

Transcript oral history of George Arthur Hahn, Sr., d. 1979

Transcription by Karen Miller

TRACK 1 [missing from tape]

TRACK 2

GH: The, ah, house was built by Peter Balmes, B-A-L-M-E-S, It's an [indistinct]. B-A-L-M-E-S, German also. And it consisted of four bedrooms on the second floor, and living room, dining room and kitchen on the first floor. Moving into the house I decided that was that was going to be my family, that is raise those four children. I casually mentioned to the architect at the time that the master bedroom I was going to live and die in. For the record let me say that I wasn't in the master very long. The children came along in rapid succession. I had five more children. I had a total of nine children, seven boys and two girls, with the result that I was moved from the Master bed room into the maid's room and the maid was pushed up to the attic. However, all my children were educated. Their grade school was all at St. Francis Xavier school here in Wilmette, Catholic school.

TRACK 3

GH: My attraction to Wilmette, the principal reason why I came to Wilmette, was that it was known as a one family resident town. As a matter of fact orders to that effect and for many years apartment people were trying to build apartments and were unsuccessful for a long, long time until the vicinity of Linden Avenue at the end of the elevated they broke through on the law and a number of apartments have been built since. I might say in so as far as transportation was concerned when I was looking for a place to build my house, I built my house even distance from the Northwestern station, Central Street even distance to Isabella station on the elevated, and even distance to Central Street bus line and even distance to the church, St. Francis Xavier Church. Which I figured was at that time there were a few houses between 1010 and Sixth St., that's between Sixth and Isabella in Wilmette and Central St. Station in Evanston, you could cut through lots diagonally. Didn't have to make square corners, you could cut diagonally over to the end. The principal means of transportation that I used to know was the Chicago Northwestern. Did I mention the Chicago Northwestern? The Chicago Northwestern Railroad, the Central St. Station. They had monthly tickets and very reasonable rates. Just what they cost I can't recall, but the monthly tickets were very, very reasonable. Do you want to cut that off for a second now? [indistinct]

TRACK 4

In so far as my business is concerned I might say that my first position is with the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul Railroad at Fullerton Avenue and Southport in Chicago. My salary was \$25 a month, including half-day on Saturday. However after two years with the St. Paul railroad, I got into a little argument with one of my bosses and got myself discharged. I then started out [indistinct] office boy on LaSalle St. and in the office that I was working in as an office boy, supply clerk, I noticed that there were certain men in the office that would come in as they pleased. If they didn't want to come to work they didn't come. They played golf two or three days a week and took extended vacations. And I was attracted to that type of work. What could they be doing? So I said to the manager, "Do you pay them fellas to do as they please?" And he said, "No, we don't pay them anything. They all work on commission." That's the kind of job I want. So I proceeded then to get a job with a broker, one of those fellows that come and go as they pleased. And I got in with a very successful Irishman by the name of W. T. Burns who was then late in his 70s. He had a nice business of his own. I worked as his secretary although I was a one-fingered operator on the typewriter. He wrote all of his letters in long-hand. He wouldn't send a typewritten letter out, but every letter for him I had to copy all the typewriter [unclear]. And that led on to an interest in the business after a few years. And when he died an arrangement made between his widow and myself that his business would be my business.

BS: Excuse me, you were commuting then from Wilmette to Chicago?

GH: All this time commuting from Wilmette. I lived in Wilmette every since until I built a house. Well come to that later. However as time went on. I ah. After the W. T. Burns then, I went into partnership with his two sons known as the firm of Burn, Burn and Hahn. After my son finished college I decided to open an agency of my own which is known now as Connors Incorporated and it's in the Board of Trade building in Chicago. I've been retired now for 25 years but my sons still running the business.

TRACK 5

GH: [unclear] principal shopping area for the particular location of my residence. And you had everything there, stores, drugstores, some of which are still there today, restaurants, etc.

BM: There were restaurants in that area? What kind of restaurants?

GH: There still are too.

BM: Well there's one that I know of. It's a little pizza place now.

GH: Now you got a donut shop. Oh that's right there used to be a restaurant opposite the elevated station too on Linden Ave., on the north side of Linden Avenue.

BM: Were the streets pretty much paved? And there were sidewalks?

GH: Oh Yes. The streets were paved with brick some of which you will see today. Others like Linden Ave. and some principal streets have been that were traveled on pretty. Are we still on? Traveled on pretty hard, have been resurfaced from macadam and different surfaces.

