JOHN GURDA'S INTERVIEW WITH MATT SCHAUER
1978

John: We were talking before about some of the jobs you've held over the years. I want to talk about some of them again. Could you begin by telling me about your family's history in Bay View - when they came and from where.

Matt: Well, my Dad was born in Kewaunee County and he came to Milwaukee in I believe it was around 1884 and him and an uncle of mine had a blacksmith, horshoeing and wagon shop at the corner of Kinnickinnic and Becher until the early 20's. Around 1911 he was the first disbributor for General Motors trucks.

John: So he went from horses to cars.

Matt: Yes, but he had a chance to sell this property in the 20's, he was getting up in age and so they sold the property to Louis Allis Co. to use that building down on Becher as a storeroom. And on the corner of Kinnickinnic and Becher which now is a restaurant -- it used to be the Ramshead, they just changed the name of that restaurant.

John: The K K Junction or something like that.

Matt: Yes, well that's where I was born and raised on that corner there. I was born there in 1891.

John: So you are 86?

Matt: Well, I'll be 87 in August.

John: Why did he pick that corner? Why did he pick Bay View when he came to Milwaukee:

Matt: Well, that I really don't know.

John: Was he serving some of the industries in the area?

Matt: Well, yes -- in them days all transportation was by horses, you know, and the Wisconsin Ice & Coal Co. had their big ice house which is now 1st St. which used to be Clinton St. across from Vilter Mfg. Co. And Milwaukee Western Fuel was down at just south of the Kinnickinnic Bridge on the east side of Kinnickinnic Ave. Pfister & Vogel used to be right off of Stewart St. and all those plants had plenty of horses.

Matt: And then the plant and glass works which was across the tracks from the Milwaukee Valve Co. where they made all the beer bottles and they must have had at least 30 to 40 horses.

John: So all those horses needed shoeing.

Matt: That's right and especially in the winter time my Dad would shoe at least 125 to 150 horses in one day. Then he also took care of the Fire Department horses and even the Police Department horses.

John: Was there much competition in the neighborhood?

Matt: No, not down there. The closest one was on Potter Avenue.

John: There is something that I have seen on some of the old maps. The whole area up there around Kinnickinnic between Lincoln and Bay and Lincoln and Becher. One map showed there was a European Statuary Co.

Matt: That was on Potter Ave.

John: I know, that is the one that Stemper has now. But I thought that was the only one in Bay View and I just happened to be looking at a map .....

Matt: It used to be right south of St. Lucas Lutheran Church on the other side of the street, the east side of the street was an organ factory years ago. But Stemper was the only place that I knew was, that made statues.

John: Maybe that was the location for one year for somebody - that was in 1890.

Matt: There was a place on Austin St., south of Lincoln, that probably made statues -- I just don't remember what they did. They did church furniture. That could have been the place.

John: Did you live in the area north of Lincoln along K. K. until you were out working.

Matt: Well, we lived there until I was around 13 years old and my Dad built a new home on South Delaware about two blocks south of Oklahoma. Oklahoma at that time was the city limits and the horse had an awful time pulling a milk wagon down along Oklahoma Ave. because it was all sand just like along the lake shore. The wheels would sink in about 6" so they had quite a time trying to get through there.

John: Was it pretty much country when your family moved out.

Matt: Well, it was a lot of fields, you know, woods out there.

John: Now that's the Fernwood district?

Matt: That's right.

John: So you were 13, that would have been what about 1905 or so.

Matt: 1904, yeah!

John: Was it developing during that time or were you kind of the first people out there.

Matt: Well, it was pretty well developed. We had the old wooden sidewalks. There wasn't much street improvements. And, at the St. Francis Seminary there was a creek that run on an angle Northwest across Illinois, Indiana and Delaware Avenue. It run into a big sewer just south of Oklahoma Avenue and during heavy rains this water would wash a lot of leaves and branches down there and plug up this big sewer -- they had a screening over this big sewer. And during World War I all this water run down Delaware Avenue and along Delaware north of Oklahoma people were in there with rowboats and canoes.

John: They had no choice -- to get across to the other parts of Bay View.

