

INDIANA UNIVERSITY  
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER

JOHN WILSON ROBERTS

Interviewed by Chrystyna Huk  
4 August 1989  
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## INTRODUCTION

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DEED OF GIFT AGREEMENT

I, Wilson Roberts, hereby give  
Interviewee (please PRINT)  
my oral history interview with Chrystyna Huk,  
Interviewer (please PRINT)  
which was conducted on August 4, 1989, to Indiana University.  
Date.

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OK - C 5/22/91

In full accord with the provisions of the Deed of Gift, I hereunto set my hand.

<u>Wilson Roberts</u>	<u>August 4, 1989</u>
Donor	Date
<u>Chrystyna Huk</u>	<u>August 4, 1989</u>
Interviewer	Date

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ROBERTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Life and Family History . . . . .	1 & 40
Variety Store Business . . . . .	2, 25 & 45
Changes in Paoli . . . . .	16
Depression . . . . .	21
World War II . . . . .	23
Vietnam . . . . .	30
Politics in '60s and '70s . . . . .	31
Small Town Life . . . . .	43

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ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH CENTER

INTERVIEWEE: John Wilson Roberts

INTERVIEWER: Chrystyna Huk

SUBJECT: Paoli history, retail business, democrat politics and Town Board.

DATE: August 4, 1989

TRANSCRIBER: Elizabeth Racette

H: Today is August 4th, 1989. This is Chrystyna Huk, I'm interviewing Wilson Roberts in his home in Paoli Indiana. We will be talking about his life in Paoli for the Paoli project. Mr. Roberts can you please tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about you parents and your family?

R: I was born in St. Louis, Missouri, in 1905 and had one sister 2 and 1/2 years older than I am. When I was 10 and my sister was 12 1/2 my mother and father separated. My mother, my sister and I moved to Corydon, Indiana, where she had a brother, president of a local bank. For several years we lived with a limited budget and we were as a matter of fact what you might call poor and didn't know it. As a boy I never owned any bicycles or a bee-bee gun or any of those sorts of things 'cause they were just out of our reach. In a few years, in those days when you got out of high school, you graduate and teach school that same year. So the year she graduated from high school she went to summer school at Indiana University and then that fall she got a job teaching and for several years before..., we were able to live a little better, own our own home 'till she got married. And then I went to grade and high school at Corydon and lived there 'till 1936 when I moved to Paoli Indiana and opened the store here which I named the Paoli ? Store. That store is still in operation but we sold it to my wife Helen's daughter July 1st, 1988, we sold the store to her. And she runs it, I'm kind of proud of the fact that very few businesses start up, most of them don't last less than 5 years, so one that lasts 52 years is kind of remarkable. It's, all these years we run the store, 50 years, I was helped by my first wife, Fay, deceased. When did that happen, any idea?

?: I don't know.

R: We were married 27 years.

?: 26 years.

R: 26 years and 7 is 33.

H: So that should be...?

R: Be about '56. That's about right, near enough. Opened the store in August 1936 and I was helped by my first wife, Fay, until her death in 1956. I was single 7 years and my main job then was to make unmarried women happy. [laughter] I worked hard at it.

H: Were there a lot of them in Paoli?

R: My God, yes. A friend of mine made a list up around, over 80 women in Paoli that she thought that I might be interested in that were available.

H: At that time?

R: At that time. I got it down to three, I tried to be very fair and shared two nights a week with each of them and then one night for rest. Well the thing about it is during those 7 years I tried to be fair and I told all my girlfriends I would have a good time but I didn't want to get married, the problem of being married. And then in order to get a little rest I got married, so how in the hell I got married in 1965, we got married in 1965 to Helen and we had a little minor problem I had two children, mine were grown and gone by that time, but she had two minor children but that worked out all right. But then Helen ever since our marriage Helen has helped in the store and carried her share of the load to a certain degree the success of the.... Well back up a bit, we were really located on the corner of..., in Paoli here on the corner of, in the old liberty building.

H: I'm sorry in the old liberty building?

R: Liberty building. and we were there for about 32 years.

H: And where was that?

R: It's round the corner as you turn north to go to Bedford. On the 37 turning north.

H: On the right or left side?

R: Right side as you turn there right side. We were there 32 years. At that time the local JC store moved their store from the near the square and to a new building north of town and we were able to, I was able then to buy the spot from them. That was one of the best moves I ever made in my life, before that we had a smaller store and we made a living but not too good living. We started actually making money when we moved our store down to the new building which had its own parking lot and business doubled

and just kept getting better over the years. So for an independent store we had a very good operation, we had good buying set ups and in running any business your main thing is satisfying your customers. Any business that starts up if you satisfy the customers you have and they'll tell your friends, you'll grow. Most of, the reason why most business fail near every time you can find the fault is poor maintenance. of course in those days you got your smaller store you could operate with less money. I actually started my store with a \$5,000 loan from a cousin of mine.

H: \$5,000?

R: \$5,000 from a cousin started the store in 1936. Now today that has changed, for starting a store like I started today if you don't have \$100,000 minimum the wholesaler doesn't want to talk to you. In any business the important thing is maintain a good credit, if your credit ever gets bad you're fighting an up-hill battle. But we were, over the years, we established both a good credit with our wholesalers and a local bank so that we were able to have enough capital to operate on and we all like to think of ourselves as good buyers but actually the success of practically any store is your buying. You must buy right, my theory over the years always been to make a reasonable profit, but a fair profit. We had a name over the years, we built a reputation of having a good variety of merchandise in a variety of fields and a reasonable price. So we had our walk in business was our base of the business. Sales, as we all know, are only a gimmick to draw people in hoping they'll buy more stuff but I feel like a store can have too many sales. For the first place, the word sale has lots its meaning. There was a time when the word sale meant something but you read so many times there's a sale which is really not a sale. You pay as much for it as you do every day. Of course, the retail store business is changed drastically over the last few years with your coming of your larger size stores coming into your smaller towns like here in our town we had the 3-D Indiana chain open a store here 10 years ago. By the time they opened the doors we were worried quite a bit what effect that would have on us, actually I would say that looking back over the years 3-D were here 10 years, they've probably helped us as much as they've hurt us. We were able to operate a small independent store, had a lot of advantages over a larger store: you know your customers, can give them better service, you can beat them if you work at it. That's getting harder and harder today with your larger chains like Wallmark, they're been..., it's rough. As a matter of fact in the independent variety store of the type I operated over 50 years is almost a dying bread. There's a few left but they're just dropping as their owners get older and retire, they keep very few

of them keep going. There's probably less than 1/2 there was 20 years ago.

H: Could you tell me how you got into the retail business and what you did before you came to Paoli?

R: As I mentioned we moved to Cardon from St. Louis when I was 10 years old, when I was about 12 years old a gentleman that owned a hardware store was nice enough to give me a job, a minor job of sweeping and cleaning up and putting away stock and stuff. Hardware store, training in that store, I worked there until I was out of high school. At that time my employee had a brother and they wanted to start a variety store in Cardon so we started a variety store there in Cardon that I worked for several years. And then in 1936 I was able to borrow \$5,000 from my cousin and open my own store here in Paoli. My reasons I came to Paoli at that time my mother was still living and I wanted to be reasonably close to her and in fact I really planned to open a store in Mitchell.

H: I'm sorry, where?

R: Mitchell.

H: Oh, Mitchell, on the way back to Bloomington.

R: Yes. As a matter of fact I had gone so far as to rent a building in Mitchell to open it. I spoke to someone about rent and we were working on a deal and then I found out they were opening a ? store and at that time Mitchell wasn't too good. One of the main employees in Mitchell was the Levis ? Company and they were not doing too good at that time so I had my choice of locations, either Paoli or Mitchell. I picked Paoli which I have never been sorry for. But actually all my experience has been working in or around stores since I was..., little minor thing in those days Saturday was always your big day. Like every thing in business you would do as much business on Saturday as you would the other 5 days. In other words the other days you could be off pretty near any time but you must be busy on Saturdays. That's changed of course today but all your smaller town were Saturday towns. When I opened the store here in 1936 every Saturday the square was solid with people, cars, wagons (a few), that lasted until about 9 o'clock every night. That was a long day.

H: From early in the morning?

R: it would start around 10 o'clock. You had ... there would be people and they ... in other words at that time the center of all the business in Paoli was concentrated on the square. Since that

it's spread...., most of the business has left the square. As a matter of fact today having a business on the square is almost a handicap instead of an advantage because your other stores on the edge of town with the parking lots taking away the people who drive there. All your beer store's along there. People... To me the retail business is a fascinating business. There's a small peg in the operation but you have some business management down at ?, men like Mr. Penny, the owner of Walmart has done an outstanding job. As a matter of fact I predict that Walmart will be the dominating chain store in the United States 20 years from now; they will...., 20 years from now Walmart will have a store that any customer can reach in less than 45 minutes drive. They are well operated, the whole thing is they follow all the sound principals of giving people good bargains at a fair price and it's hard to say why Walmart has done so well and why others have failed the business like the 3D chain in Indiana that at one time was doing very good in Indiana and is now gone. Right now we have a problem here that a new chain store opened here in Paoli taking over the old 3D building, and expanding. I wish them well but I think they're making a serious mistake in coming to Paoli. The 3D made a mistake in coming here, they made surveys of course to check business here but at that time we had two things here that were just getting started good: the local ? was bringing a lot of people to Paoli, the local ? here most of us don't realize how many people they draw into Paoli, some days it draws 1,000 a day. It's quite an operation and then a few miles west of us is this new Silver Lake and will some day be a rival to Monroe Lake in Bloomington. The 3D, I think, my opinion based, one reason they opened the store in Paoli was those factors were going to make Paoli grow business wise. The error they made was that people going fishing or going skiing are not going to buy merchandise, they're in a hurry to get there, have a good time and a hurry to get home. They're not going to spend a little money in town, or a very minor amount. This new store opened in Paoli is anew chain started up Big Wheel. I wish them well but I predict that in 10 years from now they'll be sorry they came. Because the main reason, on account of the little that I've been with, they can't get our business we will hold it. The thing is that those kind of store need a tremendous volume to pay, in other words the whole thing comes down to the size of the store they're putting. The business they need is just not in Paoli, Paoli is a poor county. Unfortunately Orange county is, we have a battle with Crawford County being the lowest county in the state.

H: Crawford County?