BM: Excuse me. Now when you went from your home to the station did you walk or did you have a car?

GH: Always walked. Once in a while Mrs. Hahn would, if it was raining, it was only when it was inclement weather that [she'd] ever come over to this station.

TRACK 6

GH: The most interesting in Wilmette outside of raising my family was the number of delightful people. Living in an apartment is a cold deal. You're filed away in a certain section and that's it. You get into a residential neighborhood and all of the people in the neighborhood which are nice, they're dear friends. I think they enjoyed me and I enjoyed them. There were several card clubs etc. I think it added an awful lot to my life getting out of an apartment and getting into a residential neighborhood and meeting all of the nice people that I have met in this town. Most of whom are dead today. I only have a few still alive.

BM: Where there certain holidays that you celebrated with your neighbors in the area?

GH: Now we had a few days that we used to get the neighborhood together. I think it was principally 4th of July days.

BM: What did you do on the 4th? Have a picnic?

GH: You had a barrel of beer and a lot of cold cuts and so on. I used to run a birthday party in which I had a dance floor in the back yard and it'd run on to the wee hours of the morning.

BM: You put a wooden dance floor out there?

GH: Part of one, I had it built. It's still around somewhere. One of the children has it. As of today I still have, well, nineteen. [pause]. I still have 27 grandchildren living in Wilmette.

BM: You do?

GH: In addition of course that means my daughter is living here and two of my sons are living here. All the rest of my family are living within in a radius of 30 or 40 minutes from my home. One in New York, that's the furthest which is unusual. I'm the grandfather of 56 grandchildren and nine or eight or seven great-grandchildren.

BM: Seven great grandchildren? That's really remarkable

TRACK 7

GH: Immediately to the south of my home there's a family by the name of Millers who had five children and Mrs. Miller's father was a GAR veteran, way up into his 90s. A most interesting character, and everyone in the neighborhood enjoyed him, and he had candy in his pocket and so on, and they'd follow him all around. And they had a pony and he'd take all the kids for pony rides. And he was the old timers from 6th street Wilmette. And incidentally not one person lives on Wilmette today that was there when I arrived there over 41 years ago, 44 years ago. He's well known I think he was well known to Wilmette yet I've never seen anything.

BM: He lived, where did you say he lived?

GH: On Chicago [unclear]

BM: Right next door to you

GH: He died at the age of 96 or 97. But he was a Civil War veteran and would tell about his prison time etc.

BM: Oh..now wait or alright

GH: The only ones that are still alive is Sanford B. Lanzo. He lives on Iroquois in west Wilmette. And [unclear] Wilmette or Florida the year round. He's about my age. The other ones alive Mrs. Miller's still alive living in Washington D.C. She has a son named John Miller living in Wilmette.

TRACK 8

GH: Um Daddy Hood's grandson John Miller is a resident of Wilmette. Daddy Hood was known by every child in the neighborhood I would say within a mile or two of his home. He was a friendly type of a old Civil War veteran, and always had some little candy I said this once before didn't I?

BM: No that's alright

GH: ð candy in his pocket. And in addition to that he had a pony and a cart and every once in a while heð take us for rides in the cart or horseback on the pony.

BM: Would he do that just on special holidays?

GH: No, no that was almost his daily affair

BM: Oh he would just walk around the neighborhood and have children ride on his cart? And he had a horse too?

GH: Thatð rightð a pony, a ponyð he had a pony and a cartð and a sleigh too

BM: A sleigh really? And he kept that in his garage?

GH: Yes right in the back of the home there. Right next door to us.

BM: Oh I seeð How ðbout Sunshine Corner? You were going toð

GH: Sunshine Corner. After Mr. Miller died, ahð thatð Mrs. Millerð husband of courseð .She saw fit toð .in order to put her children through collegeð to start a kindergarten school, pre-age school, which was known as Sunshine Corner. She was a graduate of Kindergarten Institute I think in Wilmette.

BM: The National College of Education

GH: And also a graduate of whatð the name of the college?

VOICE: Grinnell

GH: Grinnell, and her husband was a graduate of Grinnell too. And through the earnings of taking care of other peopleð children she made a good living for herself and put her kids through college.

BM: That was Sunshine Corner was the nameð where was that located?

GH: Thatð right. It was on the corner of Isabella and 6th street, right next door to us

BM: Was it a home thatð

GH: A home with a big yard. She had 100 feet of ground. Thereð an additional house built on that corner now, next to her, but that was her yard for her children and [unclear] for herself, and of course when she started Sunshine Corner it was school property.

