

Interview

with

Earl J. Hartlage

June 6, 2006

by David Cline

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The Southern Oral History Program  
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EARL HARTLAGE  
June 6, 2006

DAVID CLINE: Okay, this is David Cline for the Southern Oral History Program, and I'm in Louisville, Kentucky, on Tuesday, June the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2006 with Mr. Earl Hartlage. We're sitting at your kitchen table right now on a family farm, and this is the house in which you were born and raised. Is that right?

EARL HARTLAGE: Correct.

DC: And can you tell me just a little bit about your family and how they came to the farm here?

EH: My family, here's the picture of my great grandfather. Now my grandfather was William, and these are his parents, and these were their children, Elizabeth's and Joseph's, and they lived right here across the field here in this house, and this house was built right after—ah, we had a tornado come through here, and let me be accurate on this, in 1890, and it blew the house down, not this house, but it blew their house down, and Carrie right here who was born on March the 8<sup>th</sup> of 1890 was a baby, and it blew her out in the pasture. The house was gone. After the tornado went through they found her out there, and she was all right. And then in 2006 we had another tornado come through here, and it blew the barn down which was a hundred years old on this same property, and that was just this past January of this year. And they had Elizabeth and Joseph who were born in 1847 and 1843 respectively, had fourteen children. One of those was my grandfather, William, who was born in 1879 and died in 1968.

DC: So you're the fourth generation to farm here?

EH: Yes, that's right. Correct.

DC: And what do you farm?

EH: We were truck gardeners. Primarily now I'm a contractor, but I still farm here on the same place that dad and grandpa did. They were raised right on the adjoining farm.

DC: Right.

EH: This was German ancestry, Hartlage, Hartlage, that would be the German thing, and the biggest part of the people in this area were of German ancestry, and I can give you some of those names and probably will as we go through.

DC: What was this area originally called?

EH: Well it was Beantown back then because it was small truck gardens one right after the other. Now am I too loud?

DC: No, you're fine. Just checking.

EH: Truck garden, do you know what a truck garden is?

DC: Yeah, yeah I do.

EH: Okay, so you don't need it on there.

DC: No, you can tell me about it.

EH: A truck garden is vegetables, and farmers would raise those, and put them on their truck and go to the city and sell them.

DC: Um-hum.

EH: And that would be from tomatoes to potatoes and beans. It was Beantown at one time.

DC: Right.

EH: Before the defense plants came in in the 40s.

DC: So from Beantown to Rubbertown.

EH: Beantown to Rubbertown.

DC: Um-hum. So the defense plants really built up in this area around the war, preparing for the war, the Second World War?

EH: Yes. Yes.

DC: And just transformed, I guess, this area.

EH: Yes, to a certain extent they did. They came here, the federal government brought that here in conjunction with B. F. Goodrich, E.I. du Pont de Nemours and Company, National Carbide Corporation, and Kentucky Synthetic Rubber Corporation, and they made synthetic rubber. The government was worried about the rubber for our tires for our vehicles if our supply got cut off during that war, and so they did that, and the government invested in the early '40s 92.4 million dollars in these plants. The peak wartime production yield was 195,000 tons of synthetic rubber with more than 4,000 people employed there.

EH: Now have members of your family ever worked in this industry?

DC: Some. Some, yes, worked here.

*[Buzz on tape, sound like cell phone vibrator.]*

DC: *[Aside to EH]* Sorry.

EH: They were good jobs here, probably the best of the jobs—well, when it was built, when the government built this, people worked around the clock. They would just stay in there twenty-four hours a day, and they'd get paid. They got tired, they'd lay down to sleep, but it was really a push by the government to get this built and in production. Do you want to stay on that, or do you want to go to Lake Dreamland?

DC: Well, tell me about Lake Dreamland because we're looking right now at a card—

EH: A postcard.

DC: A postcard that says, "Have your country home at Lake Dreamland," and this is your uncle or great uncle?

EH: Great uncle.

DC: Your great uncle is listed: "For further information see Edward Hartlage at Lake Dreamland." And this is just by here, right?

EH: Yes.

DC: Yeah. And this is a place where people had basically summer camps, right?

EH: He would lease you a lot for ninety-nine years to build a summer camp on, and this card is a promotional card for that, and it says, "Two miles beyond defense plant on river."

DC: Um-hum.