R: A battle between us and Crawford and I think Crawford is probably ahead of us now, so we're probably income wise the lowest county in Indiana. We got...

H: I'm not a Hoosier and I can't visualize where Crawford is?

R: South of us.

H: Directly south of us?

R: Yes, out here.

H: If you go on 37...

R: If you follow 37 you get to Crawford. The advantage Crawford has is they have new highways, a lot of people now that live in Crawford work in the local area and have reasonably good jobs but they live, have homes in the rural area. That makes the income of the county better.

H: One thing I wasn't sure of, I understood Mr. Roberts that you worked in a hardware store and you also worked in a variety store in Caridon which is how far away from here?

R: Caridon is 38 miles, it's the capital of Orange County. I got out of High school, the man I worked for in the hardware store and his brother wanted to start a variety store. And they needed a manager so they asked me to be the manager of the variety store which was my first experience. I run the variety store for them for several years and for health reasons they, one of the owners wanted out so that store was sold. And then several years this man started a store, he bought it back and asked me to come back and be his manager, in the mean time I always had a job with the hardware store, I could always go there.

H: In between jobs?

R: Yes, my training was hardware. Actually I liked variety store better, hardware stores are they handled a lot of merchandise but the thing I like about a variety store is that you're constantly changing your merchandise: you have all your various seasons goes through the year and it's more interesting because you go through,... you take your holiday business, the average retail store does probably 40% of their year's business in December.

H: 40%?

R: 40% roughly. The next best thing is Easter, then you got Memorial Day, Memorial Day is good business. In our little store up there we would sell at least \$8,000 worth of ? suppliers in two weeks' time. The ? supplier business is a tremendous business and well it's like anything else we kept a large selection at a

reasonable price so people relied on us, local people and people who has folks buried here they learnt instead of buying their flowers where they lived and bringing them with them they waited to buy them here to save trouble. They get a better price and not have to fool with them so we did a tremendous business.

H: And they knew you?

R: Our motto was 'we got it if we could find it'. Now I don't think any one of my wives ever cared much for that motto but that's true. In the old store we were so crowded it started up there, it was so crowded that the truth of the matter was that an item we didn't sell everyday you would forget where it was. And you'd say I know we got some, and we hinted for it. Now the new store is a little better.

H: The new store is bigger?

R: OH, yes. And of course here we have our own parking lot. But the variety store business of all business is one of the most interesting business to be in because you're going into selling school supplies or you're selling candy or selling sewing material, your true variety store in other words ...

END SIDE ONE TAPE ONE

H: So you were telling me that a variety store is a lot of fun because things change all the time?

R: Yes, in variety store the merchandise you handle, there's a certain amount of seasonable merchandise which gives you a chance for a change in other words. It is actually a challenge, each season you had a challenge in buying for Halloween, Thanksgiving, school opening, Easter, Mother's Day, buying enough merchandise but not too much buying the right amount of merchandise that was one of the ..., you didn't want to buy too much stuff like when your Valentine's candy, you going to sell so much Valentine's candy. If you buy too much it's bad, don't buy enough it's bad. Your buying, being able to buy this you learn by experience. You asked about the variety store is the outgrowth of the old Woolworth's 5 and 10, they started out with only the lower price items but over the years each variety store is more or less run by what that owner, what he likes to sell. Now, our store we used to have an unusual thing here in Paoli when I come here in 1936 Paoli had two dry goods stores. They both went out of business so there was no place to buy dry goods, so we...

H: Excuse me but dry goods are fabrics?

R: Fabrics, primarily fabrics and all the things that go with them, patterns.

H: Buttons, you mean and ...?

R: Buttons, threads, all kind of stuff. All your sewing needs. So we have a diminished stock of fabrics and sewing needs and of course the fact that there's no dry goods store, we're the only one in town that has a good line of sewing material. Like your area, a town like Paoli there's quite a bit of quilting done by the women and they use quite a bit of batting for their quilt.

H: Quite a bit of what?

R: Batting.

H: Batting is ...

R: Filler for a quilt.

H: Filler, OK.

R: The best known brand is a brand called Mountain Mist. I don't know why but to many of your larger chain stores will handle a cheaper brand, they'll try to sell an off-brand at almost the same price and they make a bad mistake because the women that do the quilting ask for..., making a quilt is a lot of work and the few cents they save on the batting they're not going to fuss over paying \$1 more and getting Mountain Mist because they want that and it's good see. Now it may be others just as good but it's a name brand and that appeals. Like, we're one of the few stores that still carries bulk candy, don't see many stores any more with bulk candy. We have a scale, we were forced to, on account of candy, you used to be able to sell it a dime worth of candy and gets a fair amount of candy. But now we now sell a minimum of a 1/4 pound. We carry rock candy and your ? candy, rock is a popular brand. Over the years all your wholesalers, or manufacturers I should say, have had a problem of being fair to the bigger stores and smaller stores treat them fair. Brocks has been very fair, if you establish an account with Brocks everybody buy for the same price no matter who you are, at one price. It's a policy they established years ago, it's been a very fair policy. In other words they have a good line of candy at a reasonable price and if your credit is good enough, you have to buy enough to make it worth it, that doesn't apply to all your companies out here. I said a minute ago you make your money by buying, your factories all have 3 price levels. A price they make directly to a retail store, what you call wholesale price; they have a price to a jobber which takes it into his stock and in

turn sells it and then they have a price they sell directly to a larger store like Sears and those types of stores. Roughly the difference between what the jobber pays for an item and what the retailer pays for it is around 15-20% difference. In other words, say I have a sale for \$1 they will charge the retail \$8 a dozen for that item roughly, the jobber will buy it for around \$6.50, and he in turn sells it to a retailer. What's happened in the last two years the jobbers have been forced to work out, they confine their business to the larger accounts and then sell them. Back up a minute here, a lot of your merchandise is shipped into the jobbers warehouse, a lot of it is shipped direct from the factory to the retailer, for instance your ? Bass which is one of the main, better known lines of low price glass.

H: Do you mean glass or do you mean like mirrors?

R: Also mirror but glass, common drinking glasses.

H: Oh, glasses OK

R: They've had trouble there, all those stores what the jobber has done now it what they call drop shipments. That's when the merchandise is shipped direct to the store by the factory, the factory will bill it to the jobber on account of his credit. And he in turn will sell to the store and add on a small profit, in other words, you know the True Value Hardware Store?

H: Yes.

R: That is one of the most successful operations of the jobbing business. The True Value Hardware Store was really opened by a man named John Cotter and he's strictly hardware. That's what he has. About 15 years ago they decided to open a variety store business so they opened up a variety store division. And they, everything down there, the company is actually a non-profit company in other words every body buys from them has to buy stock in them. At the end of the year each customer there, each store that buys from them, gets back a rebate off what the company, the profit. In other words, as a matter of fact we can buy merchandise through them, they charge us 2%, they call it add-on to the invoice the factory like Rubbermaid. So we wind up buying the thing by the item roughly at 2% what Walmart pays for it. Walmart of course buys directly but we're able to buy a smaller amount and that 2% is part of the back seat. Cotter [tape turned off]

H: OK? I just asked you what a jobber was and ...?

R: Merchandise, the manufacturers sell the merchandise roughly 3

ways: to the direct, then he sells to what is known as a jobber. He also sells retail store but smaller, he keeps a large stock and he buys from the factory and in turn sells retailer and adds a profit. They, the jobber, today's business is always changing, your jobber, a lot of jobbers failed and in Louisville Kentucky they've got a hardware company, was one of the biggest hardware companies in the United States.

H: Belnap?

R: Belnap. They finally went out of business, they failed because they, everybody, they couldn't adapt to the times. Now this Cotter is coming in. Back up a little bit. At one time there was two jobbers in Louisville that carried the rights to merchandise, a company called ? and one called Hilderbrand. they both doing real good and making money. Mostly on account of personal reasons the owner decided to sell them, this Cotter company they are a master of finance. I mentioned a minute ago that they give back every year, each store got back from them a certain amount of money based on what they bought. The company's profit was, see? But they didn't pay that back as cash, part in cash and part in stock. So you give the Cotter company millions of dollars of cash and they have gone into all over the country. they went into Louisville and bought the Hilderbrand out, they paid them \$3,600,000 cash for it.

H: They bought who?

R: Company called Hilderbrand. They were owned by two brothers. they went in and bought them up a reasonably successful business but one of the brothers wanted to sell. They changed company and bought another one out for \$5 million. In other words they eliminated their competition but they're fast masters at sales. They have some problems in their, the have so many rules that they lost a lot of customers, Cotter has, because they have so many hard and fast rules. But a man today in a retail store that wants to work with Cotter company, in other words follow their methods, can do very good. In Bloomington, all over the country you have True Value Hardware Stores. And most of them are doing pretty good, they've got good solid buying base. In other word if they want to they can sell merchandise and compete with Walmart. It's a question is of how much profit that store needs and wants. The retail business is a chain business, they'll always be..., people don't realize the business in this country, the total business done the small independent mama and pop stores and what you might call the small stores, the total of them is still more than the total of all your big stores. They still do more total. They have a hard time but your convenience grocery store, those type of stores there, 7/11, those are all types of, in other words the people in the retail business, retail stores have been

forced to change their ways, operation. But they can, I'm trying to say is the small independent store can still operate and make a profit if he works at it. [tape turned off]

H: You were mentioning different percentages of jobbers before?

R: Well, today practically every store does his main buying through a jobber that operates at lower profits. Your, in the variety field I mentioned a minute ago this Cotter company actually charges only 2% for a buying fee. Now the other companies in Greensboro Indiana which is a smaller outfit they charge 6.4%. Whatever store today is almost forced to buy from some jobber that works on a low price base on their volume. YOur grocery stores, grocery wholesalers, we had, years ago we had one at Arlain's that sold everybody in town could buy from them and .. Today's operations are all done by the grocery jobbers that most of them require a minimum order of \$1,000 in terms of getting a better price, see? Everything is down on volume.

H: And in 1936 how was it done>?