BM: I see

GH: Now you asked about something else that was outstanding as far as Wilmette is concerned. Let's put this on the record.

BM: It's on

GH: It's on? The way of entertainment I found the most interesting Sundays that I spent the whole time I lived in Wilmette were parties given what is known as the Luxemburgers. They were from the, ah, what was formerly known as Gross Point, later become the village Wilmette. They had these parties men only out in the woods. And uh...nothing but beer and steak and played horseshoes, and [unclear] gambling, baseball, etc. A whole Sunday most delightful afternoons

BM: Where were the woods?

GH: Out in the woods.

BM: In the section that's west Wilmette?

GH: Lake street. West of ah. Let's see Harm's Woods. Harm's Woods is one of them

BM: OH I see

GH: Then there's another place out there. Two or three of these parties were held every year. We had a little band out there, by the way. Delightful afternoon.

BM: And this was sponsored mainly by the people that lived in the neighborhood

GH: [unclear]

BM: OH I see

GH: The amusing part of these parties after eating delicious steaks and drinking beer for a whole afternoon and enjoying yourself I doubt very much whether I ever can remember spending over \$2. Which today it would be \$15 or \$20.

BM: But this was only for the men?

GH: Men only. George White. Is this on?

BM: Yes

GH: George White who was a well known grocery man then lived up on Ridge, lived right near Lakeõ dead now and his store is not operating any more. He used to furnish the steaks, and we had delicious steaks.

BM: OK

TRACK 9

GH: You might be interested in this. At one of the Knights of Columbus meetings their sons were made officers. The whole family of them, but, hey, they~~are~~ all dead nowõ the Hayes, and the Millers and the Millenersõ they~~are~~ all up in the upper endõ they~~are~~ all Gross Point people. You know about Gross Point being added on to Wilmette and Father Netstraeder how he run the church up there? [indistinct]

BM: Why don~~t~~ you tell me the police story and then we~~d~~ come back to the other one.

GH: [laughter] OKõ so anyhow after this party we got over into the Hayes basement and his father made wine. And he had barrels of wine, different vintages all around the basement, and we proceeded to sample some out of all of them. Well the result is we all had way too much [laughter]. The funny part isõ why I ever drove the car I don~~t~~ know, but I drove the car put it in the garage then I fell down. And my two friendsõ I couldn~~t~~ stand on my feet anymore. And we started to walk thinking and they said [indistinct] we better try to sober him up. They started walking me around the block and argumentative a policeman was trying to help. I didn~~t~~ want any part of policeman. The guy was trying to help me, you know. I got bruised upõ I couldn~~t~~ go to work for a few days. That~~s~~ howõ that~~s~~ effective line I learned that I couldn~~t~~ drink wine. But the payoff on this l~~an~~ leading up to is a little interesting fact in that, uh, the neighbor, one of my neighbors, two neighbors as a matter of fact who were with me that night, in a back sense, just chinning over the night we had. None of us was able to go to work next day. [indistinct] Big mistake. [chuckling]

BM: Ohõ

GH: However, this policeman was coming along there. He says, %~~hi~~, Boys,+ Fine. I didn~~t~~ recognize him. He looked at me and said %~~You~~ knowõ you look kind of nasty. Yes, and not only that+he says, %~~when~~ I got into the station I was taken to task by the Sergeant. %~~o~~

I says, %~~What~~ for?+[interruption] %~~hi~~ ya, Tom!+ I said, %~~What~~ for?+

He said, %~~got~~ four calls from the people in Wilmette that a drunken policeman with three other drunks were at one or two in the morning going around the block. [laughter] He said, %~~had~~ a hell of a time trying to convinceõ ..

BM: Waitō Alrightō .

TRACK 10

GH: Policeman said to the sergeant, he says, %ou know, Sergeant,+he says, %o those three men have lived in Wilmette for many years. I don't think any were up to 9:00 o'clock in their lives.+[laughter]

BM: Alrightō

GH: While I was contemplating moving from an apartment in Chicago, I observed ads in the Chicago Tribune every Sunday in which Father Netstraeder which was the pastor of St. Joseph Church in Gross Point which is now Wilmette in which he was inviting young Catholic families to come to Wilmette to live and that he would assist with the financing. Several people that I know purchased these homes with the assistance of the financing on the part of Father Netstraeder.