Matt: Well, at that time I was driving truck for the Thomas Furnace Co. that made pig iron and they were north of the Kinnickinnic Bridge right near where the Pere Marquette Carferry dock was and they disposed of their slag -- they run this slag into a big pen of water. They pulverized that slag, then with a clam shell they loaded up on these dump trucks and we filled up along the lake shore especially south of Russell Avenue. We filled that whole lake shore up there. You know where that big Bay View apartment is? Well, just kiddy corner from that apartment on what they call Ontario St., at that time it wasn't South Shore Drive it was Beulah Ave. My wife and I lived upstairs there. We had 4 rooms and a bath and I paid $8.00 a month rent.

John: Boy, you couldn't touch that for $300 now.

Matt: Course we had stove heat.

John: Going back aways, the area you first lived in around Becher and K.K. Now, that's part of the Bay View neighborhood. Did you see it when you were growing up as apart from other sections of Bay View, say the area along the lake or the area around Humboldt Park.

Matt: Well, course there wasn't much improvement down there until they widened South Bay which now I believe they call it East Bay. Years ago it was South Bay. And those days I was driving these trucks nights -- I worked 13 hours a night, 7 nights a week. I worked 91 hours a week and we didn't know what a windshield was, all we had was a cellulois curtain for a windshield and during the winter or a heavy rain I had to roll that curtain up because you couldn't see and always carried a suit of oilskins and around 5:00 or 5:30 in the morning all these fish wagons from Jones Island would come down, horse drawn come down South Bay and we used to buy fish there for maybe 10¢ - 12¢ a pound. I'd bring fish home a couple times a week.

John: So you wore the oilcloth just to -- it was almost like being a sailor -- because of the weather.

Matt: Oh, sure.

John: What were some of the nationalities that were living up in that area? In the area of K.K. and Becher?

Matt: Well, it was a mixture of everything -- Polish and German there was Hungarians.

John: Was the same thing true when you got down to Lincoln Ave. and Howell. Was most of Bay View mixed or were there pockets?

Matt: There was a mixture. When you got out further, see like I belonged to Immaculate Conception Church at Kinnickinnic and Russell. Years ago that was an Irish Parish -- the majority of the parishioners were Irish. But later on we got the Italian little districts here and we had a lot of Italians. Now there is a mixture of everything, mostly Polish, I guess. You know if someone asks me what nationality I am, I always tell them I am an American. I am of Bohemian descent -- what do I know about Bohemia or any foreign country, isn't that right?

John: Unless you've been over there.

Matt: Well, a lot of people will answer that they are German, but they are of German descent but they are American.

John: By nationality.

Matt: That's right.

John: I guess the word I usually use is ethnic -- just to describe your heritage and nationality seems to be the popular word, the only word that people understand. But Schauer sounds like a German name.

Matt: Well, I think -- see what I was told that the Bohemia was right along the German border and there was a lot of intermarriage down there.

John: The same thing with my family, my Grandmother's maiden name was Hoeft you know which is Polish on my dad's side. Hoeft sounds like a German name but it was in that part of Poland that bordered Germany.

Matt: Then there has been a lot of people that changed their names too. You can't go by names today. A lot of them have shortened their names.

John: Were you raised in a very Bohemian household at all? Were there any customs that you carried out?

Matt: To a certain extent. My mother and father could talk Bohemian. They only time that they would talk was if they wanted to carry on a conversation that they didn't want us children to hear.

John: Did you have a lot of Bohemian friends in the neighborhood?

Matt: No, no. Down there it was mostly German and Polish and my dad being in business down there he was able to -- he had no trouble picking up the Polish language and the German language -- a lot of these Polish people beyond Becher St. and Lincoln Ave. bridges that couldn't talk English at all so he had to -- he finally learned how to converse with them. He had an awful lot of business from the Polish people up there.

John: Who were the biggest employers in the Bay View area during that time, in the early 1900's?

Matt: Well, I would say at that time Filer & Stowell, Vilter's, Pfister & Vogel and I remember when I was a yard clerk Nordberg, which is now up at Oklahoma, they were just a real small plant. I remember when they actually started business there. See same as Heil. Most of those firms started down around which is now South 1st and Virginia, South 1st and Pittsburgh Ave. They started down there and then expanded out here. Allis Chalmers had their plant which is now South 1st and National Avenue and then they built their plant out there in West Allis -- that was right out in the country, they actually made West Allis.

