

Tom Griffith: *Wheeling Streetscapes*

Michael Nobel Kline: Can you start out by saying 'my name is?'

Tom Griffith: My name is Tom Griffith.

MNK: Again please.

TG: Tom Griffith.

MNK: And today is?

TG: This is June the 15th, and it's a Thursday.

MNK: Tell us where we are.

TG: And this is Row House Gallery in North Wheeling, which referred to old town Wheeling, and we're here today looking at my artwork. And, and a nicer group of people I have never met!

MNK: Thanks.

TG: Is this a test? And did I pass!

Carrie Nobel Kline: All the right lines!

TG: Yeah.

MNK: You got a 10, a number 10 rating. Would you tell us a little bit about your people and where you were raised?

(011) TG: Well, I was born and raised here in Wheeling all my life. And when I says I was born and raised here, that's exactly it. I've only been on a few, couple, few days at a clip I've ever been out of Wheeling. Never went into the Service or anything like that. And growing up, like I said, I'm going to be 54 in July. And if you remember, an awful lot about Wheeling is the way it was, and an awful lot of artists are painting pictures of Wheeling like old homes and, and the way Wheeling looks today. And I think that's a good idea and something I'd like to do too, but I still think about Wheeling's past. Long before it became popular for nostalgia and the old photographs of Wheeling and postcards and all of that came out, I was interested in painting old scenes of Wheeling because there's an awful lot of stuff here in town like the Market Auditorium and the old theaters and different buildings in town that

are gone, you know. It's nice to be able to show what Wheeling was like in its heyday as far as I can remember, you know. They always say that you can't go home again, but if you're an artist working on a painting, a lot of times you feel like you have, are taking that vacation back in time, you know. And that's as close as you ever can come to it, you know. And again, it's nice to be able to, you know, paint Wheeling's past before you get on to the present because, especially the theaters that, that I've been doing. And they used, you know, lit up at night or in the daytime, whichever way I choose to go ahead and do it. It shows what Wheeling is, Wheeling's past has been. And also the fact that since it's a tourist town and they're trying to attract tourism in Wheeling by going ahead and having the theaters shown and working on them and trying to get them out to be seen, maybe that will connect with the city fathers. And we have two theaters here still in Wheeling that are practically not even being used. The Court Theater up on Chapline Street and the Victoria Theater, which is a church, is only just used every once in a while. And it'd be nice to be able to have things going again, not necessarily for movies, but for stage plays and concerts, and there's a lot of local bands around and local theater that would probably love to play downtown Wheeling. And these theaters are there, and before they meet the wrecking ball they ought to be utilized. And that's sort of what I hope, as far as painting the theaters are concerned. But it's nice to be able to be doing artwork and painting things up and down the street in the town you grew up with. And, and it's nice to be able to have a gallery like here at Row House to be able to show them. In the, in the future with the Artisan Center it would be nice to see other artists too come into the forefront and share their views. Not necessarily just on Wheeling, but anything. And that's about all I can think of off the top of my head.

MNK: What, what about the neighborhood you grew up in. Do you, do you have some recollections of --

TG: Oh yeah. I grew up in --

MNK: Your brothers and sisters --

(048) TG: Yeah, I grew up in East Wheeling. And up there where The Point is that we were talking about was, is now Grandview Manor, but it was Vineyard Hills at the time. And this is -- I

grew up there during the war years up through the 1950s. And then several people, places in Wheeling, and I live down at Center Wheeling now and have done the Market House, Market area down there and the paintings and have sold that already. And just all over Wheeling, you know, just painted in the different businesses and, and have sold them. And I sort of like been making extra money off of that besides -- You know, still have my day job! You have to keep that. And if you sell a painting that's where your next pair of shoes comes from! And it might look like a starving artist, but at the same time, that's exactly how you make ends meet is hope that somebody will see your artwork and go ahead and buy it, you know. And sometimes you, you wish you had a brother Theo like Van Gogh did. And that's --

MNK: Tell me, tell me about your, the community you grew up in. What was it like growing up there in the war years? Can you, can you talk about that a little bit? Some of your memories?