EH: So at that point in time it was known as the defense plant. The telephone number was SH 2165 M, that was Shawnee, is what the SH stood for. Uncle Ed -- everyone called him Uncle Ed whether they were related to him or not -- this was his farm, and he was pretty progressive. He had some other property around St. Dennis which is a community on Cane Run Road.

DC: So what is now Lake Dreamland, he originally owned all that land?

EH: He owned all of that. Uncle Ed owned all of that. That was his farm, and when he died—I don't know for sure when he died now -- he was born in 1888 so he wasn't dead when this picture was made here. So that was in the 70s I think.

DC: Um-hum.

EH: No, probably 80s.

DC: So you really grew up and have been around these plants your whole life, right?

EH: Yes. My whole life.

DC: What has it been like being [their] neighbor?

EH: It hasn't been too bad. In the old days there was a lot more pollution than there is now. You could wake up if the wind was coming this way, well, you'd have a white film on everything outside. There was a lot of that. But now, right here, primarily the winds come from the southwest, and so in that direction we have the Ohio River and southern Indiana which is not very developed, and so we had pretty clean air here, right here where I live, because most of the bad stuff would go in toward western Louisville because of the southwest prevailing winds.

DC: Right. Right. If the wind shifted you could smell it or see it?

EH: Yes, we'd have that. And the smell, yes. There was smell, a lot more smell than there is today.

DC: Was it ever a concern for growing vegetables out here?

EH: Yes. Immediately next to us here to the south and west there was a plant that came in there called Stauffer Chemical Company, and right now that plant is abandoned, and they have torn it down. But they bought some land here, and then they had to buy some more because they were having leaks there and killing crops of some of my neighbors and some of my relatives, like Tubby Hartlege was right down the road from me here on Bremer's land, and they had to buy him.

DC: This is contaminants to the soil itself?

EH: It was not so much a contaminant, but it was a gas leak, and chlorine leaks, and it would just come across and kill the crops. Like in 1961 there was some gas that floated over to Lake Dreamland from the former Stauffer Chemical Company, and there was an evacuation of a thousand residents.

DC: Um-hum. That would have been a chlorine leak?

EH: Chlorine.

DC: Right. So there were buy-outs then of some of the farms?

EH: And then they had to buy out because you just couldn't plant a crop. We were selling to A&P, that was the Atlantic and Pacific Tea Company then. Some of our neighbors were selling to Kroger then, and we got to selling to them later. You would plant for them, and whatever we could grow they would buy because they knew it was going to be good and put up nicely. We'd take it to their warehouse, and then they would take it out to the individual stores and sell them. And here we would have at least ten thousand tomato plants, each one of them on a stake that we tied up each year. So it's very, very labor intensive.

DC: Yeah. Yeah. Do you have other family member or siblings that worked with you?

EH: Yes, we had. In my immediately family there were seven boys. I had six brothers, and we worked on this farm right here that I own now. Their names went down the alphabet. The oldest one was Albert. The next one was Bertrand, Carl, Delphin, Earl, who is me and I would be the fifth one, and then Floyd, and Gerard. After dad and mom had three children and just named them, and someone told them well, hey, that's the ABCs, so when the fourth one came along it was a conscious effort to continue that.

DC: Kept going. Right.

EH: Had no sisters, and dad was in partners with grandpa, and they knew what to do with us boys: work 'em.

DC: Yeah. They had themselves their own labor gang.

EH: Oh yeah. That's the best way to give them something to do, and they're not going to be into trouble.

DC: Right. Almost had a baseball team.

EH: Yeah. We did play a bunch of ball here, just amateur ball.

DC: Right. So was this a very close-knit farming community out here then?

EH: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yes.

DC: You've mentioned other relatives living around.

EH: Yes, real, real close, and practically all of them of German descent.

DC: Um-hum.

EH: And would help one another. About everyone had some hogs, had the mules that we worked the land with and cultivated row crops. It was row crops.

DC: Okay. The reason that I got your name is that you've recently joined the Rubbertown Community Advisory Council?

EH: Oh no. No. No. I was on the original council.

DC: Oh, you've been on it for a long time.

EH: Yes.

DC: So can you tell me about how they sought you out and how you came to work with the council?

EH: I've been a County Commissioner of Jefferson County, and at that time there were three county commissioners and the county judge, and that ran the county. Then the City of Louisville was twelve aldermen and the mayor, and that was the governing body of the city. And so I served one four-year term as a county commissioner.

DC: And when was that?