John: During that time were the glass works and the rolling mill very big employers?

Matt: Yeah, the rolling mills, I forgot about them. They employed a lot of people.

John: Did they draw mostly from the area around the lake or did they draw from all over.

Matt: Well, I tell you they had an awful lot of people from the Polish ancestry and those fellas would walk anywhere from 16th Street and maybe further they'd walk all the way down to the rolling mill. Streetcar fare was only a nickel but they saved the nickel and they all had these three story dinner buckets. See, down at the mill there -- I worked down there several times and run those dinky locomotives down there and the fellas maybe would bring a piece of steak or pork chops and down at work they had their frying pan and when these hot billets coming out of the furnaces there, all they had to do was set their frying pan or their coffee pot on top of these hot billets and they'd all have warm meals. And then at the lake there, where the water came into the intake, there was a screen there and all they had to do was go down there with a net and catch them beautiful big perch, what they called lawyers, and they would clean put an onion and butter inside of them and salt and peppar and they'd have some of that regular butcher paper and roll them up in that paper and set them up on the furnace there and cooked them. They called them domers.

John: Domers? How would you spell that?

Matt: I don't know, that's what they used to call them. They were really good.

John: They put them up on the blast furnce?

Matt: Yeah, they would put them into the furnace and bake them. You can even do that here at home in an oven.

John: 'Cept they probably don't have the same kind of controls on the blast furnace.

Matt: See they all worked 12 hour shifts and it was 6:00 in the morning until 6:00 in the evening and the night crew worked 6:00 in the evening to 6:00 in the morning and at 5:00, the mill whistle would blow -- one long blast and five short -- and then at 6:00, it would do the same thing -- one long blast and six short blasts to let the people of Bay View what time it was. All your factories had whistles them days.

Matt: The whistles were for starting time and noon and also quitting time. You don't hear that any more. Even on New Year's Eve all the whistles in the city would be blowing at midnight on New Year's Eve. and all the church bells.

John: Compared it with some of the other employers around the area. Were the mills considered hard and dirty or was it considered a good type paying job.

Matt: Well, it was average pay but it was a very good place to work. All they wanted was a good day's work, they didn't try to hound the men trying to get more out of them. It was a very good place to work.

John: They called it Soldier's Home because the men all stayed?

Matt: That's right. There were fellas who worked there -- the only job they ever had was down there.

John: Was there a lot more turnover in a place like Pfister & Vogel or Filer & Stowell?

Matt: Well, Pfister & Vogel usually worked all year round. Now Fred Vogel when he was a young man and out of high school, he graduated either Yale or Harvard, one of them Eastern Colleges, and his father he was a real old German and Fred Vogel had to work through the entire plant and the first job that he had was unload box cars of hides that were rolled up and tied up with rope. And if you ever want to smell something rotten -- I used to walk by them cars and hold my breath and that's where he started. And he worked in every department of the tannery until he eventually he got to be President and he used to walk through the plant and call men by their first name because he worked with these fellas, he was a friend of theirs. And he knew the conditions of every department and you see that's your trouble today -- these young fellas that had that same opportunity don't get that experience.

John: I heard that same thing said about Nordberg -- he used to walk through the departments and knew people pretty well.

Matt: Well, I think it creates a lot of closeness among the company. Isn't that right?

John: That's for sure. From some of the reading I've done about the rolling mill again -- it seems that in the beginning at least an awful lot of the workers were from England, Scotland and Wales. Did that continue to be true after 1900?

Matt: Oh, yes, because even my landlord when I lived up there which is now South Shore Drive, Mr. Williams he was and his wife both were from England.

John: And he worked as a skilled worker at the mill? What did he do?

Matt: Oh, yes. I don't know. Now you take, I knew Mr. McCormick he was a roller down there, in fact his home was on Russell Avenue where the Bay View High School is now. It was a wonderful family. Well, Dr. Fran McCormick, he died. Dr. Bob McCormich, he was a Dentist and Joe McCormich he worked in the Taxation Department at Madison for years and Tom was an Ear, Eye and Nose Specialist -- he was in the Wells Bldg. for 37 years. In fact, then he moved up to Prospect and North Avenue and he was in this office with his son-in-law, Dr. McLaughlin. In fact, I got these glasses from Dr. McLaughlin -- he's an eye specialist but Tom was a couple years older than I am and I never called him Doc, I always called him Tom and whenever I was up there I'd stop in and pay him a visit. Well, he just died about a year and a half ago. He was 89 years old. This Mr. McCormick raised a wonderful family and he was, he worked down at the mill as a roller. Rollers at that time they'd make about $6.00 a day which was big money.

