, to Novi, We spent all night setting equipment up.