R: Well, in those days you had your smaller jobbers and every city like in Louisville they had the ? hardware, which is a big hardware company, they had little ? The main street is the wholesale district, there were a number of jobbers down there handled various items, including furniture and all kinds of things. Today those jobbers are all gone, the retail picture is..., you got a few jobbers are strong left and you got retailers. You take, today everything is dependent on volume. You take the Coca-Cola Company: I had trouble for three years, I couldn't get anything out of them, I had good credit, I give them a lot of business, I got big enough with them that I actually ... In the vendors, they used to make you buy those things. But if you're big enough they'll furnish it to you for free. My volume was good enough then, I told them I wanted anew machine and I got it, in other words everything is volume. Volume, volume, volume. I'm trying to think, your .., in turn in every line of business the manufacturers, the day of the town salesman had gone, there was a time when the salesman come round sold stores, that day is gone. Now a days it's strictly operation all goes back to volume and credit.

H: So, are you attributing the fact that you could get anything form the Coca-Cola people to your credit, your volume or both?

R: Both. At one time I was the biggest company in Paoli.

H: Just from the vending machines out front?

R: And in the store. Don't get it wrong the other stores sold a lot more drinks than we did see. But they handled other brands see. We handled only Coca-Cola, we spent about \$2,000 a month. And that was enough to, when I asked for something I got it.

H: When were you their largest customer in Paoli? In what decade or about ...

R: We're still one of the best companies they've got. Because the other stores sell more drinks but they handle Pepsi Cola and other brands and we have Coca-Cola only see. The whole thing comes down to your buying, you got to learn how to buy right, you got to learn where to buy. And that's one of the things that over the years that I learnt, how to buy stuff at a fair price so I could sell it at a fair price.

H: How do you learn something like that?

R: Experience.

H: Just being in something long enough. So because you only had Coke, because you decided to only sell Coke that was more profitable for you than ...

R: I decided not to fool with several brands. The first machine I had to buy it \$700 then we got big enough I was buying enough then and they'd be glad to. So we have two machines now, one put out the cans and one put out the bottles.

H: You have a machine which still puts out bottles?

R: 16 onze. bottles. We, the big bottle, for along time we sold the cans at 40cents and the bottles at 50cents and made money at it. MY daughter has raised the price of them. We sell it at a cheap price. People would drive all over town to get it there because it was cheaper see. We take the money out twice a day, morning and night. Sometimes on a warm hot night, those two machines we'd take out \$50 out of them.

H: \$50? You had told me, I didn't catch it. You said before you had the machine that you had to buy something else. Was it a cooler?

R: We had to buy a machine to put money in. They used to make you buy the machine, Coca-Cola Company machine.

H: And that cost how much?

R: Well, they still, if you don't have a big enough volume

they'll make you buy a machine.

H: I thought you mentioned \$700?

R: I think the first machine we bought was \$700, see.

H: But then you had so much volume that they bought the rest...

R: The machine wore out and I wanted a new machine and I asked for one for free and my volume justified it see. In other words, you take this Cotter company. They go to a company like Rubbermaid, makes household items, they make trash cans, all kinds of trash cans. Cotter will go to them, we'll buy umpteen thousand of those at a price. Well if business is slack they'll wind up getting the items from Rubber Maid cheaper than Rubber Maid's regular wholesale price. As much as \$2 or \$3 off per basket. Your volume, today volume pays. Walmart to a certain extent they made their money on buying power. But you take for instance, it all goes back to credit, for instance the company makes low price picture frames, the stuff sells at \$5 you know. There's a company in Chicago, they've moved down now but they were there, they were one of those companies to sell at one price. If you had to buy \$200 order and you got the best price. I bought as cheap as 3D or Walmart. They realized that their business, some of these companies don't want these big companies controlling them. In other words, if Walmart gets big enough to take all that that factory makes they're afraid that the time will come when Walmart will say we won't pay you, be under their control see. So smart manufacturers won't let Walmart or anybody else have too much. They want to stay where they can ... In our little town we have a furniture factory, and they used to make furniture for Sears and Montgomery Ward. This man was smart enough he wouldn't get too close to any of them so if he lost an account he wouldn't be out of business, see. In other words if they control your business they run you in, see.

END OF SIDE TWO TAPE ONE.

H: The whole thing comes down to what, did you say?

R: Today the retailer has to be, learn to be a good buyer, a good merchandiser, he can... The independent stores today can still make a living and stay in business if he's, take care of his customers, treat them fair, they'll come back and always sell at a fair price.

H: You have to be smart about it?

R: You take yourself, you go into a store and buy something, you

go into another store and see the same item at a lower price. You're irritated because you paid too much for it. You probably won't go back, see. Why would you or anybody else go to certain stores? Why do you buy your groceries or your cosmetics or anything you buy at certain stores? Price is one thing but not everything.

H: Service and quality is also important.

R: In other words, to remain in business today... Price is a very important thing in business today but it's only one of the things. Because each of us does our buying based on how we're treated, how well we like the business, the people in that store. We have a business in this town here, a small grocery store that do a very good because of the operator. People go in there, they know they'll pay a little more for it but he's friendly, he has what you want, he's handy. They'll pay him, they'll wind up... Gasoline, we have two gasoline in town here, cut price, we have other stations in town here that get a nickel or dime higher that do very good because they give more service. In other words, they... Price as I say is, price is important but not everything. You can't build up a business entirely on price. You got to do a bit more than that. You take it in Bloomington, I'm sure it's the same in every town, you have stores that open up there that don't last a couple of years, they're gone. You have others that do good, it comes back to the operation of it. Same thing in restaurants. Your foundation today is satisfying your customers, that's the main thing. If your customers is satisfied, you'll do all right in business, anybody. [tape turned off]

H: Mr. Roberts, when you first opened up you store did people hang around the store and chat and get their news and gossip that way? And has that changed at all?

R: In 1936, in that period your average farm family probably only come to town once a week. They come to do their shopping, also visiting. A combined business and social affair. The children would go to the local show in the afternoon and it was a kind of high spot of the week for the farm families. They had to see other friends, visit different stores and shopping, they'd also do a lot of talking to their friends and it was their, matter of fact, probably Saturday and Sundays was their high life. On Sunday most of them go to church. But over the years it's all changed quite a bit, now your..., with the better cars you're able to get around. The average farm family some member of the family is in town pretty often, that means that they don't spend much time talking, visiting, but they also ...

H: They don't spend much time visiting now a days or when the car

became more popular and...?

R: Now they come to town to primarily, they have certain things in mind they need to do, want to buy certain items, want to go to the bank or post office. They more or less come in but they don't take long.

H: They come for a certain purpose instead of like an afternoon outing? Of trading and ....

R: Yes. Yes. In the old days they combined it all in one day but now they come in and of course, it's partly business and partly pleasure. Of course, as far as the square is concerned in Paoli or in any, pretty all towns, at one time most of your business was concentrated in Paoli on the square but over the years that's business has moved out to the edge of all cities primarily I imagine on account of parking, in other words, any of your larger store like Walmart, K-mart and those types of stores, shopping centers. Actually the shopping centers are away from the downtown so they're easier to get to and of course with the parking problems in all towns. You take every town has a problem with parking meters. The people don't like the idea of putting money in a meter in order to shop but they don't realize that, taking Paoli, at one time there was 10 stores, retail stores on the square of a fairly good size. They left and now the business part of Paoli on the downtown square now it's barber shops, one restaurant, people going to the bank. In other words it's lawyers and if it wasn't for the parking meters the square would be parked full all day, most of them employees of, that work around the square. So actually the meters were handy, it did keep people moving around. It's.. The whole thing is that your shopping centers have been developed round all your towns, has changed business entirely. More people are going to the shopping centers where most of them have one or two large stores plus they have specialty shops and grocery stores. They can find all their needs at one place almost.

H: Let's trace back when these changes occurred. When did the automobile start becoming a lot more prevalent in this town's history?

R: Well probably around, I think, around when I first got here.

H: People are already driving around when you opened up your store?

R: Yes. But they, in those days, '36, in those days the family all came in together, the father, mother and the children all come together and they spend the afternoon in town.

H: Only one car per family then.

R: Yes. Now they don't ride together, each one, they want to go their own places. The girl wants to go to the beauty shop, the husband wants to go to the barber shop, they don't come at the same time any more.

H: I understand. When did, post World War II when there were many more cars after the war? Did it seem like there were a lot more mobility?

R: It's got more and more. In other words, the average family today, average farm family probably has at least 2 or 3 cars. So that means that they'll be in town but different times. And for different reasons. I was trying to think about your school bus, of course, they, years ago here in Paoli these children in town had to get to school either walk or their parents would drive them but that's all changed. Now they even have school bus routes to pick up the children that live in town. So in other words, that means that the, if the child needs some school supplies used to be they could buy them in the stores in town on the way to school but now that they ride the bus they don't stop, they don't have a chance to buy a lot of school supplies at the school where it's handy for them.

H: They can buy supplies at school now?

R: The school keeps a fairly good stock of tablets and basic supplies, see?

H: Oh, they didn't in my day.

R: it's all changed now, see? They do it on account of the bus situation, on account of the children being bused because they get to school they wouldn't have a tablet or something they needed and the excuse was they hadn't been to town. So that way the school started keeping these things there so primarily the convenience of the children. Of course, it also works out they make a fair profit that's used for, it's supposed to be used for some good in the school. I'd say today probably half or more of all our school supplies now are sold at schools, it's changed.

H: Can you recall when buses started taking up kids in town?

R: Oh, it's been by different steps. First they started running routes in town which the parents would pay for the children to ride. Maybe \$1 a week they had to pay for it. And then the parents of course kept complaining that the other children were

freezing. Finally they started hauling all the children in town free.

H: But that's the 50s, 60s?

R: Oh, it probably started around mid-60s roughly. It's been over 20 years. Your small town is, what used to be the prosperous business district today in most towns is having some rough times. Most of them have some, here in Paoli we have a bill here on the square, we have right now three or four empty buildings for rent. I used to be that those, all of the buildings on the square if one moved out for some reason leave, there'd be another one, they'd grab it. Somebody waiting to start a business. Your shopping centers on the edge of all towns has made a drastic difference in the way business is done in all small towns.

H: I understand that those changes have occurred, but can you..., were those changes sudden for you at a certain time or were they slow in developing or ...?

R: They rather slow, I mean like in Paoli here I'm just trying to think back... From the square to the shopping center on the north east of town that's been about over the last 10-15 years. On the south side of town has several stores and then down off the square on west Main Street there are several businesses down that way. In other words, what's happened here is that the retail business has left the square and moved into various shopping areas all around the town,. In other words the total business done in Paoli is probably, is held up pretty good, the total quantity is held up very well. But now it's scattered over more area, it makes the and of course the... In other words , being in business on the square today is actually a handicap in a word, of course those stores, I used to own we had our own parking there for about 20 cars. So that, this was enough parking that took care of our customers but it wasn't big enough that they..., it wasn't too large a parking lot. It didn't backfired because people have a tendency to park there and leave their cars there and...