John: It was? What time would that have been?

Matt: Well, I'm going back to say before 1910.

John: $6.00 a day.

Matt: Yeah, same as the glass blowers down at the glass works. They made around $5.00 to $6.00 a day and see they blew all them bottles through a tube and kids 14 years old worked down there carrying these bottles in a, well they had a rod with a container where they could carry these bottles and the kids made $3.00 a week.

John: I was talking to a man named Joe Soltes. That was his first job. He was 13 years old.

Matt: Soltes, Soltes.

John: He had a jewelry store up on K.K.

Matt: Yes. He used to be -- the jewelry store just north of Lincold Avenue.

John: He lives over here about a block away.

Matt: He does.

John: On K.K. Across the street from the American Legion Post. He started out at the glass works and then he went on to the mill. He was talking about this too, you were saying that the rolling mill employed a lot of Poles and a lot of English,

John: British and so on. Did those two groups have different kinds of jobs in the mill.

Matt: Yes, you take the English and I guess there were Scotman and they had a little better job than Poles -- most of them were just commom laborers. At that time, most of them Polish fellas couldn't talk English at all. They were immigrants, you know.

John: So they did the shoveling and the carrying ---

Matt: That's right. And everything was done with the shovel compared to today with all your modern machinery that is taken even on street work today. Years ago the ditches were dug by hand, you know today one of those shovels will come along and they will dig that trench up in a couple of hours. They don't work as hard today as they did years ago.

John: How did you happen to be working there at the mill?

Matt: Well, between jobs -- I first started jobs railroading and I got laid off. All I'd have to do was go down to the mill, a fella name of Ernie Brunk was the gate man. There would be 50 people standing there waiting for a job and Ernie would let me in the mill and all I'd have to do was go back and see a fella by the name of Eddie Pierce or Wally Neleel, a Chief Electrician, and I'd go to work rubbing these electric trains, these steam shovels.

John: Did you know these people from growing up?

Matt: No, I don't know. I worked there once and they probably took me -- that's one thing wherever I worked I always tried to give them a full days work. I always feel this way if you try to goof off and kill time that old clock don't move very fast, isn't that right? You're almost better to keep yourself busy. Oh, then I drove these trucks for the Thomas Furnace Co. and that blast furnace is lined with fire brick. And toward the end of World War I that furnace was in pretty bad condition and they were a little afraid there was a break through, the fire brick was all crumbled away and when Armistice Day came they closed the place down and they were building this Lakeside Power Plant out here -- you know where that is -- and it was around the first of December I went out there and all that was up was this ? and there was a Pittsburgh firm that was putting in all the shafting conveyor for the conveyors. See that was the way they fired them furnaces years ago when they pulverized all their coal and then blew it in under pressure so I applied for a job there and the Superintendent asked me if I knew