EH: That was in the 70s. Prior to that I served a four-year term on the old Jefferson County School Board. Now we are merged with the Louisville Independent [school system] so it's one school system. Probably because of some of that political involvement I was asked to join and did so gladly. It's a non-paying job.

DC: What got you involved in politics?



EH: First I ran for the school board. I'd look at my tax bills and the biggest part of the money was going to the school system. I was an unlikely candidate I thought to be running for the public school board because my children went to the parochial system.

DC: Okay. Right.

EH: They did that because I thought it was superior, and I always thought that someone could do a better job there than I could, but I wasn't satisfied with the job that they were doing there, and so I said, "Well, I'll go there. I'll take a stab at it and see what I can do." So I ran and won. I met with quite a bit of resistance because I didn't choose to use the public school system for my children.

DC: But your idea I imagine was that you wanted to try and improve it to such a level that—?

EH: Absolutely. I wanted to improve it. I wanted to see where all of this money was going, make them more accountable.

DC: Right. So what kinds of things were you able to get done when you were on the board, or what kinds of things weren't you able to get done?

EH: We made quite a few changes. Richard Van Heus was the superintendent of the Jefferson County School System then, and he had been there a long time, and he ruled it with an iron fist. And I don't have any problem with someone with strong management skills, but there's always room for improvement. The school board members were pretty much picked and ran until I came along. So that was a good experience. After that I knew I wanted to run for County Commissioner, and I should have run for re-election to the school board, but I'd just be there for one year, and I decided that that wouldn't be fair to my constituency to run for a four-year term and then leave in a year so I didn't do that. But it would have been very smart politically for me to do that because I could have

been there, and taken a real active role, and gotten a lot of press, but that wasn't in me, and that wasn't my style.

DC: Right. So there was basically a year off.

EH: So I just sat out a year and then ran for the County Commissioner's seat and won that.

DC: Now that was mid-70s. Were you in that seat during the school desegregation order in '75?

EH: Yes. Yes. I was County Commissioner when that order came down from Judge Garden. I didn't like it. I didn't really, really fight it. However, one time we were having a meeting of the fiscal court, F-I-S-C-A-L, as it was known, and Judge Garden's name came up, and I called him a "soup sandwich." Some of the TV reporters after the meeting asked, "Earl, what's a soup sandwich?" And I said, "Well, you go to the restaurant and order one and see if you can figure it out." That was just some old hometown, country talk, and if I called you a soup sandwich, well, that would not be a compliment. I thought you were pretty messed up.

DC: Right. Right.

EH: But that's what I thought of him, and so that's what I called him.

DC: So it was pretty clear what your feelings were?

EH: Oh yes. Yes. He had an opinion, and he made his ruling, and I had an opinion, and told him what I thought.

DC: I've also interviewed Don Randolph who was, I believe, Chair of the School Board at that time, right?

EH: Yeah. He was there whenever I was there.

DC: Right. So that was your introduction to politics through the school board and then county commissioner, and that was at the same time as city/county merger as well.

EH: Yes.

DC: So that was a major time to be in that position.

EH: Yes.

DC: Lots of change.

EH: And when I was on the school board we had the merger, and the Louisville Independent School System went out of business, and the county is the prevailing entity then so they took that over so it's a large system here.

DC: Right.

EH: I don't know for sure what the budget is right now, but it's pretty big.

DC: Right. And I just saw in the paper, this morning's paper, that the Supreme Court is going to hear the latest law suit [regarding using race as a factor in the placement of students].

EH: Yes.

DC: So does it surprise you at all to see this arc of change like that?

EH: No, not really. Not really. I have a lot of black friends, Negroes. Many of them did not like this order when it came down. I suppose that it was a social experiment, but when you spend your education dollar on transportation, well I will question that. That's what that did, and that was the start of that. And I don't know that it's really improved the quality of the education. I wouldn't go that far to say that. As a matter of fact I think it's pretty sad right now. The teachers profess to have the knowledge, and we are paying for them to impart that, and I don't really think that we're getting our money's worth. Teacher tenure, you know what that is?

DC: Um-hum. Yeah.

EH: I don't like it. As a matter of fact, whenever I was on the school board I tried to do something about it, and it got going pretty good, and the then superintendent, Richard Van Heus, got the fourteenth district PTA president on it, and they really came after me. But there is no one in our society that has anything close to tenure, and I don't think that they should have that, teachers should have that, have tenure. One of the things then, we had teachers that weren't quite right, and would be found out, and the superintendent would—it's so hard to fire them once they have tenure.