H: Go elsewhere. You know with this change of vehicles and shopping elsewhere how did that effect the people's social life on the square in terms of what happens on the square of people chatting or any kind of special festivities, that kind of thing?

R: Well, they still do a little bit of things but not like they used to because they see each other much for often. Everybody's in a hurry today. They don't spend much time, of course in your restaurants there's always a few in there drinking coffee and of course most restaurants have a coffee crowd that comes in in the

morning or afternoon and most people are people who have been retired, they'll just come in and get a break and drink a coffee and visit.

H: Which 2 restaurants are those?

R: Well, here in town Drothers, here in town has a pretty good coffee crowd every day. But most all of them have some primary coffee and visit.

H: The one on the square that has the coffee crowd?

R: Yes, a few every morning there. Every town has a, as we get more and more retired people living and getting around these people have a lot of free time. And they spend some of that in a coffee break, life sure has changed a lot. [inaudible back ground discussion with wife ... Seniors Citizen's?] We have a local senior citizen's place here that has a pretty good, they serve a noon meal there and also gives some of those that want to a chance to visit and I think they do, some of the women do some sewing there. People's life styles changed so much over the last 10 years, I'd say. We have more and more people that has the time and the money to enjoy life a little more.

H: People live longer too.

R: Oh, yes.

H: Well say in the 30s, 40s and 50s it wasn't just the older crowds, maybe people didn't live that long too, but younger people would congregate on the square and chat and socialize. Right? What happened to those people, slowly, where did the socializing go?

R: Well, it's hard to say. [wife's comments inaudible] There still a few young ones that like to gather on the square when the weather's good, in the summer. And they sit and talk and visit. It's really hard to say what they all do but...

H: Instead of being dropped off by their folks or coming in with their family, they go their separate ways?

R: Yes, more or less they ... Of course, the young people here for years have always been complaining there's nothing for them to do at night and over the years I guess they were made to provide supervised place for them, for youngsters to go at night but it hasn't worked out too good because it's, most of those things are expensive to operate and just, it's hard. As a matter of fact there's a group now trying to start up something, get a

building some place for young people, a place to meet you know, have various...., but.

H: Well, what kinds of, I don't know if we talked about this or not before but, what kinds of activities or festivities or special fairs or weekly things did they have on the square? A couple of decades ago? On Saturday nights did they have something?

R: Well at one time they used to have the local band would put on a concert, I think it used to be Thursday evening. And people, everybody would crowd together to hear them play and of course we used to have a picture show on the square and that always drew a pretty good crowd. It had matinees on Saturday and Sunday and they'd always be...., I don't know.

H: And they'd have all kinds of activities going on generally on week-ends? Several decades ago there was always something to do?

R: There's more it seems like, yes.

H: And that sort of gradually died out? Like the Strand burned down and ...

R: Well, they had a bowling alley here and a few idiots had a fair crowd there and of course outside of Paoli about 3 miles they have a drive in theater and they'd have pretty good crowd especially on week-ends. People had more time and more kept money to...., a lot of the young people down in Paoli like the young boys here in Paoli they'd drive down to the Valley, to Arlene or Mitchell and in other words and try to meet some new friends. They would have all the bills they could get.

H: Those used to be unreachable a couple decades before, 'cause that was far?

R: Yes. [wife's comments inaudible]

H: Your wife just mentioned the slopes? Ski slopes?

R: Yes.

H: When did those open up?

R: Roughly 10 years ago. About 10 years ago. [wife's comments inaudible...., chartered buses]

H: So the chartered bus tours brang a lot of business into town? You had mentioned to me that in '36 when you opened up your store

that people used to exchange information as they did on the square. Was their main source of news then the radio?

R: Yes, that was before TV. Radios then, still a lot of people that listen to the radio.

H: In Paoli?

R: Quite a few 'cause they have the local radio station carries a lot of local news.

H: There's a local radio station?

R: We have a local radio, in other words it's like back in the winter time when snow's on the ground why the local radio station announces early in the morning whether there's going to be school so parents will tune in the radio and know whether there's going to be school or not. They, in the average winter there will probably be around 10 days they'll close the school on account of snow. Some of those days it's OK for cars to drive but the school authorities are afraid the school buses on some of these rural roads will get in trouble so they'll call school off those days. With the school bus, in the old days they had school practically every day no matter how bad the weather was, the children got there some way, you heard different people ...

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H: You were saying that different people...

R: Oh in the older days why we heard our parents tell about their problems of how they had to get to school and how they had to sometimes walk several miles even in the snow and things. And the problems were worse, a lot of those rural schools they had problems getting water and everything. At least they got to school any how, but now with the school buses it's all changed.

H: What about like world events? Did you hear about national and world events through your radio or did you hear about it word of mouth when you, I'm talking about in the 30s and 40s. How did you hear about something, did someone hear about it on the radio and it ...

R: Well, probably our main sources those days was TV.

H: No, no in '36 it was still radio.

R: Yes, I'm just trying to think. TV is come in, and got better and better over the years, now most of us get our main news on

ROBERTS

the TV stations because they all have a, carry the latest news on a regular thing. But...

H: For example, do you remember how you heard about World War II breaking out? Do you remember hearing about it on the radio or did someone tell you when you were working or?

R: I really don't recall my first time I knew about it. It's like the end of, that goes back even farther, end of World War I when the news come over the peace had been signed first the Germans then the Japanese. It was news it took a little while before everybody knew about it but news travels. Of course as you know there are three main ways of travelling news, you know.

H: I hear it coming. [laughter]

R: You know what I mean.

H: No, let's hear it.

R: Well, telegraph and telephone and tell a woman.

H: There are 2 women in this room, Mr. Roberts I don't know if we would agree.

R: Well, that's the way news travels. Women... [wife makes comment about men talking too.]

H: So are you telling me that once women went to work during World War II that it slowed down your news in Paoli?

R: Well, no news had a way of travelling pretty fast. News travels well, of course today you have scanners, all the police news that's going on, so any time there's an accident it gets around pretty fast that somebody, there's been an accident in or around Paoli. It's not very long before it gets pretty well know by everybody.

H: That hit the community really hard. What about other kinds of, national events? How does the community, when you first came here in '36 how much were the farmers still, there was a drought about that time?

R: It may have been a drought also those years were a bit of depression, business on a whole was in decline.

H: People were still recovering from the Depression?

R: Well, they, you farmers have, farming always has been a risky

business. The average farmer has one good year out of about three and maybe one fair year and maybe one poor year. So they go through cycles and the same thing, why in your rural areas why your back bone of your business is the farm business at that time. Now that's all changed, now your small factories, now more people, less people make a living out of a farm and more and more make a living in some small factory and in Paoli we've been lucky we have no real large factory. We got several fairly good size factories that have very good record of steady work. In other words in Paoli any body wants a job here and wants to work they can find work now.

H: But, you think Paoli has been unusual in that there's always been some type of small factory work?

R: Paoli over the years I've been here has been more even, in other words it doesn't boom too much and doesn't bust so bad. In other words the business is diversified enough between the farmers and the other businesses here that it has, business holds up reasonably steady every year, doesn't go up and down so much. Some towns that have one large factory that has a bad year, lay off workers, that town is hurt real bad but here we've been fortunate, we haven't had anything like that.

H: So the Depression didn't effect?

R: Not too much.

H: OK so it didn't effect your business either very much?

R: Well the variety business actually is more or less depression proof. If business is good you'll get your share any how and if it's a little bit down then people will come to you because they'll buy cheaper merchandise, they'll buy variety store merchandise instead of buying your hardware. They'll buy down-rated, what they'll buy they'll buy the cheaper items.

H: Oh I see there's a variety of things to buy so they'll just scale down. In 1936 did people buy on credit?

R: We never sold on credit. There was a certain amount of business done on credit but today I don't know what but a lot of business goes on credit cards. Here in Paoli I don't think there's very few credit cards used. They, I know one motel takes credit cards but as far as I know very little credit cards in Paoli, used very little. In other words, people here don't use credit cards.

H: Do you them?

R: I don't have any.

H: And your step-daughter's store does not take a credit card?

R: No, don't take Visa or any of them.

H: But what I meant about credit was like in the 30s and 40s if I were a steady customer of yours and I came in to buy a bunch of stuff could I pay you at the end of the month or something like that?

R: Well, about the only stores that operated on credit was the grocery stores.

H: 'Cause that was more regular thing.

R: I think the, we had two dry goods stores that might have done a small amount but was very limited. Credit was not, was a minor item.

H: We had talked about them before but I don't recall when they went out of business, or why they went out of business. We had talked about, remember you had mentioned to me that your store carried the Mountain Mist batting...

R: Well I mentioned earlier about the two dry goods stores here, they went out of business. Both of them died because the owners of them died. And when they died they went out of business so they just...

H: And when was that about?

R: It's been around 20 years ago now.

H: And their children were not interested in taking over?

R: Neither one had any children.

H: A little different many years ago. That's another change that has occurred. People don't always have children now or have fewer to help share... Was there any change in your line of business with anything else, with World War II or anything? Did you change your business because of times or war or? Did anything get affected, were there any changes that just happened?

R: Well, of course, during the World War II days we had a lot of scarce items. Certain things were being rationed.

H: Like?

R: In our store sheets, towels, pillow cases.

H: They were rationed?

R: Not rationed just in short supply.

H: Sheets and towels and pillow cases?

R: Yes. Especially nylon hosiery was very scarce.

H: Nylon hosiery.

R: I was lucky enough, I made a number of contacts with the wholesalers in Louisville but I was able to get a fair, reasonable amount of these scarce items. Of course if you go back far enough there were days when the issue of coupons in order to buy a ? but they, most people here never did, hurt too much by the items being rationed. For instance gasoline was rationed.

H: In the 70s?

R: No, that was, well here in town in Paoli most people didn't suffer because most of us had a friend that was able to get a hold of gasoline. You see your farmers could get a hold of gasoline for farming and most of them had a little extra gasoline there.

H: So you're saying that in lots of ways it sounds like Paoli has been insulated from a lot of economic...

R: Actually we haven't been. We've been hurt. The Depression hurt us less.