Matt: how to line up shafting and I said yes I used to do it down at the mill so here I worked up about 6 stories on this structural iron up there with just planks up there. In fact while I was there they were building them big smoke stacks two men fell off them smoke stacks. And gee all we had was that northeast wind -- oh, I darn near froze on that job up there and at that time Ford Motor Co. had their plant up on Prospect between Prospect and Farwell and Kenilworth. That building is still up there and my cousin worked up there and he told me that they were hiring so I went up there one morning, he had told me the Superintendent's name, and all Prospect Avenue there must have been 20 or 30 men, even men in uniform, that was looking for work. I dressed up as though I was going to a wedding and I walked to the north end of the building on Kenilworth and I went up to an old gentleman and asked to see Mr. Meyer. So he takes me through the office into Mr. Meyer's private office anda there was nobody in there and I pictured Mr. Meyer as a Superintendent to be a man in his 50's. Finally a young man come in and picked up the phone receiver and was talking on the phone and I'm sitting there and finally he hung the receiver up and asked me what he could do for me. I said "are you Mr. Meyer" and he said "yes." Well, you know I used to sell life insurance at one time and you gotta use a little psychology. It would be the same if I came to your house and asked you do you want to buy life insurance. The first answer you'd give me would be "no." You got to create a desire first, isn't that right? I introduced myself and started to tell Mr. Meyer my experience in the automobile business. I told him I had worked in Detroit for the General Motors and I also worked for the Ford Plant in Detroit and I asked him, I told him I just wondered if he would have an opening for me. He started shaking his head, "no" he said -- "wait a minute" he said, "do you think you could handle a job on the line?". I said "yes." He said "come along with me." We went into the plant and he introduced me to the foreman, Mr. Knoll, and he said I could make arrangements with Mr. Knoll and I thanked him and Mr. Knoll asked me, he said "Schauer, where do you live?" I said "Bay View". He said "what was your dad's name?" I told him and he said "heck, I know your dad." He belonged to the same lodge, some lodge that my dad belonged to. So I went to work the next morning and I worked there about 3 months 'til Spring and around the end of the war I took a Civil Service examination for the City of Milwaukee and in April I was called to go to work for the City of Milwaukee.

John: What kind of work?

Matt: Driving truck. It was quite a stiff examination but I passed the examination.

John: And you stayed with the City for 30 years until you retired?

Matt: Well, I retired in '51 and at the time the City of Milwaukee did not have any Social Security so I went out to Ladish and a friend of mine Mr. Dunn was the first mill man out there and he gave me a job in the shipping department. So I worked long enough out there to receive Social Security.

John: I see. You are getting kind of ahead of the story. You are saying you worked for the City and before that it was Ford, then the Power Plant, then the Illinois Steel Co. When the rolling mill closed their blast furnaces down, did that pretty much shut them down for a long time or....

Matt: You mean, the blast furnaces was not the rolling mill. This was down at the Thomas Furnace Co. north of the Kinnickinnic Bridge.

John: The Thomas Furnace Co. had a blast furnace too?

Matt: Oh, yes. Down where the Pere Marquette carferry used to land, on the north side of the Kinnickinnic River and east of the Kinnickinnic bridge.

John: So they were making pig iron too?

Matt: Oh, yes. They made a special pig iron, yes. Because you see down at the blast furnaces down at the mill when they run their iron they had big ladles, they were almost as big as this room, on the railer tracks and they'd run this slag into these big ladles and then the switch engine would pull that ladle right along the edge of the lake and they had a big wheel there, they'd turn that wheel and all that hot melted slag run into the lake and it used to light the entire sky of Bay View.

John: Really? They put it in there when it was still molten?

Matt: Yes. They had a way of getting rid of their slag down there but the Thomas Furnace Co. had to run their slag into this big pit of water which pulverized it, it looked almost like sand then, and this big clam shell would scoop it out of this pit of water and stockpile it and then they would load up these trucks. These trucks run day and night.

John: Where would they dump it?

Matt: All along the lake. You take just east of that big apartment there. You went there -- that stuff has forned into like a solid rock, that slag. And all along that lake there was filled with slag and then also the North Shore -- I don't know if you remember the North Shore Electric Lines -- the south end of what was 5th Street, it run over a trussel and this trussel was set up on regular pilings and we also filled part of that trussel with that slag.

John: That's on 5th just north of Oklahoma?

Matt: Well, it's about across from old Lindeman Hoverson at Cleveland Ave. And then we used to stockpile the ward yards around the city and they used that slag to throw on the streets after they tarred them. They used the slag instead of sand because the slag absorbed more oil and was more porous than sand.

John: It was kind of like cinders, wasn't it?

Matt: Yeah, that's right.

John: So, you drove truck for Thomas Furnace and you worked at the rolling mill.

Matt: Well, certain times, yes.

John: There's something I guess other people have told me about would be kind of like the Fourth of July every night at the rolling mill but some people, from what I've read, was the blast furnaces but the flame they saw was actually the slag being dumped.

Matt: That's right. You mean the reflection in the sky? That was from the hot slag. It lit up the entire sky.

John: When did those plants --- I guess I want to talk about the Depression. What effect did the Depression have on places like Illinois Steel and Filer & Stowell and all those plants along the .....

