

John Schneider

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The pages that follow constitute the transcript of an interview conducted as part of the Wilmette Public Library

District's Oral History program, started in 1975 by a committee of the Friends of the Wilmette Public Library which has been chaired since its inception by Rhea Adler, a resident of the Village of Wilmette since 1932.

A copy of the tape on which this transcript is based is available for circulation, and may be obtained by checking with a Reference Librarian concerning circulation procedures.

This program would not have been possible without the cooperation of the many long-time residents of the Village interested in helping to preserve particulars of a fascinating past, and the patience, energy and effort of a small but dedicated group of interviewers, transcribers and typists who share the belief that the past is too important to be forgotten.

Richard E. Thompson
Director

ABSTRACT

Interviewee: J. J. Schneider

Interviewer: Rhea Adler

Date of interview: November, 1975

Family - childhood - school

Early location St. Joseph school and church

Fun games - skating - swimming

Gross Point boundaries

Stores · grocery · bakery blacksmith saloons · fifteen

Gross Point Band/Schneider's Band, now Gross Point Marching Band

World War I · Peter Huerter; Huerter Post · American Legion

Truck farms South Water St. Market

Old Trier - New Trier Township

50th anniversary of J. J. Schneider Shoe Store

Transportation horses · Northwestern Railroad

Gross Point people worked locally - growth slow until it was annexed to Wilmette

Lacked sewers, water, telephones

Unhappy high school life due to dual language problems

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RA: Where do you live today?

JJS: I live at 1029 Greenleaf in Wilmette.

RA: And your name?

JJS: John J. Schneider.

RA: Tell me about your childhood.

JJS: Well, I was born out in Gross Point. And those were really nice days. I was just a little boy, naturally. I was born there. I remember them so very well because we had a lot of play room, and we had nothing but fun. It was just an awfully nice place to live. And I remember some of the things that occurred in my life. Oh, we had this grind organ that used to come there every evening once in a while, and then we had this *[indistinguishable]* that used to come up there occasionally, and you know, it was all dirt roads and it was just a plain old-fashioned good old town. It was really nice.

RA: How many brothers or sister . . . ?

JJS: I had two brothers and a sister, and my one brother is still living and the others in the family have passed away.

RA: And where did you go to school?

JJS: I went to St. Joseph's School on Lake Avenue.

RA: Lake and what?

JJS: Well, Lake and Ridge. Just below where I pointed out where the old church used to be east of the parking lot.

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RA: You spoke of fun. Of what sort of things was your play? What was your play like?

JJS: Well, this one particular lot I remember so very well. It was across the street from Frank Felké's greenhouse. And they were on the east side of the Ridge and we were on the west side of the Ridge and occasionally we played a lot of ball there and occasionally my brother or somebody else would drive a ball into the greenhouse for a home run and that stopped the ball game. Of course, we never got the ball back. *[Laughter]* And of course, there was that old Emil's Pond. That was up north in Kenilworth Gardens. And, well, we used to play and went skating there. Ice skating and play sting ball and, in the summertime we'd go swimming there. And it was just a lot of fun, but our mothers never wanted us to go there because it was too deep and there was the danger of drowning. Oh, and we never lacked for a place to play. We always had an extra lot some place to play. There was a skating pond any place. We played crack-the-whip and I used to say, "Well, I'd take the end of it, and I'd land up against a tree which was not funny, believe me. I wonder sometimes if I'm not a little nuts because of it. *[Laughter]*."

RA: Did you ice skate?

JJS: Oh, yes.

RA: On the pond in the winter?

JJS: We had a lot of room. We were never lacking a place to play. There was so much room and people never objected to letting us play on their lots and their acreage. It was just some-

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thing wonderful.

RA: What I wondered was when your ball broke the greenhouse window if you were expected to pay for it?

JJS: No, we just didn't show up for a couple of days. (Laughter) I am sure they got awfully angry, but it was only a pane of glass and those glasses were only 2 by 2 something like that.

RA: Not expensive in those days.

JJS: No. (Laughter)

RA: And then, how big was the Gross Point area then?

JJS: Well, it was - - it extended from Winnetka Avenue on the north to Dominick's on Central Street on the south. And then it went up to about - - to around, I guess it's - - well, some parts of it's Wilmette now. It used to be Gross Point. But I remember this one place, they had this saloon out where Woodley Road is, you know, and so it was out that far anyway.

RA: What about those farms out there - . -?

JJS: Where Glenview Road is. That was all Gross Point.

RA: And as far north as Winnetka Avenue is almost. Was that part of - . ?

JJS: Well, all of Kenilworth Gardens was Gross Point once upon a time.

RA: Yes, and how about the Avoca School area?

JJS: That was Gross Point at that time, too. It was quite an area, no kidding. Really big.

RA: And primarily farms?