DC: Right.

EH: And we would, the superintendent, the administration would get them to resign and give them a glowing recommendation so they could get a job in another school system.

DC: Right. Just get rid of them.

EH: And I detest that, and as soon as I found that out I wanted to go about changing that. If I tell you somebody's all right, well, they're going to be all right. If they're not, well, I'm going to say, "Well everything I know about them is all right, but I don't know them very well." But if I can give you this, you can mark that down and take that to the bank because that's as close to the old gold as you're going to get.

DC: Now did you serve another term on the school board later on then?

EH: No.

DC: No. It was that one term and then one term as county commissioner?

EH: Yes.

DC: Right. And that was the end of your political career?

EH: That was the last. I haven't sought an office. My wife came down with

**cancer whenever I was—I ran for reelection as a county commissioner, and there was**

Mitch McConnell, who is presently the U.S. Senator. He was County Judge Executive, and he had favor with the *Courier Journal* and *Louisville Times*, the newspapers at that time, and my wife came down with cancer, had breast cancer, and I just suspended the campaign. I said well I'm going to do what I need to do, and that's take care of her. So I wasn't able to campaign as much as I could, and there was a massive effort that came after me, and they got me. So I didn't win the second term.

DC: Right. So the reason we got talking about politics was you said that that was part of your background that may have been appealing to the Rubbertown Community Advisory Council...

EH: Yes.

DC: ...when they were looking for members. And so how long have you served with them now?

EH: I don't know for sure when that was started. Do you know?

DC: I didn't bring my notes on that with me.

EH: But I've been on there for ten years I suppose.

DC: I think it's been running about twelve years if I remember right. I think that's what Charlie Hunten said. Right.

EH: I was on it originally and have served ever since.

DC: Had you ever had any relationship or been on any other panels with any of the individual plants?

EH: No.

DC: And who was it who sought you out and came to ask you to serve on that, if you recall?

EH: I don't know for sure who that was.

DC: Okay. That's really not—.

EH: The original, whoever the original [director was]. That thing was set up. And I was, oh, I got on there and I, shortly after that I told them that, hey, du Pont who is a member, I said, "Look, they're like General Bull Moose, the Li'l Abner character. Whatever's good for General Bull Moose is good for the community." And I said, "That's what I think their attitude is," and they did whatever they wanted to do without regard for their neighbors. Now they took care of their employees. The employees there made real, real good money. They paid well. Du Pont was very, very liberal with anyone who wanted to run for public office. Any employee there that wanted to run for public office, well, they encouraged it. They would pay them for any time that they had to spend away from the plant and their duties, but that was some of the genius of the corporation. They would place employees at all levels of government, and then they would know what was going on.

DC: Very interesting.

EH: So nothing could happen without them knowing it.

DC: Right. But as a neighbor they were a bit of a bully?

EH: Oh yes. Very, very much.

DC: Can you tell me about that, in what ways they were a bully?

EH: They didn't really, in the early days, they didn't care what kind of fumes, dusts, or what have you that they were putting out on the adjoining community. Now we, the people, have forced them to be a better corporate citizen, and ultimately that's going to cost the community too because du Pont has made an announcement in September 19<sup>th</sup> of 2002 that du Pont de Nemours, announced the closing of its Louisville plant and moving the operations to Louisiana. At that time they were saying that 285 jobs will be lost. Now it hasn't happened yet, but it's going to happen. It's on schedule, and that whole plant is going to be leveled. They're going to put it back to the way it used to be.

DC: Now are there a number of vacant plants around here, ones that have already closed down or shut over the years?

EH: Stauffer Chemical is really—it shut down. They were into the farming and I guess when the economy went down it hurt them pretty badly, and right now here they have a little over three hundred acres here. They've got a little over two hundred and twenty acres on the west side of Camp Ground Road and the south side of Bremer's Lane, and they've got eighty acres to the east of Camp Ground Road. There have been several mergers, and right now it's Apti-Mix Ten owns it, and it's sitting there vacant. They did put in some German technology there, and they are pumping water out of the ground, and treating it, and dumping it into the Ohio River, and that is supposed to clean up the land, the contaminated land.

DC: Supposed to. Supposedly. Right.

EH: And that runs twenty four hours a day. But they had a dump down here close to the river. it was a private dump of theirs, and they just throw anything and everything in there. At one time they—?

