

DOWNTOWN



1994

QW: ... Why don't we talk a little bit about the downtown area? Because you lived on South Maple Avenue and you weren't far away from what has developed into our downtown area. Are there any things you remember about the—about the development of that area?

KC: Well, I can recall vividly between the construction of the firehouse, the remainder of the block from the firehouse to Prospect Street where there was a blacksmith shop, and then stables for horses and carriages. And the same with Chestnut Street from Ridgewood Avenue to Franklin Avenue, likewise, were stables for horses and carriages. And I can remember, also vividly, on the corner of Chestnut Street and Ridgewood Avenue there was a drugstore on the first floor. And Mr. Tice was the owner and the druggist, and on the second floor was the telephone company. And if you ever come across some old pictures of Ridgewood Avenue, you will find that there was just a line with telephone poles and wires covering all the community of Ridgewood



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SW: [There were several lunch counters, but only one restaurant.] But a restaurant — Wengers—W-e-n-g-e-r-s, I think it was called, or Wangers, was a second-floor—occupied .. the corner of Oak Street and East Ridgewood Avenue. And that was the only restaurant but it wasn't too good. There were a lot of merchants who would have out-of-town business meetings. And so we had to leave Ridgewood to have our lunch meetings, you know, for business, because there was no place to eat. Well, talk about the changes in Ridgewood; today, I think Ridgewood is restaurant row. I mean, we have terrific restaurants here and a lot of them. But can you imagine, in 1939 right through until the '80s, there were no restaurants.

FW I think when you talk about the changes in a community, I think the business district reflects the times. And today restaurants are in everyplace. Everybody eats out. It's takeout and that's what is your business today. We went through a period of banks coming into Ridgewood. Every time an empty store came about there was a bank that came in. Then there was a beauty parlor. At one point, we had, I don't know, 25, 30 beauty parlors in Ridgewood. And I think that's— that's some of the changes. ... Change is not necessarily bad; it's just a change.



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IN: That must have been a very interesting thing. What do you remember about that time in terms of our business district here? Was it the same as we see it today?

IW: No, it started from the station down to Oak Street and that was the end of the business district. I remember there was an A&P on the corner and then Thornton's Drugstore moved across the street to where the liquor store is on the corner of Van Neste Square and Ridgewood Avenue. And I remember in those days they unloaded the A&P. We worked—a couple afternoons a week or maybe every two weeks the A&P would bring a freight car in. And it would—up on the end of Ridgewood Avenue was a freight station. And we would—I think I got 50 cents a day or—for unloading a freight car. ... And driving a team of horses down Ridgewood Avenue to the A&P. And it would take us about two days to unload a freight car.

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IN: That must have been interesting. How old were you at that time when you were working with—again, 10 or 12 years old?

IW: I was about 10 or 12.

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IN: Was this a way that most youngsters your age at that time earned a little bit of extra money?

IW: Well, there weren't too many jobs around Ridgewood in those days. There weren't that many stores and it was difficult for young men to get a job. So a lot of them would work out in Paramus' celery fields. I remember the big deal was, like, 35 cents an hour breaking your back out there.

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IW: And that was about the only place to get a job. Otherwise, they'd have to—their fathers would get them a job in an office in New York and commute.

IN: ... you mentioned about using a team of horses to unload...the freight from... the freight cars and the amount of time it took to do that. Where were the horses kept?

IW: In back of the store. There was a big barn that they kept—the taxi kept the horses there for the taxi cabs, Ridgewood. And then the stores had their own deliveries. So they had their own horses and wagons back there. ... There must have been, maybe, 10—10, 15 horses back there. And then there was the Curet family—whole family had chickens. And I think Dr. Hanks had a cow back there, if I remember. ... In the morning, most of the family's houses had a coachman and a horse and a buggy, which they took the man to the train in the morning.



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JR: [in] '72 there was a fire [at Drapkin's Stationery] , which absolutely devastated the business. It was—we just didn't know what to do. We just didn't know which—what turn to take. So we sat down.

CR: And the people of Ridgewood—

JR: They were wonderful. Everybody was so wonderful but we had—we had, as a family, to make a decision at that point what to do, because it meant a lot of hard work to reestablish the business to get it back on its function. What do we do in order to show the people that we are going to service them? What we did, the day after the fire we took a—we decided to do this. We took a stand and took it out—put it out in the front of the sidewalk—on the front of the store. And Charlie was there and the brother-in-law and Georgie. The three guys were there with their little coin things. They got the—they didn't stop the papers. They stopped nothing. And they put up a newsstand in front of the store and they took in \$20 that first day; I remember that. And that was the beginning of the second round of the store. The survival of the store was that little newsstand.

CR: Every supplier that we had said, "Do not worry about [unclear]. It's there." Many of our suppliers had checks for \$5,000, \$10,000. "Pay us back when you can." I went down to the Citizens Bank and Dick Beacon was there. He said, "Charlie, don't worry. Here's \$100,000 to your account."

JR: That's so—

PC: Wonderful.

JR: The town was very supportive. The people were lovely.

...

JR: Yeah. People pitched in. We worked very, hard. We had to go in and take inventory. Every little paperclip had to be inventoried, counted. Everything that survived the fire had to be counted. It was a—it was a terrible, terrible time. But we hung in. We all pitched in. Our kids were in college at the time. And so I had no family responsibilities at the time. So we devoted our time.

PC: Well, I remember the tribute that the store gave to the village and to the people that came to help them clear the store and count the inventory.

JR: And so it just shows you, if you're good to people, people are good to you