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JJS: Yes, most of it. There was so little business up there. Gosh, I could mention half a dozen stores that it consisted of: Hoffman Brothers, for instance, and Mrs. Bleser and the bakery, Ortegals Bakery. And Pearson's or Nick Bies's Market at that time. Klinge and White had a grocery store and, oh let me see. There was a blacksmith's shop on Lake Avenue just west of where John Mick's Saloon was. And I think that was just about all.

RA: Where was John Mick's Saloon?

JJS: It was on the corner of - on the northwest corner of Lake and Ridge.

RA: Oh, yes. Where there any other saloons?

JJS Oh, yes. *[Laughter]* We go up to the northern boundary at Winnetka Avenue. Just north of the Indian Hill Golf Club was a saloon owned by Kiel & Co. A ways south from there you come to a saloon owned by Nick Wagner. His place was situated about where Beechwood Road is Northwest corner of Elmwood, just across from Mallinckrodt High School, a saloon owned by Matt Kiel. Continuing south to the northwest corner of Ridge and Lake across from where St. Joseph's Church formerly was located was a saloon owned by John Nick, now a drugstore. Let me see. The name is Tierney's now. Across the street from there on the southwest corner was Winkle's saloon. Just in there was the picnic grove just where the Jewel Tea Store is now. And I remember

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years ago all the farmers came in there for Memorial Day or Decoration Day then. And the Fourth of July and Labor Day they stayed from about 2:00 in the afternoon till midnight. And the horses used to stand out there all that time They'd feed ~~em~~ occasionally. In the middle of the block to the south was a saloon owned by Jake Huerter and two doors south was Albert Zeutschel's place. At the corner of Schiller and Ridge was John Schaefer's, my grandfather. And incidentally, my father was the originator of the Gross Point Band years ago. He and his seven brothers and some of his brothers-in-law started that.

RA: He had seven brothers?

JJS: Yes.

RA: Any sisters?

JJS: Two sisters. And the brothers were all musicians. All played an instrument. I don't know how well, but it was a band anyway. And then, after my Dad died my older brother took it over and then it became Schneider's Band. And now it's a marching band of about sixty people and now they call it the Gross Point Marching Band.

RA: And it's still in existence?

JJS: Yes. And it really does a real nice job. Very happy with them.

RA: And the Huerter you spoke of must have been a predecessor of Huerter Post?.

JJS: Peter J. Huerter was a cousin of mine and I think he was one of the few people that didn't come back. He died on

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his way across from the flu. And I remember I took his job selling shoes in 1918.

RA: He died in the war in 1918.

JJS: The First World War. Yeah. And let me see.

RA: And what other businesses?. How many saloons in all?

JJS: Well, fifteen. There were thirteen on just one street, on Lake Avenue. And the other two were out on - well, where the old number 1 fire station is now - no, number 2 fire station. And the other one was on Locust and Illinois Road just at the entrance of, what was that street we were talking about, you know?

RA: Illinois Road and Locust and Woodley?

JJS: Yes, a very high class - - Woodley Road, on the northeast corner. What a place! The Trinity Church is out there now.

RA: It was on that corner. The northeast corner. Yes, that's right.

JJS: Well, let's see. Now we go. I was talking about the picnic grove. In the middle of the block just south was a saloon owned by Jake Huerter and two doors south was Albert Zeuschel's place. At the corner of Schiller and Ridge was John Schaefer's. Oh, I went through that once before. Farther south was a saloon owned by John Bleser. Next door from there is the old Gross Point Village Hall.

RA: That's at the end of Washington Avenue now.

JJS: Yeah. And two blocks south was a saloon owned by Joseph Heinzén. And three doors north, or three doors south on

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the northwest corner of Ridge and Wilmette Avenue was Ed Zeutschel's saloon. Now across the street from there was Charloix's place and from there the next place, just where Dominick's Grocery is, was Sesterhenn's saloon. Then going west on Lake Avenue to Illinois Road where Fire Station #2 is, was Thalmann's saloon, and proceeding.. from Illinois to Locust on the northeast corner was Beizel's saloon. All together that makes fifteen saloons.

RA: You spoke of the bakery and a grocery store.

JJS: Oh, yeah. There was Ortegell's Baker. That was across the street from the Howard green. You know where Howard School is. And Mrs. Bleser had a dry-goods store and Mr. Bleser had a barber shop across the street from Schaefer's place, on Schiller. And then there was a Nick Bleser who had a grocery store on the southwest corner of Ridge and Washington. That is about all the places that were up there.

RA: Then everything else was farm - and saloons? (Laughter) What did they raise on the farms?