DC: This is du Pont you're talking about?

EH: No, this is Stauffer Chemical.

DC: Stauffer Chemical.

EH: They capped it off with some soil. The put one foot of soil over the top of it. There's supposed to be less water will penetrate that one foot of clay soil than would go through a quarter inch of plate steel.

DC: Okay.

EH: So that's capped off. Now immediately downstream from them is the old Lee's Lane Landfill.

DC: Which I've heard about. Yeah.



EH: And that was, the Lee's Lane Landfill was it started out as a burrow pit, and a hole was dug for the sand that was used for backfill and fill in buildings around there, and then it got to be a dump, and you could just go in there and dump anything and everything. When we had the Super Fund, the government set up that Super Fund to clean up some of the toxic dumps, well the Lee's Land Landfill was the number one contaminated landfill in the nation.

DC: So it was being used by both private citizens and by the companies?

EH: Some of these companies here in Rubbertown had to pay some of that cost, but it was wet garbage, meaning household wastes, and anything and everything. It didn't matter. You could dump it there. They weren't policed as they are today or regulated.

DC: So have you been fairly pleased with the increasing response from the companies over the years?

EH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. It's good. It's a long time coming, and the companies, they recognize that they have to be a good corporate citizen, and they want to be good neighbors.

DC: Now we talked about race a little bit earlier, but how does race play out in terms of this area and in terms of relations with the plants? Is there a black neighborhood around here? If you could just sort of sketch that out for me.

EH: Immediately north and somewhat east was a large concentration of a black neighborhood there. Some people called it Little Africa. It's Park Duvalle. That's where a lot of this pollution went. That would be some of the closest neighbors. Now it's Shivley which is immediately to the east. Rubbertown is about thirty per cent black, so the color is changing. The blacks first settled in the west end, and that was the nicest part



of Louisville, and when that happened there was an exodus [of whites] to the south and down into Pleasure Ridge, and what have you, and the whites moved [there].

DC: Um-hum. Right.

EH: Now it's not that big of a problem. There's a mixture all around. Cane Run Road immediately east of the plants is getting more and more color.

DC: The pollution that the plants have produced over the years, you said it mostly ended up in that Park Duvalle?

EH: In the Park Duvalle neighborhood.

DC: Bore the brunt of it?

EH: And they bore the brunt of it. Didn't have the political muscle to do anything about it then.

DC: But now have things changed as far as—?

EH: Yes, and now that we have metro government there are some "safe black districts" of which I am in one of the safe black districts, so if I chose to run for that council seat, the first council seat, it would be extremely, extremely difficult to be elected because of me being a Caucasian.

DC: What do you mean by "safe black district?"

EH: They were set up as safe black districts when the redistricting was done.

DC: Oh, okay.

EH: And we have safe black districts, and the biggest part of the constituency, the residents, in those districts are black, and we just witnessed that over here. Mary Woolridge retained her seat over the Shivley councilwoman who ran against it, and that's one of the safe black districts.

DC: Interesting.

EH: And so that is a—I don't know what you could ever do about that if you ever wanted to, but really in those safe black districts those whites are precluded.

DC: You think it would be very difficult for a white to get elected?

EH: Impossible. Next to impossible.

DC: Now on the advisory council is it a mix of whites and blacks?

EH: Yes. There's a mix.

DC: And does it seem that there are certain issues that the black members bring up, or are things jointly explored or expressed?

EH: There's a joint respect, and not really a black/white issue. There is a little bit of that, but not too much.

DC: I got to town a couple of weeks ago, and actually the day that I arrived was the day that these two law suits were filed, these class action law suits. Can you tell me a little bit about them, both what you know about them and your opinion?

EH: Well, the one, this was a white family that wanted their child to go to Bloom Elementary I think.

DC: Oh, I'm sorry. Different law suits. I'm talking about the [pollution suits against the] plants.

EH: Oh, the law suits against the plants.

DC: The plants. Yeah. There are a lot of law suits here!

EH: Yeah. That's going to be extremely, extremely difficult to prove. In Riverside Gardens, which is right south and southwest of the plants, the closest plant now is the old Borden Chemical Company which is now Hexion because of a merger. Riverside Gardens is a little community that was established in 1926, and it was established to have a place for the city people to come out to on the weekends to get away from the city and get out on the river, close to the river. All of the lots there are twenty-

five by a hundred, twenty-five feet by a hundred feet deep. So there were small houses there primarily. Now you can combine some lots.