Matt: Well, see about the time when they closed the mill up. The mill was owned by the United States Steel Corp. and I forget -- it was around '28 or '29 when they closed the plant up. And, with their big plant down in Gary, you know, they could handle all the business they had. They used to make a lot of rails down here -- these small rails that they used in elevators and also this round iron like 1/2", 1" round iron and that stuff would shoot over the beds and then they'd cut it certain lengths and would drop down to the pocket and it would be wired -- big heavy wiring and then the crane would

Matt: pick it up and put it in these gondolas or coal cars, to be shipped out.

John: And so did they close because U. S. Steel had a better plant in Gary?

Matt: I think so, yeah. And this plant a lot of it was getting out of date, you know. More modern machinery down there in Gary and, of course, like here the blast furnaces were getting pretty old so they never invested any money to make any improvements.

John: So they were kind of tailing off in the 1920's?

Matt: And see down along the river was the, is where the boats used to come in with iron ore and they would unload it there and haul it over to the blast furnace.

John: Did the rest of those companies close during the Depression? All the ones along Bay Street?

Matt: Well, they didn't close but they were working with a skeleton crew.

John: Do you think the Depression hit Bay View harder than it did other places in Milwaukee?

Matt: Well, I don't think so, I think it hit all manufacturing places 'cause there was no demand for anything, you know. Even hit, of course the --- things started to perk up after prohibition ended especially in the beer business. Yeah, that was quite a thing when beer come back.

John: What year was that, that it came back?

Matt: '33 or '34, I think '33.

John: Was that kind of a symbol of the Depression ending too?

Matt: No, well, the end, of course, gradually in the 30's it -- things started to boom gradually because I guess they could see a war coming on and things gradually started improving toward the end of the 30's.

John: To take Bay View. This is something I'm having a hard time getting ahold of. It seems there was a big change in Bay View when the Depression -- the effects were pretty well worn off in the late '30's. But Bay View as a neighborhood before the Depression and after the Depression was quite different. Now is that something that you see too, you know, was the area quite different?

Matt: Well, yes. Well, of course, the old timers, now you take my dad and my uncle I remember when I was a kid, in fact when I was railroading, the Kinnickinnic Savings & Loan it's on the corner of Kinnickinnic and Lincoln, the Directors used to hold their meetings in my dad's office down on Becher St. And a ...

John: At the blacksmith shop?

Matt: He had an office there and then they held it at a fella named Martin Meeces tailor shop, I don't know if you remenber where Wisnewski had a store on Kinnickinnic Avenue? Well, in them days the north part of that building was a tailor shop and the south part was a grocery store and they held their Director's Meetings in this tailor shop and then later on they had a little office, well, just north of Lincoln on the east side of Kinnickinnic Avenue. My uncle that was in business with my dad was the first President of the Kinnickinnic Savings & Loan. Well, then my dad, I don't know, he switched over and went to St. Francis Savings & Loan. My dad was a director of the St. Francis Savings & Loan for years and in '46 or was it '47 my dad was killed by a hit and run driver. I often wondered if all these old time Directors -- Norman Gilles, for an example, he was a Director, he had an office down on Kinnickinnic Avenue there and I often wondered if those fellas could come back and see the office they've got today out here -- they just built another big addition to it.

John: So, things gradually got more and more sophisticated?

Matt: That's right and things changed as the older businessmen died off, you know. You take years ago, at the corner of Becher and Kinnickinnic on the southwest corner there is a parking lot there -- that used to be Fleck's furniture store, a 3 story brick building and when I was a kid and Kunzelmann of the Kunzelmann Esser furniture store, Mr. Kunzelmann was a carpet layer for Fleck's Furniture store. See, those days they would lay carpeting right to the wall and tack it. They didn't have the method they have today and that's what Mr. Kunzelmann did, he was a carpet layer. Then Fleck's built a new store down on which is now South 1st north of Mitchell Street where it runs into South 1st on the west side -- they built the store there and Kunzelmann, he had a store, a small store up on Mitchell St. -- 7th & Mitchell.

John: It's still there.

Matt: Well, of course, he's dead. But the store is still there.

Matt: So, Fleck's, they went broke down below there -- that was no place for a store, it was more a manufacturing district.