JJS: Oh, I remember that these people would - used to go to Chicago at 2:00 in the morning. They'd hitch up the horses and they'd go down to South Water Street and peddle their stuff. Just imagine, had to leave at 2:00 in the morning. And load up their wagons and take their horses to the South Water Street market in Chicago. It was really something, those people. They really worked in those days, no kidding. Boy! But I think my - - Oh, I must tell you that my grandfather Schaefer - they always said that he

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was the first white child born west of the Ridge.

RA: Oh, really. What year was he born in?

JJS: I don't know but I just imagine - let's see, he must have been born in - my Dad was born in 1870. So he was born in 1850. Somewhere thereabouts. You know, I talked to a girl from St. Joseph's Church and I think she told me that the church was started there in 1864

RA: 1864.

JJS: It must have been at the old place, you know.

RA: I think the Hoffmans say that some of the people came from Trier in 1840.

JJS: Yeah, well, my grandfather Schaefer was supposedly the first white child born, but my grandfather Schneider, he was born in Germany. And he settled in old Gross Point and those people - - they all settled up there and that's where New Trier Township originally got its name from.

RA: From Trier.

JJS: Oh, yes. Old Trier and New Trier. Oh, I must tell you too, about - because I've been in business for fifty years this coming March - -

RA: Really? Well, we can celebrate it with the Bicentennial.

JJS: That's right. On March first I took over this place where I am at now. Q

RA: What kind of transportation was there in Wilmette besides horses?

JJS: The only transportation we had was to walk. I remember I

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used to take the Northwestern train in the morning and then I walked home every night and sometimes bucking that west wind up Washington which was kind of a hill, it was pretty rough, believe me. And I was just a youngster at that time. But I worked at the - I worked in Chicago at that time, at the London- Lancashire Insurance Co. And then when this Peter Huerter, my cousin, was drafted, then I took his job selling shoes west of the tracks on Wilmette Avenue. And then I was transferred to Main Street, Evanston. And then I went to work for somebody named Rasmussen in Highland Park. And then I went to work for Lords Department Store in Evanston. They're not there anymore. And then I - - Oh, yes, I sold cemetery plots at Memorial Park. That was a real good job

RA: In what year was the Memorial - - ?

JJS: In 1925 I sold lots there. And I happened to get my nick- name %Schuettie+ from this fellow who sold lots up there, too. And I still have that name. I think I acquired it back in 1908. Even my folks and my mother and father called me by that name. And then, of course, I bought out this Mr. Rafaiski at the place I'm at now, 1150 Central. And, uh, that was in 1926. Well, I guess that's where I've been all these many years.

RA: Now you spoke of being in business here. What proportion of the people worked here and how many of them in the early days went in the city?

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JJS: Well, in Gross Point most of the people worked in that area, and not very many of them worked in Chicago like I did, but . . . I don't remember. Some of them had their own businesses in Wilmette. Ben Meier of the Meier Coal and Material here. Hoffman Brothers had their business here. I can't recall, but I can't remember anything else.,

RA: What about the occupations in the village besides storekeepers, then? What were some?

JJS: Grocery clerks, delivery boys, things of that kind. Oh, tradespeople. My Dad was a carpenter. So many of them . . . I had two or three brothers-in-law who were carpenters. I think most of them were tradespeople at that time.

RA: You spoke of having loads of places to play. Was there a great deal of building going on during these years?

JJS: No, Gross Point never really had much going on until it became Wilmette and they had sewer and water. And then it doesn't look like Gross Point anymore to me.

RA: Then it didn't have sewer and water all those years?

JJS: No, we didn't have a telephone in the house for, gosh, I don't know how many years. I used to go to New Trier High School and I used to ditch school and I knew they could never contact my mother and dad because we didn't have a telephone in the house. *[Laughter]*

RA: So you thought you could get away with things when the others couldn't? -

JJS: Well, there were a lot of things like that. Oh, I got caught finally and my dad said, "Well, you better get

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yourself a job and go to work or go to school and do it right. I said I'd go to work and not go to New Trier anymore. I never liked New Trier because, coming from old Gross Point, where they taught us mostly in, oh, half of it German, half of it English - - and when I came to New Trier everything there was English. And some of the kids had their own cars way back in 1914.

RA: Really!

JJS: I went to school with Jack Searle of Searle Pharmaceutica Company and some of these other wealthy fellows and, I didn't - I had an inferiority complex at that time. No kidding about that. You can't like a place like that. It was just -

RA: It's sad.

JJS. Yes, it is, but I - -

RA: It happens all over.

JJS: I think I did remarkably well.

RA: I'm sure you did.

JJS: Most of my education, really, from this basic schooling I got at St. Joseph because those nuns drummed the stuff into you. And arithmetic. And, well, up until my, let me see, the last five years, I think I always filled out my own income tax. You know, I never had a complaint, never questioned about that. Now I've got this accountant and I'm always in trouble. *[Laughter]*

RA: My husband is a C.P.A. and he will appreciate that story.

[Laughter by everyone]

End of tape.