DC: Oh, okay.

EH: And put another house on it. That was known as Cane Run Road Subdivision Number Two. Cane Run Road Subdivision Number One was Ladd Avenue, which is right off of Lee's Lane and a little bit east of Riverside Gardens, and that's where the Lee's Lane Landfill is. I have a few rental house there in Riverside Gardens. It's not that bad, or I certainly wouldn't have them there. I would not be investing my money there. So you won't see me as a part of this law suit.

DC: Did people come to you to solicit your support at all?

EH: No.

DC: No?

EH: They already knew how I felt.

DC: Right.

EH: But no, I wasn't contacted, but I would not [be]. And there's some activists there that's got a bunch of signs out, we want a buy-out and relocation was their theme, and that is not going to happen. Borden Chemical, or Hexion now, they couldn't afford to buy all of that out for the price that they would want, and they don't have any plans for enlarging anyway or need more land there, and if they needed more land, well immediately adjacent to their plant is the three hundred acres that we talked about earlier, the old Stauffer Chemical plant land.

DC: So most of the residents who have been party to those suits are from Riverside Gardens?

EH: Riverside Gardens.

DC: Are there Rubbertown—I guess it's mostly Riverside Gardens people.

EH: Mostly Riverside Gardens.

DC: Okay.

EH: There was one member of the RCAC, which is the Rubbertown Community Advisory Council, lent her name to that, and she's part of that.

DC: Um-hum. And who is that?

EH: The name is escaping me right now.

DC: Okay. That's all right. The Lake Dreamland folks, have they experienced much in the way of air pollution or other kinds of pollution?

EH: No, other than that one leak from Stauffer. The Lake Dreamland neighborhood now is mostly on the river side of the flood wall. We had a flood wall we built. It was in the mid-50s, and it went from downtown Louisville, and it came out here and it went right past the Lee's Land Landfill, and then it turned east, and it dead ends at Greenwood Road and Dixie Highway, and it had to do that because if the water got up, the tail water could just run right around the wall and back up. Now since then the government has tied onto that where it made that bend there, and protected more and more of the county, the old Jefferson County, and it goes all the way down into West Point now, so that section of the flood wall now is not in use.

DC: Okay. Right.

EH: When that flood wall was built my grandfather, William, and his brother, Edward, who owned Lake Dreamland, a lot of his land was going to be in the river on the river side.

DC: Right.

EH: And grandpa wanted the flood wall, and Uncle Ed, Edward Hartlege did not want it, and they had a little bit of falling out over that. So now, the old Lake Dreamland **it's in the river. It's on the river side of the flood wall, and it does flood once in a while.**

When Uncle Ed died, I think it was within five years from his death where that was going to have to be sold, and the county bought that with community development funds, and anyone that had a lease on their lot there the county sold it to them for a dollar and left them there. Now I'd have you believing that we would have been better off to move them out of there, move them on the other side of the flood wall.

DC: Because they're right in the flood plain.

EH: Because they're in the flood plain. And the lake is still there, but it's polluted. You wouldn't dare eat any fish out of it. I can remember when the fish was good to eat there, and at one time there in Lake Dreamland there was a night club called El Rancho, and that was the place to be, *the* night club in Louisville. It started out, it was originally opened as Hartlege's Barn, and that was Uncle Ed's barn. And then Buddy Regan and some of these guys that had Provis's Restaurant down on Cane Run Road, they bought it, and that was *the* place.

DC: People would come out from town?

EH: From town would come there. Louisville Transit, it was known as the Louisville Railway Bus Service then, had service to there so the gals could come out on a bus and get a ride home in a new convertible. And the very best of the cars and the newest cars, and there were a lot of convertibles then, would be there on the weekends.

DC: Now was this an artificial lake or a natural lake?

EH: No, it was a built lake. The old lake was there, and then Uncle Ed built the new lake which is in this picture on this card.

DC: So he developed that, the lake itself?

EH: And Lake Dreamland Road was not there at that time. You had to get there from Hughes Lane, which is right here adjoining my place, or Sand Road. And Uncle

**Ed's house was the biggest and the nicest house in this community, and the next one**

would have been at the end of Elmwood in Riverside Gardens. It's gone. Now Uncle Ed's house is still standing. I'll take you there and show it to you if you want to see it.