H: And even the times when maybe cities were in short supply you were able to sort of make up for it. Did women in Paoli also start going to work like they did in the cities during the World War II?

R: well, quite a few did of course, actually in our factories I don't think Paoli had too many women working but there was other jobs available like in Bedford. And some of the women there were more jobs for women but not too many in Paoli, women in Paoli had to carpool to drive to other towns like Bloomington and Bedford and at that time they a factory at Arlene that employed quite a few, they made radios. In other words our area here has never been hurt too bad by the Depression.

H: Hurt too bad by what?

R: The Depression or the war days.

H: When women started working did that effect your business at all? Did they need more items because they were working? Like maybe more hosiery?

R: Well main respect was, each family had more income, they had more money to spend on things they couldn't have bought before. For instance, 20 years ago any toy over \$5 was a limited amount of sales because the parents just couldn't, would not buy those higher priced toys. Gradually over the last ten years, especially last ten years the parents have more money and they started buying higher priced toys for children. I was trying to think of some of the things that could come along... Like the Cabbage Patch doll \$39.95.

H: How much?

R: It started out \$39.95. You would have thought that with a doll that price you wouldn't make the amount of sales but every store was able to sell everyone they could get. Of course, that lasted about three years but... Well I'm trying to think of...

H: Did you sell things like radios in your variety store?

R: we didn't have any. Never got into that. I was always leery of having these things that required service because when a person buys something from a store if you have a problem they expect the store to make it good. In other words, I tried to stay clear of anything that needed service.

H: So you never sold, when that big fade was walkmans radios, you didn't purchase them?

R: No.

H: Did you ever sell records? or tapes?

R: We sold them but they were a minor item. I never went into the popular stuff that's just a more or less, in other words there's always a few store that try to keep the latest records and tapes but they always have a problem because there's high demand for short time. In other words our store when the holidays come we concentrated on the basic toys, your name games, like Monopoly and Rook and those games, and all your, everyday red wagons always a steady seller and of course you'd sell a few sleds and in other words we stayed primarily with basic toys. The toy

business is a very precious business, there's in Paoli there've been several stores that have tried to go into toys but none of them have ever made any money out of it because they sell quite a few but they have left-overs would have all the profit tied up. I think with ours we carried toys all year round so even if they buy for December 25th we have money for Christmas, but we'd sell quite a few toys even in January to the children that got money. We had year round toy business.

H: You had mentioned to me that your three biggest holidays were Christmas, Easter and decorations?

R: yes.

H: I'm a little bit surprised that Valentine's Day or Halloween are not up there?

R: Well, Halloween is fair, Valentine's is a one shot thing. And ...

H: Do you sell cards in your store?

R: Greeting cards, yes. Greeting card business is a tremendous business. There's probably in Paoli right now ten store stock cards and all do a pretty good business. People today send more cards and also as sending a gift is so expensive, you couldn't buy anything for \$1 or \$2 so a lot of people on a gift list will wind up sending only a card and no gift.

H: Well, now a days cards can be \$2-\$3-\$4-\$5.

R: oh, yes. [tape turned off]

H: You were mentioning to me that greeting cards are a pretty steady business.

R: In our little store we sell, have a nice business, people buy greeting cards a lot of the time on impulse where they happen to be, in a drug store, or ... Even out here at the local clinic on the edge of town when people go see a doctor, they have a drug store that has a nice set of cards right there. They do a fair business, the greeting card business is a big business. The trouble is greeting cards are so over priced. I mean, what I'm trying to say is that at Christmas time you go in any store and buy a box of cards and you get some pretty nice cards that won't cost over 25 cents a piece. You buy a box of around 12 cards for \$3 and you get very nice cards. That same quality of card with a birthday message on it will be three times much higher. The card business like everybody else they get what they can. Your Coca-

Cola, there's cola on the market that you can buy half price, Coca-Cola doesn't cost any more to make than the other cola. Your leading brands you're paying for the advertising.

H: Sure.

R: Take aspirin. People still buy Bayer aspirin. It isn't a damn bit better than any regular aspirin, it's just as good. A5 aspirin has the same strength as Bayer has but people still go in a pay double price for Bayer.

H: Well when generic products started coming in, becoming popular, did you start buying some of those?

R: No. We didn't have too many items we could buy generic. We carry a limited amount of shelf drugs, aspirins and toothpaste and that kind of stuff but most of it... we stayed with name brands because that was one of the best sellers.

H: Well, for Christmas you would sell as big assortment of toys and Easter, Easter baskets, and bunnies and chocolate?

R: Easter you had a certain amount of, I'm just trying to think what all we sold, lollies, candy, Easter candy was a big item, that would be the one time a year you would sell chocolate rabbits.

H: And for decoration day?

R: Mostly flowers.

H: And you had told me before that people would come in from out of town and wait 'till they ...

R: That was when I was trying to explain to you... Over the years we built a name of having merchandise at a fair price and that applied to Memorial Day wreaths and flowers so we went up in volume and a reasonable profit. We was able, with our buying success we were able to sell nice spreads and wreaths at a lower price and most of your stores, a lot of people have family buried here in Orange county that would come back for Memorial Day and put flowers on their graves. We would sell a lot of locals and there's quite a few people that they themselves lived somewhere else, instead of buying their flowers there and hauling them down to the graves in Orange county, they wait to get here and buy them because they know we were going to have them, a nice selection for them at a lower price.

H: Did you notice that, I know that Decoration Day used to be a

ROBERTS

very very popular holiday, is that still maintained here in Paoli or is that decreasing a little bit?

R: No, most everybody winds up spending a few dollars, they don't buy very many fresh flowers on account of that time of year they're so high. So now a days with the new silk flowers they have artificial flowers, they can get all the nice artificial flowers. A lot of people, the average family will probably spend, buy, decorates at least I'd say a minimum of two graves and probably some as high as ten graves. They'll have family buried.

H: Still today?

R: Every one of those brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles,...

H: But still today they do that?

R: Yes. In other words, you make a lot of sales over \$100 sales just in flowers.

H: So the flowers, so technology in the flower industry has really helped you because it used to be that flowers were only like paper but the silk flowers ...

R: Oh, yes your silk flowers make it....[tape off] Coming back to... You make a profit, now the store I run a variety store is actually made up of merchandise, the best selling items out of the hardware stores, grocery stores, other stores all in one store. Now one thing that you almost

END OF SIDE TWO TAPE TWO

R: In the items you had in the grocery store, you could not make 2%, you mark up was lower because those stores operate on a lower profit margin. Anything that is sold by a drug store or hardware store you could make a higher profit because the hardware stores and drug stores make a higher profit so in other words in the mark up of merchandise a good operator would take a higher profit where he could and where he had to come down. Take items like paper towels, every body ?, flop a dollar on them. But ...

H: What about paper products, in terms of party things, you know like birthday napkins and things like that?

R: We keep a nice line of colored napkins, probably 10 or 12 colors, we have, for each occasion you have them, you'll sell a fair amount of Christmas napkins and Thanksgiving, birthday, all kinds of things. In your craft field, it's been one of your field that has been , probably one of the biggest fields, new items in

the craft line it's surprising the number of how many are offered. Each store has to count how many items of craft you want to carry is up to you, the more you carry the more you sell. We've always carried, my wife did the buying because she knew more than I did about it, that's another thing: in so many stores run by as man he tends to buy what he likes and you can't buy what you like so I always made a policy that I asked my wife or other employees for help in picking, buying the items that I didn't know about. I'd tell them I want to put so many hundred dollars in a certain item and let them pick out the items. And you take sewing material we do a very nice business, what you buy, you volume of business is done on your lower price merchandise like you basic muslin and sheeting and broad clothe, in other words if you started buying material that sold \$4 yard or more you get into dangerous ground because you bought material that you paid \$2.50 for and if it didn't go very good you'd have trouble selling at cost. But you could always, oh, I tell you it all goes back... I don't know how to say this... Each of us that runs a business they all think we're good buyers but the average, everyday average women, average customer is really a better buyer than we are because at the end of the year you can take any store the good items of stock have sold and what they've got left is what's not too good. People have an ability to pick out the bargains and leaving you the junk. I don't know how they do it but they wind up, if you aren't careful you'll wind up with the poor sellers. I spent, my wife mentioned a minute ago, you stores like K-mart and those they don't want to have anything that has to be measured and cut for the customer so we do a tremendous business on yard goods, ribbon, trim and laces where a person can buy 3 yards, any measure they want, see? And all that stuff carries a fairly good profit if you buy it right.

H: When did the crafts business boom?

R: It gradually got better I'd say the last 20 years.

H: About 20 years ago?

R: Started getting better 20 years ago [wife's comments in background]

H: Not even that long you don't think? Who's doing the crafts? Predominantly women doing them, older women as women retire or...?

R: Well, be somebody go see a friend of theirs and they making some of those items, craft items and they'll bring it back to Paoli. Those fades travel, I'm just trying to think of something to name..., over a while they got a craze making dolls for a

while there. Quite a craze of making home made dolls, that's kind of died down now but it's.. in the craft field we buy from two of the jobbers and that's something, one line that you only have to buy from a jobber because that stuff is all imported and imported goods...

H: From where?

R: very few stores can.. they get lot of stuff... you take the craft field it's just... I mentioned at each variety store is a different lay out. We're strong in sewing things and crafts and things where we don't carry much hardware. Some... we don't... we do a fair on household utensils, we do a fair business on all kinds of kettles and pans and low price household ware but....

H: Has the use of plastic increased a lot?

R: Plastic.

H: I mean, was there a time in your life time as a variety goods owner that more glass things were used? You know like glasses and glass jars and...

R: Items made out of plastic have improved in quality some what. Originally they were very poor quality and people would buy them but they wouldn't last, today you're getting your plastic items have been so much improved now that you're, like your rubbermaid, one company makes a large line of household plastic items very good quality. The quality, in other words the quality of plastic has so much improved that today we're using more and more plastics.

H: What kind of dish drainers, for instance, did people used to have before there was a good plastic?

R: Well originally it was made out of, I think some were wire, of course that, today your...

H: You know you wash your dishes and you want to stack them...

R: Those things today so many people have dishwashers, your sales of those things is way down.

H: Do you sell those things?

R: We carry them, yes.

H: But they decrease with dishwashers. Can you tell me when the first experimentation with inferior plastic was, about what

decade that was? And when the better plastics became...