John: I would like your opinion on this -- because you were certainly there and you were working -- the one impression I have is that you take Bay View between 1900 and the 1920's after World War I, it was pretty much working man's neighborhood, people worked in factories along Bay St. and along Becher St. and along Chase Ave. and the mill and it was a pretty modest, not real rich and not real fancy neighborhood at all, pretty much blue collar. The impression I have is that that is the way it was before the Depression and then the change was that after the Depression was over and things got better, you know in the late 30's, you began to see fewer blue collar workers and more white collar and the less dependence on industry and more on office jobs downtown. Is that true?

Matt: That's right. See them days even when I was a kid, well I don't really know what percentage of the kids went to high school. See, in those days we had no Bay View High School. And these kids out in Bay View, you take in the morning why Kinnickinnic Avenue was crowded with kids hiking to South Division and every one of those kids had a package of lunch under their arms. They would walk way up to South Division -- they weren't afraid to walk. Streetcar fare was only a nickel but they walked up there. The only time they took the streetcar was in bad weather and they ate this cold lunch at noon and walked all the way home. Today I can't see they gotta have a hot lunch the same way you see these high school kids today from Bay View at McDonalds. I stop in there once in awhile. They gotta have a regular meal at noon. Now, that to me is ridiculous.

John: Would you say that high school gave people an advantage to advance?

Matt: Well, of course, later on -- I don't know what year it was, kids had to go to school until 16 or 18? Then it was compulsory. I feel sorry for these kids today, a lot of them are just wasting time in school. Where during my time kids would get out of grade school and sign for the apprentice. I know fellas that by the time they were 18 or 20 years old they were plumbers, carpenters, electricians -- they learnt their trades. Sure they probably only started for $3.00 a week but by the time they were 18 or 20 years old they had a trade learned. Now in my case I started working before I was 14 and when I got married at age 22 I'd even been around the country, I'd had a lot of experience.

Matt: Where these kids today they get out of high school and they are not even dry behind the ears yet and then they want to get married and then they want a home better than the parents had. I feel sorry for them because in buying these homes today they will be in debt for the rest of their lives.

John: You don't have much choice though with the prices today.

Matt: Well, I still say they are better off in rent.

John: And waiting for the bottom to fall out?

Matt: Absolutely, it's bound to, it's got to. I hate to see it but this thing cannot continue -- every year and every time a contract expires everybody wants more money. It won't be long electricians today getting $17.00 an hour, that's ridiculous. Look at the price of food -- you take the lower class people or the retirees they can hardly buy meat or fruit -- look at fruit is today, it's ridiculous.

John: Hamburger is a buck a pound now.

Matt: Yes. I see celery here the other day -- over a dollar a bunch. Now they got peaches 59¢ - 69¢ a pound. If you have two or three children and you want to buy some peaches for them you could spend $5.00 for peaches.

John: But during the time -- I guess this would refer to the present too -- a lot of people got better educations and better jobs and so on.

Matt: That's right. Gradually -- well then I think radio had a lot to do with it and also television. That was very educational for the younger generation, you know. They even use all that electronic equipment in schools too. I think it improved their education.

John: So things improved in Bay View. Back then, you know, say in the 30's and even today, were there different parts of Bay View -- very distinct sections of Bay View -- where you could say this is kind of the Gold Coast and this is the low rent district.

Matt: Oh, yes. When you get up around Superior St., up in that neighborhood, that was actually the Gold Coast, you know.

John: Was there much contact between that area and the area around K.K. and the area around Humboldt Park?

Matt: Well, they were, I don't know, the people of Bay View were always friendly regardless of what district -- they was always friendly to each other. And, you take even your Italian district down there, those people were to me wonderful. They were very friendly -- like during World War I when I lived on Beulah Avenue, we did most of our shopping at Groppi's and he was one wonderful man. And I understand the Mrs. is still alive. The oldest boy, I think his name is John -- he is a dead ringer to his dad.

John: This area around Mabbett and Trowbridge -- has this area changed much since you moved in, what, 59 years ago?

Matt: Well, no. Of course it's changed as far as people for the simple reason, I'm about -- like in this block, there's only, I'm about the oldest person in this block and the last. Practically all of them are dead -- they're gone. I go up the street here now -- like the Kludius girls up here, well they are old timers but 90% of the people up there I don't even know. Years ago I knew everybody.