DC: Great. Great. So anything else that you want to tell me about working with the plants or serving on the RCAC, other issues that you have dealt with over the years being a neighbor to these plants?

EH: Oh, it's not a whole lot to that. Now I just gave a little spiel to the RCAC. They asked me to tell them what it was like before the defense plants came in here to Rubbertown. I just did that at the last meeting, the preceding meeting, and we meet this Thursday now again.

DC: Can you give me the condensed version of that?

EH: Yes. Well, I went back. Uncle Ed bought his property from Millers before that, and the property where du Pont is and what's Rubbertown now, it was farm, woods, and there were some farms there. Out front where the plants are now it was pretty much woods, and there was a great big ditch out there adjoining Campground Road. Down on the river they had corn, and hogs, and cattle. Around here everybody had hogs, and we'd kill those hogs in the fall or winter, and ate a lot of pork, a lot of pork. Rendered the lard. Used the lard to fry with, and put it in piecrusts and everything, things we won't do today.

DC: Right. That's a big process too, so would you go from farm to farm to help each other with the killing of the hogs?

EH: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yeah. We'd go over to this place, and they had small grinders they would be grinding with, and take your grinder over and help him. Help him do his, and then he'd come help you do yours when you were ready.

DC: Right. It's labor intensive. Yeah.

EH: Oh yeah. We shot them with a twenty-two.

DC: And scald them.

EH: And scald them, and did the whole thing. Up to the north of these defense plants was Bond Brothers which was a [railroad] tie plant, and they creosoted wood for railroad tracks, and there was a little black community there, and that was just like the old coal fields. They didn't get paid. They had a right to go buy at the company store and get some of what they needed, and they really had to work there. There was a golf course that they owned on the river down by where National Carbide is now.

DC: Who owned the golf course?

EH: Bond Brothers.

DC: Oh, there was a company golf course.

EH: This was the tie plant that's no longer in existence. Behind American Synthetic Rubber there was a ball diamond, and they would allow us to practice there, and we had a church league that played amateur ball at Shawnee Park. Well there were two leagues, the Holy Name League and the Louisville Amateur Baseball Federation. And St. Dennis, we could practice there at their ball park. So they were all right. There were a lot of people. A lot of them worked there. There was another tavern called Fat's Camp which was right between the Rohm and Haas Plant and American Synthetic Rubber. You went down that road, and it was down on the river. He'd be open mostly on the weekend. And then there was another one up on Campground Road at Ralph Avenue real close to du Pont's, and that was Shoops, and that burned in the 1950s, and Rohm and Haas ran some fire hose from their plant to there, which was a pretty good little distance to run some fire hose, and helped them put it out with their wells. There was no city water here yet. And the real reason that these plants, the government built these plants here was because of the availability of the ground water and the Ohio River.

**There is plenty of ground water underneath this soil, which is good, and there were large,**



large wells put there because it takes a lot of water to manufacture this synthetic rubber. When they got to pumping water everyone around here ran out of water because every house, every farm had a well, and they lowered the water table so we had to go down deeper to get water.

DC: Do you remember that happening?

EH: Yes.

DC: Yeah.

EH: Yes. And, of course, at our expense even though they lowered it, and for a long distance away the water table was lowered so much. Now they don't have many of those wells. They're not there now.

DC: Are you still on well water on this property?

EH: I have a well here, and I have an irrigation pump that I irrigate the fields with. It's a hundred and twenty-five feet deep, and I can pump around the clock if need be and won't run out of water. Underneath all of this ground is sand so when you're anywhere close to the Ohio River that's what you will have. You will have some top soil on top, and you will have a little clay, and then you'll have sand. So this water is down in that sand, and we extract it out of there. And that sand really acts as a filter.

DC: Right. And the sand also makes it difficult to put in septic systems. Is that right?

EH: Well, no. In this area here we have [leach] pits. We'll have a septic tank and a pit, and a pit is a four foot diameter hole in the ground about twenty-five to thirty feet deep so your [solid] sanitary wastes will go out into the septic tank, and then the water will go into this pit.

DC: Oh, okay.



EH: And go on down into the sand and dissipate. Lateral fields, which you will have if you're in a rocky area, don't work good here. But now these pits that we use here have been banned. The state has banned them. They say they were contaminating the ground water.

DC: Banning meaning no new ones, but you can use the old?

EH: You can use the old ones, but sewers are coming fast, more and more on sewers, and the city water is here.