R: I'd say your better plastics started coming in about 20 years ago and got better ever since.

H: And before that, in the 50s maybe there was some experimentation with...

R: it was, the plastic companies, the primary thing then was price and quality and as they learnt to make better quality and sales went up.

H: How many employees have you generally had or has that number changed?

R: well, we probably always made a point of having at least three employees on... working everyday. And four or five on Saturday, we make more on Saturday see.

H: And what about during Christmas season, do you usually have more then or?

R: We generally add on a couple more just about every year.

H: You had mentioned to me that years ago you store used to be open from 10 in the morning 'till 9 at night. What were your normal hours when you retired last year?

R: Well, we got down, opened at 9 and closed at 6 everyday.

H: Including Saturdays.

R: Everyday.

H: And you never extended those hours?

R: We come down to that, we originally used to open at 8 o'clock. Open on Saturday nights but we quit opening Saturday nights probably 15 years ago.

H: When the biggest boom in your business? In the 52 years you had it?

R: Biggest boom?

H: When did your business seemed to have grown the most or just ...

R: Actually our business has held pretty steady over all the

years. I can almost..., I keep up there a weekly sale record and I can almost tell you week to week what business we should do.

H: So even when the 3D opened north of town it didn't give you serious dent, it was a different kind of business there or...?

R: We probably lost, hard to tell exactly, but we still maintain our volume still held very good.

H: Do you know, when you retired did you know most of your customers?

R: We probably knew 9 out of 10.

H: As of last year you still knew 9 out of 10?

R: You knew them by name or by their faces. [tape turned off]

H: Getting back to national events we had talked before informally about your missing all the wars.

R: You can call it lucky or unlucky, the age group that missed all the wars. I was too young for War I, I registered for War II had a draft card but as the war went along why I got older and managed to stay out of that and so I had no special skills, if I had been drafted. I was old enough to be involved in War II but I feel like I missed some contacts, some experiences that people, those that did get involved in both the wars but I also missed the problems they had. Of course I was too old to be involved in Vietnam which was an unpopular war...

H: Paoli people felt that way too?

R: An unpopular war.

H: But that was a national sentiment, was that also the sentiment of...

R: Well, it wasn't, the boys here, my wife's daughter had her first husband was a Vietnam drafted for the war. And we had some ? with it but the thing that we all know that illegal war because if the Supreme Court had been asked to rule on it they'd have said we couldn't be drafted. But it was, they wouldn't rule on that.

H: How does the community react to its local boys in Vietnam, did they..., was it different from the World War II participation, were they treated differently?

R: The ones that served in the first war, in the European War II they were received more honors and more awards. The ones in Vietnam they just kind of, when they come home most of them went back to work and kind of a few of them had some problems but they weren't treated like heroes, they...

H: Even in this community?

R: There were very few of them actually treated as heroes. They weren't, I mean Paoli people felt like those that went, most of them were drafted of course, just a few volunteered, but they felt like something had to be done but unlucky to be involved in it.

H: How did the 60s and 70s generally affected Paoli? There were lots of changes happening in the world, Civil Rights movement, the women's movement ...

R: Oh those things I don't think ever, they effected some but they weren't a strong movement here. In other words here they have a pretty strong local group here of women's groups that's been pretty active but I think it's not something to get very enthused about, women's rights or anything else.

H: We had talked also about your political participation, can you tell me a little bit about your political participation in the 60s?

R: Well like most of us I inherited my politics and religion from my parents, most of us inherit those things. I was raised as a democrat so when I come to Paoli I soon found out that being a Democrat was... a very unpopular it was very unpopular being a Democrat in this town. This town is probably 2/3 at least Republican so in those days if you wanted to do any business with the schools or the public business if you were a Democrat you had no chance, they wouldn't, you had no chance to do business with them. But I had a number of problems with personal friends, they..., I first come here they tried to get me to change over my politics, I always felt like...

H: Who wanted you to change your politics?

R: Some local people here, in other words they said it would be better for my business, so I changed over for a business angle and they... As the years went by I, you can be involved in politics as long as you don't get in dirty politics. People would respect me, every body knew I was a Democrat in town so. How many years ago we first run for Town Board? About... '65 or '69

H: You were on the town board in the 70s?

R: In the 50s I was talked into running for the town board. That year there were three Democrats elected, the first time Paoli had a Democrat town board, ever had one. As a matter of fact that week's paper came out with the headlines in 3" letters Democrats carry Paoli first time in 75 years! It wasn't a matter of being Democrats, we run three businessmen, we ran our first team against our second team and of course we were elected but they probably shouldn't have voted for us because we had poor qualification. For instance the town of Paoli was a pretty good size of business that you were involved in at that time and still today the town owns all the transformers and meters all belong to the town where they buy the current wholesale and sell it retail. So in those days they made enough money off of that they had no town tax at all, we had not town tax. When I left office we had over \$1/4 million in reserve money and all debts and bills paid. Now one of the things we did when I was here we had..., for years and years the state of Indiana was trying to ..., Paoli was..., all we had here was the old septic tanks had no sewer system. One of the first things we did our first term of office we put in local sewer system, all your sewer lines, treatment plant, all those things.

H: About when was this?

R: That was late 50s. They said it couldn't be done but anything... we got that problem handled. I think I recall that at that time Paoli was a dry town, you could buy liquor or beer by the bottle but not by the drink. So the way I felt we wasn't bringing liquor to town it was already here, we were just changing the way you serve it so we did, we just quietly passed an ordinance making it legal to buy it by the drink.

H: In the 50s?

R: That was the 60s. We didn't ask anybody. You know when you're on any kind of board it's a hard decision to make, you want to do the best you can, do the right decision, but the more people you ask about it the more you hear both sides of it. For instance I could have bring in liquor by the drink we made our mind up the thing to do, we had an attorney do it on the side, it was all done in a short time, nobody know anything about it 'till it's done.

H: Did you have any protests after it was done? Was there any fuss made about it?

R: I was very surprised, I had one protest and that was of a lady

that doesn't even live in Paoli, she come to me and says Wilson I'm surprised with you doing that. So I tried to tell her my side of the story and I finally said well Milard you don't even live in Paoli, go home, go back where you belong. Another thing we done a local dentist come to us about putting fluoride in the water plant. At that time the question of fluoride there was some for and some against it, if we had announced, brought it up at all we would have had people carrying on. What we done we put fluoride in the water didn't say anything about it. The first time Paoli people knew we had fluoride in the water was when our local mandatory pumping station, the first time they knew about it was when he told the paper the fluoride machine was broken, broke down. People didn't even know they had fluoride.

H: I don't know if you could do that today. But today people want to have a lot more control about what's happening...

R: The thing to do, any board you got to make your own mind up what's right. Because the more you listen the more confused you get... If you make your mind up and decide and do it.

H: And how long were you on the board?

R: 12 years.

H: 12 years, so during those 12 years bringing a sewage system, alcohol and fluoride were some of the biggies...

R: Well we improved the whole electric system, the power lines here in town. And we, I think we did a pretty good job of taking care of the streets and things like that. of course every town has some water problems. People they'll build a house in a low spot where water runs in and causes problems and then they come to town to solve the problems... Well it's a problem, you do what you can for them but if you solve one person's problem you create a problem with somebody else. So all you do in those kind of things is try to help all you can but there's a certain limit.

H: Has the town board changed in how it handles things since you've been on it? Could they make a decision without asking the public now a days? They still can...

R: They have the power, yes.

H: And people wouldn't protest?

R: Well who would protest who? As long as it's legal action. Indiana has a law that anything that the state, all roads are paid for as they're built so in other words we have to pay

END SIDE ONE TAPE THREE

R: The constitution forbids the state from going in debt so this year I read in the paper this year that the state of Indiana has a nice surface build up where other states are having trouble. That's one thing that Indiana should be proud of. In Indiana all public moneys are subject to being checked by the Revenue... Department... every time public money spent this... every unit is audited regularly, has to do your schools, your towns, your county and all that so and those men are over the years they've been very strict. If you don't give, in material politics if you don't handle the money right why you pay for it. So in other words the public tax dollar has been well accounted for, here in Orange County well we're a poor county I feel like our tax dollar here that we pay is well spent even though it may be..., the men running the..., over the years we've had very few public money scandals. Of course, being Democrat it probably doesn't make any body more honest, we've had... people, human nature being what it is we all need to be checked on. Every so often we hear about some church treasurer, or somebody embezzled money. Sometimes people just get tempted too much...

H: A while back you had told me when we were chatting that you were involved in, that you had met two presidential candidates or was it one?

R: I met John Kennedy and Bob.. I met them when they were running. John Kennedy when he come to Indiana and was very impressed by him and then my wife and I went to a rally Bob Kennedy had at New Albany and then I was appointed, I'd asked to serve as Bob Kennedy's chairman for his campaign which involved putting up signs and mostly putting up signs...

H: You were personally impressed with John F. Kennedy?

R: Well, I was impressed with his enthusiasm and his bigger vitality, he was young.

H: How did the town take his assassination? How did Paoli react to that?

R: Oh, I think about the same as every where else, there was sadness... Of course this was Nixon country. If Nixon ran today he would carry Orange County!

H: If Nixon ran today??

R: he if he ran for office today he would still carry Orange

County. This county is that rock-rib Republican.

H: Would you say it's what?

R: Rock rib Republican.

H: I never heard of that.

R: Solid, in other words they always say that Nixon didn't do anything that the Democrats didn't do which is probably true but he got caught at it... Nixon had some good points but the thing that got him in trouble... There's one thing a politician don't care what he does, the thing that will give him more trouble than any thing else is when he lies about something. He can almost do any thing as long as he doesn't lie about it... But lying is I think many people won't stand for it, anybody ....

H: But the fact that the president was shot how did the community react to that?

R: Well, I think most people was sorry to hear about it, it's hard to say of course very few people was a personal contact. I do believe though that people did take their politics more serious than they do today, in other words if you was a Republican or Democrat you..., on both sides they felt the only good man was on their side. For instance when I run for the board here in my elections my favorite adversary was a Republican and I don't recall him ever saying any thing good about me. He couldn't say any thing good,... he didn't say any thing.

H: He didn't say anything?

R: Didn't say a thing. In other words the Republican here in Orange County the attitude was the only good Democrat was a dead Democrat, only good one was a dead one.

H: Can you tell me a little bit more about where did you meet Robert Kennedy?

R: We met him and his wife was down in New Albany at a rally.