John: So, you are kind of the veteran of the block.

Matt: Yes, sure.

John: Has it changed in other ways or not? Is it still the same kind of place to live?

Matt: Well, it hasn't changed, there seem to be more youngsters around here than years ago. Course I had six youngsters. My oldest boy, he runs between Chicago and Minneapolis on that Amtrak train. He's talking about retiring this month. He'll be 60 years old the 27th this month. They can retire at age 60 -- but he has been on the railroad for years.

John: He took after his father?

Matt: Yeah, well.

John: I've just got one last question about Bay View. If you had to sum up in a sentence or two what living in Bay View meant to you or what made the neighborhood kind of special to you.

Matt: Well, I'll tell you, you take this location here, our crime rate is very low. For all the year that I have lived here when even my children were small, you could leave stuff lay even on the front sidewalk and it would be there in the morning. I think one reason for it most people -- practically every house is owned by a family, you know, we haven't got a lot of people, a lot of rental places where people are

Matt: moving in and out and we don't have too many strangers in the neighborhood. Oh, once in awhile you get kids from, God knows where they come from, that'l roam around and they steal something but otherwise we don't, we never have any trouble with stuff laying around. I even leave my big garage door open all day and I've never missed anything.

John: Is that still true?

Matt: Oh, yes.

John: Are there other ways in which Bay View is different from other parts of Milwaukee or other cities you've lived in?

Matt: Well, I'll tell you this section here it just seems as though it's a little offbeat and it's like a little town by itself. Now that may change with our new bridge here where they want to widen Superior St. and to me that is the biggest joke out to build a bridge like that and run it into a bottleneck. Why didn't they extend it like they were figuring on -- at least out to Layton Ave. and run it into I-94. I've been in most of the big cities in the country, I've done a lot of traveling and to me you take Milwaukee today, you take I-94 here -- the traffic is going to get so heavy that I-94 will not be able to handle it.

John: So you are for the freeway?

Matt: Absolutely. You cannot stop progress.

John: Is that pretty tolerant of Bay View, are people pretty much behind.....

Matt: No, the majority were in favor of it.

John: But how did it get stopped?

Matt: Well, you had a certain group with our Supervisor -- and naturally the people that's going to be effected where their homes had to be moved or torn down -- they were against it. And with the backing of our Supervisor, I don't know -- we even had a referendum on it in the City of Milwaukee and the people voted in favor of the expressway.

John: I recall that referendum -- it didn't say how much it would cost.

Matt: Well, if they would have continued with the construction of the expressways when they first started them, they would have saved a lot of money. The cost of materials have gone up every year. If they had built these expressways 10 or 15 years ago -- the same way with our stadium. If the County hadn't built that stadium, well around 1950, I think, just imagine what that would cost to build it today.

John: Is there anything else that stands out about Bay View that's special. You talked about it being off the beaten path, a safe neighborhood, not many strangers. How do you think the rest of the city looks at Bay View? Is it kind of ignored?

Matt: Well, I don't believe so. I know several of my old friends that used to live out here, young people and then they finally got married and moved to other parts of the city, they often tell me that they wish they could be back in Bay View again.

John: Just for the sense of community?

Matt: Well, of course, naturally they being practically born and raised in Bay View and after leaving it, they really get lonesome for the old neighborhood.

John: Was the Fernwood district -- when your family moved down there -- was that considered part of Bay View or was that kind of off to the side?

Matt: No. See, they -- I think they are extending Bay View too far even down below, even Chase Ave., that was not part of Bay View. The original Bay View was south of Lincoln Ave. and east of Kinnickinnic. That was the regular Bay View.

John: How far south did it go?

Matt: Well, it run all the way to Oklahoma as far as that is concerned.

John: And the rest of it really wasn't Bay View?

Matt: No, no. Even south of Oklahoma, that was the Town of Lake.

John: So, Becher and Kinnickinnic wasn't Bay View?

Matt: No, no, it isn't. Actually, no, not of the original Bay View. Along the lake, yes. You get down along where Wrought Washer is, in there, that would be part because years ago that was all marsh.

Transcribed by Lois Rehberg - January 1983