DC: Oh, it is now?

EH: Now. It pretty much got everywhere here. Now the sewers are not everywhere yet, and it will be some time before some of the areas get on sewers.

DC: I've taken up a lot of your time, and I appreciate you sneaking me in on such short notice too, making time for me tonight. Anything else that you'd like to add or anything I didn't ask about?

EH: Well, in my speech to the RCAC I talked about what was here before the plants came. Now when the plants came the government zoned all of this land MR, and that's an industrial zoning, and MR at that time meant that you had to do fifty per cent of your business off of the river. Well, that just killed a lot of the land because these farms were not that big. They didn't go all the way to the river. So this area in here now that's not really developed, it's not zoned that way now. It's EZ-1 which is an enterprise zone.

Right down at the end of my road there was a moonshine still during prohibition, and a guy by the name of Schulte was caught, and his son-in-law, Tommy Crawford, took the rap for that and went to prison because they thought he was too old to go.

DC: Oh, really?

EH: Yeah. He took the rap. The revenueurs came in and got him. There was—

let's see, I might give you some of the names of the [old families]—the Bank of St.

Helen's was the only bank around here for a long time, and that was started by Mary Beeblehauser's grandfather. He was one of four, and that's where Uncle Ed would get his money. He'd buy up some property. I think they would tell him maybe if someone had some bad luck, and he'd go over and say, well, hey, I understand you've got some bad luck, and I'll help you out of your problem, and so I'll buy your land. And he would buy it, and the Bank of St. Helen's would loan him the money.

DC: That's how he put together all this property.

EH: Yeah.

DC: Right.

EH: Some of the early ancestry here was Tarstrich, Randstedler, Sheffline, Wessel, Hartlege, Beeblehauser, Thenomen, Hessian, Kaelert, Schenck, S-C-H-E-N-C-K, Plenge, we called it Plank. It was P-L-E-N-G-E. Theigh, Kauffman, Schlaeder, Berns, Bremer, Zinn, Dennis, Volk, Siebert, and Kaelan. So you can see the biggest part of that is German.

DC: Was there a German-American social club in this area?

EH: There was the Cane Run Road Improvement Club over here which is still in existence yet today. St. Dennis held their picnics there until 1948 when it wasn't big enough any more. That's where the dances would be, the wedding receptions would be, and it would be German music there when that was going on.

DC: Right. There's a German neighborhood within Louisville as well, right?

EH: Yes.

DC: And was there much connection between this area and that German community?

EH: Not so much. No. That was a little more east, and back then there weren't really roads. It was non-existent, and the horse took the produce to the market and to towns across the fields.

DC: So you really, even growing up, the City of Louisville was "over there?"

EH: Oh, yes.

DC: Did you feel quite disconnected from the city?

EH: Oh yeah. Yeah. We were disconnected from the city. Yeah. We would go in into Parkland which is at Twenty-Eighth and Dumesnil is where we had to go to shop.

DC: Oh boy.

EH: There was a bank in there and a grocery store.

DC: That's some distance, right?

EH: Yes. Now when we played ball at Shawnee Park that was City of Louisville.

DC: Um-hum. And the school that you attended?

EH: St. Dennis.

DC: St. Dennis, okay.

EH: And then I went to Flaget, F-L-A-G-E-T, which is at Forty-Fourth and River Park, which is not there any more mostly because of the exodus to Pleasure Ridge and what have you.

DC: I know the parochial schools, so many of them closed down, right?

EH: Yes. But there's still some around. We have Holy Cross, Bishop David and Holy Cross, and Saint X[avier].

DC: Saint X, right.

EH: In high school they would be segregated. The parochial schools were segregated, or separated, males and females.

DC: Oh, right. Right. That's right. Okay. I think that pretty much covers it.  
Anything else that you want to add?

EH: I hope this helps some.

DC: It really does help give me a sense of this history and some great stories, so I appreciate it.

EH: Well, I'm glad to give you the time, and I did a lot of this whenever I was county commissioner. All those political science students had to interview an office holder or governmental figure, and I granted those all the time because I knew that if I were there I would appreciate it if someone would extend me that courtesy, and they needed that to help them complete their course, and so I granted those readily.

DC: That's great. So you're no stranger to having the microphone pinned to your shirt.

EH: Oh, no. No.

DC: Good. Thank you.

EH: You're welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED JULY 12, 2006 BY SHARON CAUGHILL