H: Oh, I thought that was JFK, I didn't catch that.

R: JFK I met at a rally in Indianapolis when he was a candidate before the primaries see.

H: OK, but you met Robert Kennedy and his wife at New Albany?

R: Yes. And we had a chance to say a few words to him and of

course they were both young men, both full of..., all had ideas. Well, the way I see it the Democrat party over the years has been to make living better for people, people living better directly. The Republicans as a rule they feel like if the businessman is doing well it'll come down to the working man.

H: The trickle down theory.

R: Yes. My wife lived in ?, Alabama during the days of all the colored problems so she saw a lot of those problems down there of how the colored were treated. So she saw how the colored was treated. This country, our country is the most generous country in the world for helping others through our churches and various groups we raise more money for charity and every thing else. How far the government should go in providing help for the homeless and the poor is a big problem to us. You got some poor that don't work 'cause they don't want to work but I think the majority of them, most of them just can't find a job.

H: Well what did you do for, you were at the campaign manager in this county?

R: Well, he didn't get in. Robert Kennedy was only a candidate in the primary and he got killed, so actually he wasn't a candidate very long. But he... lets see now.. he was still alive that year of the primary so he was, got the most votes to be in our local primary.

H: In Orange County he got the most votes for a local primary?

R: For a Democrats that year, I forget now...

H: '68 I think.

R: He was involved, I forget who else was running, he probably a name people still... Of course the Democrat party in Orange County has always been a smallish party here. Of course it wasn't a very heavy, in other words it wasn't a heavy vote see but he still carried it.

H: I think I used the wrong words, you were the Democratic Chairman of...

R: Chairman of Robert Kennedy campaign. I was campaign county chairman.

H: And what did that involve?

R: Well, it didn't involve very much 'cause I didn't get that

'till late. In actual what I found was the \$95 which I spent and also a lot of posters. I spent the money in hiring people to put up the posters.

H: Bill boards? \$95 for billboards? Doesn't go very far though does it?

R: It didn't go very far.

H: So it was only the beginning, maybe you were county chairman a month or two or...?

R: Wasn't over a month.

H: So it was just the beginning and then he was assassinated. Did you get a lot of flack from the community for being a Democrat when here you were a businessman and you just mentioned to me that Republicans like to business success to trickle down, I mean did people think that that was a contradiction in terms for you?

R: Well in this town among the businessmen we've always had a, well what I'm trying to say is in the Republican party the lawyers and all the prominent they were active on the front line, see. On elections see. And democrats many times they were in business most of them kept very quiet about politics. They just didn't, some on account of business, you know who they are, they give you a little money for campaigns but they didn't want to get involved.

H: The Democrats?

R: Most of them didn't want to get involved whereas the Republican party they got involved.

H: You were an exception?

R: yes. I was... everybody knew what I was.

H: ONE of the things that I wanted to ask you was how has your life changed compared to your mother's day, your day and your children's day. How would you say that, how would you compare them, similarities or differences? None of you children live in town, is that correct?

R: Well of course most of my children went to... my son goes to dentist, he had a ? college, my daughter finally got her degree last year, post-graduate work, she's 50 odd years old. But...

H: Your son is a dentist where?

R: Bloomington. But I think I've been fortunate and well having owning a business, a reasonably profitable business. In other words I, we just had a better life than my parents did.

H: Their life economically was harder?

R: Yes. My father worked for a tree cork company?

H: What type of company?

R: Tree cork company.

H: That's right.

R: Never made any money. As we all hope, in other words, all my grandchildren, I have 8 grandchildren they're all doing good.

H: How has their lives, your children's and your grandchildren's lives different than yours? Do they have more opportunity?

R: Well they have... my son and grandson he's actually works for the federal government and he likes that life style. One of the girls works for a roofing company and her boss took her to Russia last year, this past few months on a business trip, they all of them have got good jobs.

H: You have two children?

R: Yes.

H: And how many step children?

R: Helen has one son and one daughter.

H: And then you have 8 grandchildren?

R: if you count them together we have 10 with Helen.

H: You know I think when we chatted before you had mentioned to me that all of your children and grandchildren except for your wife's child are scattered all over the country. That's a difference from your day, people lived closer together, didn't they? I mean you had mentioned that you moved to Paoli 'cause you didn't want to be so far away from you family. And seems like your children...

R: Well, in my daughter's case she had 5 children, they all still live in the same area of Hartford Connecticut, they all live in

that general area. But my son has three children, they're scattered all the way from both coasts, one in Indiana, one in California and one in Washington D.C.; I mean they're scattered more... the daughter's children they all still live around Hartford Connecticut.

H: How would you say that all of your lives are still similar? What's the similarity in all of your lives? How are you still all the same? What hasn't changed?

R: Well, I don't know. The main thing is I don't worry.

H: What about the rest of your family? I'm asking for something that's still similar among all of you. Technology has changed, transportation has changed, and job opportunity has changed, education has improved... What's still kind of a common thread?

R: Mean the whole family. [wife inaudible in background] We all like... we maintain really close ties even though we're scattered. As I mentioned my son has three children and my daughter has five children they over the years haven't seen each other for a number of years but they live in different parts of the country so last year in 1988 I come to the idea that if those of the family would take the time to come to a reunion I would pick up the tab for the motel bill and the main meals. So they all seemed to want to do that so we finally agreed to Youngtown Ohio would be a place that everybody could drive to in one day's time. It took one granddaughter on the West coast and she flew out there. So all 22 we asked to come and 22 come. It started Friday evening... Anyhow all day Saturday and part of Sunday but our main get together was on Saturday night and we... my daughter had a what do you call the thing she had... took pictures...

H: Cam Corder?

R: Cam Corder and she recorded all of it, each room to each person and each would say the things that had happened over their life and I enjoyed the grandchildren. Some hadn't seen each other for 10 years so they got, they really enjoyed it. So now my son and daughter are planning to hold one next year.

H: That's great.

R: In they've decided it would be a little better to pick out a town in Pennsylvania and so far even my... my son's son is divorced but his wife still always come 'cause of her children see. So it's nice that she's... as a matter of fact she is now making plans to attend next year.

H: She comes or just the children?

R: She comes too... After all it's better for the children.

H: So she comes too, that's great.

R: They're better friends now than when they were married.

H: That's great, I'm glad you told me about that. While we're finishing up can you tell me has there been a strong turning point in the history of this community? Or is it something gradual?

R: Well, it's very very gradual. Like I mentioned, like in the last few years we have elected a few Democrats to the local office but it's been very few of them. It's still, more a personal matter.

H: OK, so there hasn't been any major event or major people that came to town that changed the community, it's been a very slow change. Is that correct?

R: Things change here very slowly?

H: And one thing I wanted to ask you, is there any way that your step daughter is there a change in the way the business is going now since your step daughter is running it? Or is it very similar?

R: I'd say minor changes. She's made a few maybe. Of course each person runs a store will have certain things but the overall thing is she has maintained the.... a fairly good stock of items to carry at a fair price. That's what we've always done over all the years.

H: She's maintained the tradition. Did you work in the store until the day that you retired last year at age 84?

R: yes, I worked there. As a matter of fact I retired on July the 1st on account of tax purposes and I probably went in the next couple of weeks, I went in every day and then gradually I just... In other words, running the store you learn by experience and in other words I tried to help all I could but she made a few mistakes... But she learned from it, that's how you learn in any business but she on the whole she doesn't... as a matter of fact she did more business... I had the business the last half of... She had the last half of '88, she did more business in that last half than I did in the last half of '87. So ... and for '89 she's her volume was up.

H: Is it hard to start a new business on the square now?

R: Well, [long pause] to start a new business... I can't see anybody starting business on the square on a one line business and making any money. In other words say shoes or dry goods....

H: OH, so you're saying that the success of your store is that you handle a variety of ....

R: Yes.

H: Why is it so hard you think to handle one item? Like they used to...

R: The volume is not enough. We've had people start a craft shop, that started in ... Everyday up there one department will do good, then this department... you have something to fall back on.

H: How did people make money years ago when there used to be shoe stores on the square?

R: We never did have, this town never did... At one time we had a men's store in shoes but it didn't last very long. Of course, we've had two men's shops here that carry shoes, men's stuff, clothing have done very good.

H: They haven't or they have?

R: They have.

H: Well, why do they do OK, that's only one time?

R: Well they carry men's everything, pants...

H: OH they carry a whole variety of things.

R: Had one lady's store in town they did real well.

H: OK Can you tell me just what are the advantages or disadvantages of living in a small town?

R: Well, the big advantage

H: I can see this coming already...

R: here in Paoli we're big fish, in Bloomington or a bigger town we'd be small fish. So I prefer to be a big fish in a small town

than be a little fish in a big town.

H: You'd rather be a big fish in a small town? OK, very good answer I appreciate it.

R: For instance, over the years it made my daughter all mad because I could call the bank here and anything reasonable I would always get. My credit was good. Her's is good too. You build those things over years. I can call anybody in town, most anybody know my voice, they know who I am and I generally get what I want ...

H: You mean personally, professionally?

R: Anybody I call I tell them who I am, I think the thing to do is to tell them who you are, and my name people know that I ...

END SIDE TWO TAPE THREE

H: You were telling me about the disadvantages and advantages of living in a small town?

R: Well, in a small town you know just about everybody in town. You're interested in their, what happened to them and they're interested in what happened to you. In other words you have more time to know each other better... In the city you have few friends, like I'm recalling as a boy in St. Louis we hardly knew the next door neighbors but here why it's... Of course living in a small town doesn't mean you don't enjoy a lot of the privileges of travel.

H: You mean...

R: You still have available if you want to... In our case we've managed to travel quite a bit to most of your eastern cities. I'm not too fond of Florida because we... we much prefer the... I mentioned before over the years my wife and I have managed to visit most of the eastern cities, most of them... Washington, New York and went to the Bahamas Islands and personally I've made about 15 trips to old Mexico, I've been to most of the main cities in Mexico and the wife and I have enjoyed Acapulco and Mexico City. We've been to the west coast, we both liked Los Vegas were you can have a very, nice vacation if you just use a little common sense and don't try to beat them. The trouble with people who go to Los Vegas if you go with the idea of beating them gambling, you got the wrong idea 'cause a few will win but very very few. But you can have a lot of fun there if you just use a little common sense.

H: So travelling enables you to see a lot of the other world and still maintain...

R: OH, yes.

H: small town closeness and... Are there any disadvantages of living in a small town or doing business in a small town?

R: Well, probably if I was socialized... I used to take steam baths years ago down in West Baden at a place that's now closed but I mean well that type of thing is not available in our little town here. But that's a minor thing. It's what you like, of course the... We've always lived a very busy life here, I mean with being active a little bit in politics, in our church, wife belongs to clubs, and ...

H: Church had been an important part of your life. We didn't talk about that very much.

R: We always tried to be a good member of our Presbyterian. We try to support our church. But we belong to a small church and like I tell them if you want to keep your church those that can have got to pay for it. Of course, the Presbyterians we're probably as nearest Catholic, there's very few sins to us, we can... This town was settled by Quakers, this town is a Quaker settlement. If you know anything about Quakers they had very hard and fast rules about how you lived life, you didn't do this you didn't do that. The Presbyterians, I would tell my Quaker friends, you just do those things but you can't enjoy them. Presbyterians we enjoy them because to us it's no sin.

H: And you always lived in town?

R: Outside of the first ten years I lived in St. Louis.

H: But always in town in Paoli? You didn't live in the country.

R: No, never did.

H: You know one thing I just thought to ask you, did computerization effect at all your store in terms of doing inventory?

R: Yes in fact our system, all your companies now insist on ordering on an automatic system of some type. In other words the we do a certain amount by telephone but every thing... in other words some companies we have to order over the phone but even then they feed the order into the computer.

H: And how long has that been? 10 years? 15 years?

R: It's getting stronger last 10 years.

H: Do see any changes in Paoli for the future?

R: No. We don't want a big business factory coming here because it would create more problem for us than the money it would bring. We... as long as the present factories here can provide enough jobs for practically all of the community why that's ... it's about what we want see.

H: What I'd like to ask you is in the 53 years ? Am I counting this right?

R: 53 years, yes.

H: Can you tell me what were your best and worst times in Paoli?

R: Well,...

H: That's a tough one I know.

R: We always ... we been fortunate in always having a the business ... the first store on the square and was there for about 30 years it was a smaller store we made a living but didn't make any money.

H: At the corner where you told me before?

R: Yes, we made a living but never made real living as we did when we had our own building and moved and business got better and better.

H: You've only moved once?

R: Once.

H: So that was like your best times in terms of...

R: Well, roughly we paid out \$50,000 in rent at the first building and all we had for it was cancelled checks. In the other building in a few years we had it paid off...

H: When did you make that move?

R: About 22 years ago.

H: And do they both have parking or only the second building.

R: Second building has parking.

H: So that was one of your better times in Paoli when you ....

R: That made a better life, yes.

H: What was one of your worst times here?

R: Well we never had any bad times here. I told you earlier the business in a variety store is, doesn't have your ups and downs your other businesses have. We always had enough business coming in to pay our bills, I never been ...

H: It doesn't have to be a professional best or worst. It could be community best or worst time or a personal best or worst.

R: Well I've been fortunate, of course I lost my first wife that was a tragedy and ... well I mentioned earlier I've been fortunate in having two good marriages.

H: A very lucky man to me.

R: I am. Here we are sitting right here, our income is more than double our needs. And we're in a small group of older people that their income is more than their needs are.

H: I think anybody who can't tell me a worst time or a worst memory that he's had is quite a lucky guy and I'm really happy to have met you just for that reason. What a healthy attitude.

R: Well, I mentioned earlier there most of us worry too much, if you stop and think. Years ago I read or heard some place that 9 things out of 10 to worry about never happen. The thing to do, I've had some problems but when you have a problem all you can do is do the best you can about it and hope for the best and it always worked out. For instance, I been checked once in my life by the IRS which is always something we kind of dread.

H: But it wasn't your worst memory.

R: Well, the only problem I had was that I didn't have a stock inventory, actual physical stock. But we worked out that, we worked out that minor problem with the IRS. The whole thing comes down to the IRS they probably know more about you than you do about yourself. And if you start paying too much money they want to know where it comes from. As long as you..., so I always pay everything with checks and if they want to ask... As a matter of fact we've got a problem right now about ... my son in law done

my tax work and he had quite a worry about handling the business over to the daughter 'cause we sold it to her at discount price. he was afraid of the gift tax. But he got ... so we got to get CPA audit to have him out and luckily the law has been changed now that you can give your people more money, used to be a limit but it's been raised quite a bit. Our sale of the store to in the family will still stay inside the gift clause... We're in good health, my wife she's got some minor problems all caused by stress, her hands are breaking out. It's a stress problem, she worries too much. Maybe I don't worry enough. Worrying don't solve no problem. We enjoy life, we enjoy... we've always taken... in the town we're involved in some school matter here and local matters... we always try to help all we can. Like I said, the original statement was each of us gets back what we put into his life, you get back out of life what you put into it. I try to put into Paoli and other things my share and turned out I got more than my share back.

H: Finally, this is a community history project about Paoli, is there anything you feel that's important for people to know about this town that we haven't talked about?

R: I don't think there's anything unusual about it. It's a typical small... As a matter of fact years ago I think Life magazine wrote it was a typical small town which I think it is. People here...

H: Well can you tell me maybe about the award that we chatted about informally?

R: Well, I've been a member of the local Lion's club a number of years and the highest award they have is called [tape off].

H: I'm sorry I shut off the recorder for a second, can you say that again?

R: In the Lion's club which I'm a member of the highest award that they give, that the average member can receive is what they call a Melvin Jones Fellow which is made up of those that have worked for their community and done good things. It's a really small group, only around 20,000 people that ever get that and last year my club picked me for this award. It involved them paying out \$1,000 which they did.

H: They had to pay \$1,000 for the award. And it's a service award.

R: It's for people that have been involved in their community and worked for local Lion club. We have a local man here who has all

the good signs of a teacher, one of the best for a small town, his students are in the top bracket, over the years he has certain things he wants to do that he had no funds for. So over the years I've always, if he gets short of \$50-\$100 I tell him to come see me and I help him out. The local humane society we help with some, we have a nice shelter here to take care of the animals, we got problems but it's operating. We've had a good life.

H: You were talking about the humane society?

R: Yes, we have a group here that's very dedicated to, they will raise the money and build the building to house these stray animals see and ...

H: Is that a fairly new building?

R: Last five years probably. Of course we had a small hospital out here. We had not hospital out here for years, we all chipped in and we got it built.

H: And that's recent as well?

R: It's now been 20 years or better but ... One of the best groups any young men belong to is the Junior Chamber of Commerce, I was a member for age 21-35 only see. Myself and a number of others here in town through that association we got involved in local civic matters, in other words here in Paoli here we have a real nice local park here that years ago the JC started it and over the years with the help of the whole community they got a nice pool down there and a nice picnic area and all the things of a park.

H: Something that I want to ask you, is this generosity and community spirit typical of Paoli or is it a select group of people?

R: No, I don't think ... Anybody mention to you a fellow named Strauss?

H: yes.

R: You heard what he did in town?

H: I heard about him.

R: Well that's...

H: Tell me about him.

R: It just shows what one man can do with a little money. When he lived he wasn't regarded very highly.

H: And then Levy Strauss?

R: Faul Strauss. Nobody knew about it but he was never married, had not family as a matter of fact when somebody asked him where he got his money, he said he didn't spend it, he saved money as best... Anyhow when he died he was worth, he left his estate, the income from it to go to the hospital here in Paoli and part for the youth of Paoli. So every year they've had several thousand dollars that goes to the Boys Scout and Girl Scouts and all kinds of things see. But it's been one of those things that gives the youth of this town some money.

H: What did Mr. Strauss do in town?

R: He owned a dry goods store.

H: So the generosity of giving back to the community has lived in this town? You'd say that's a real strong feature of this community? It's not just something that you do but other people do as well?

R: Some more than others. He did more than others,...

H: He's an exception.

R: Yes.

H: Is there anything else that you'd like to tell us before we quit, something that you've left out about yourself or your life or the town of Paoli?

R: I have some strong views on several things, the question of abortion which today is a big issue. I don't feel that any man has any right to..., it's strictly women's business. I think it's..., I mean I'm against abortion but I also understand that how some problem is involved in it. And another thing I'm very ? with: regularizing drugs.

H: Regulizing what?

R: Legalizing drugs.

H: OK and why is that?

R: You remember prohibition?

H: No, I don't remember [laughter].

R: Ok, we went through this once this liquor. Liquor is a much worse problem, liquor today is a bigger problem to us than drugs as a whole. More people are killed on account of alcohol, accidents and things, it would be ideal if we could get rid of drugs but the demand is so great... it's like it was with prohibition, we've tried it and it failed. The biggest thing to do is take the profit out of it, remove the pusher and the profit.

H: And use it for some good?

R: Use it for education. We're..., the thing is again, in other words legalizing is not the ideal thing but it's a better way of controlling it than we are now because we're losing the battle now.

H: Kind of an unpopular view point to hold though isn't it?

R: More and more people are coming to it.

H: You think so.

R: It'll be legal in ten years. I think our... politicians should be limited terms, we lose some good men but we gain more than we lose. What it's turn into now is almost impossible to make a change.

H: You talking about Senators or...?

R: Senators and the House. As I see the biggest problem, don't care with either party, those men go there meaning well, want to do things. But they get over there and they get into that town, spend so much money they lose the value of a dollar. I tell you we got some, take the farm program we got, I'm not an expert but I know the farmers have problems but just how far does the government go to help them out... They lose out.

H: So you're saying we should have limited representation in Washington?

R: I think the term should be limited.

H: Get fresh blood. Well, I'd like to thank for all the time that I spent here, I really appreciated learning everything that I did and I'd like to thank both you for the interview and you wife, Helen Roberts, for her hospitality. And it's been a pleasure

ROBERTS

meeting you, thank you.

R: We enjoyed having you.

END OF INTERVIEW

INDEX

3-D 3  
Coca-Cola 11, 12, 27  
Corydon 1  
Crawford County 5  
Depression 21, 22, 24, 25  
St. Louis 1, 4, 44, 45  
Vietnam 32, 33  
Walmart 5, 9, 10, 13, 15

Interview with John Wilson Roberts, p. 53. Conducted by Chrystyna Huk, 4  
August 1989, Paoli, Indiana. Indiana University Center for Documentary Research  
and Practice, OHRC accession #88-100-1, 2, 3, 4