(064) TG: Yeah it's a pretty much like you see when they revive a movie of the past, the old radio programs and the theaters. Like when I was a kid theirs were the, the movie theaters was an influence with me just because I worked as an usher in several theaters. The Capitol Music Hall was a movie house at that time, and I worked there. And the people who owned the Capitol also owned the Court Theater and the Victoria Theater. And if they didn't need you over there, they sent you over to work the other theaters. And town was alive and busy at, at that time compared to how it is now. People'd see you out at night going to work as an usher for the midnight show, and they'd want to know, "What, little boy, are you doing out?" You know, "You should be home," and all of that. And you're telling them that you're going to, that you're, that you're going to work in a movie house. And, and it was a different flow of life back then. The stores was open seven days a week up until the evening, because people poured in and out of town, because they came to town for their entertainment. And it was just really nice, you know, to have grown up at a time like that. And in my pictures

(078) I try to show that. And that's about, just about all I can think of.

MNK: What was, were these, were these the days when Bill Lias ran --

TG: Uh huh.

MNK: The city and so --

TG: Yeah.

MNK: Can you, can you talk a little bit about --

(082) TG: Yeah, but I can, don't even remember just barely that. He had a restaurant in South Wheeling on a corner of --

MNK: Could you mention his name?

(084) TG: Bill Lias. And it's an abandoned piece of property now. But like he was, he was very big at that time, and he lived with his family on 15th Street. And during the years that I was married, like in the 1960s, he had a grandson there at his house. And my little boy, which was about nine years of age at that time, played with him. And he was very careful about who he left his son, his grandson play with. And my son was just, you know, went over there and played with the little boy in the house all the time. They didn't let the Lias grandchild run the neighborhood or anything like that because they was just afraid of anybody ever coming back at Bill himself or any problems, you know, troubles that, you know, get-even tactics or anything like that. And he was pretty, there was -- Wheeling was pretty well open at that time, but I was just a kid in the 1940s. I was born in 1940 itself, so when it was wide open, it was all just hearsay. And especially down in the Center Wheeling Market where I'm at, living at now. It's just not anything like it was at that time, you know. There's an awful lot more bars and honky tonks. And when town closed up, that's where everybody went after hours. To speakeasies and of course there was a houses of prostitution. But I was too young, you know. Dog gone it! What can I say.

MNK: Missed a good, missed a good party, hmm?

(103) TG: Yeah. Well, I don't think I really missed anything because I'm Catholic, and I'm pretty good Catholic and I would have never did anything like that anyway. And now I'm too old to do it so it's just as well! I don't have to, any of that kind of temptation to worry about at this point in time.

MNK: What about your parents. What, what was your dad like? Where did he work at?

TG: He worked as a foreman in a Continental Can Company.

MNK: Can you start by saying, 'my father?'

(108) TG: My father worked as a foreman in the Continental Can Company. It was located here in Wheeling. And that would have been down around 45th Street on the riverbank. And in the '50s they had, excuse me, went ahead and moved to Pennsylvania. And he, he continued working there. Of course that was after my parents got divorced. And my mother worked for the old Marsh Stogie Company down here on Main Street and did piecework for them. And --

MNK: What do you mean piecework?

(115) TG: She, she would put the tobacco into the fillers itself. At that time they were paid so much depending on how much they had put the tobacco together, you know, by the pound or I guess, you know -- That's how they weigh, weighed it up at the end of the day is how much each worker -- That's how much you made on your paycheck, I guess, at the end of the week. And she had been there for years. And then that was just about it. That was about the ... of their occupations was that. But their marriage only lasted up until I was about nine years of age. And my dad remarried again. And I was raised by my mother, and I have an older brother. And he's still around, but he's -- He was in the Navy, and my dad was a Navy man in the war, war years. And just a pretty nice background, childhood, you know. We made the best of, you know, coming from a broken home. And then of course I was married myself, and I had three kids. And like I said, shirt sleeves and shirt sleeves. The marriage did break up, and my kids have all been raised. At this time I had three of them. And they're all raised up on their own, and there's just me now. And I don't

(131) have any child support to pay. And just working part time and hoping the paintings will sell. Just trying to make headway that way as, as best I can. I work for a contract cleaning outfit that cleans the McLain Building here in Wheeling. And it pays only 22 hours a week. That's about three and a half hours a day, six days a week. So that's about 84, 85 dollars a week, you know. And that's not much. And you have to have an understanding landlord when it, you know, and he, which he is. And he's from Warwood. And it takes about all month to pay the, pay the rent. And, you know, you just really welcome being able to sell artwork and, you know, have things being seen. That's what I mean about being a starving artist. Although I might not look it, it hurts in other areas, you know! I'm on the food

stamp program, and that helps out a good bit. But it's just, you know, not everything that you wish it would have been when you have your dreams about being an artist and times are kind of lean. And you'd rather be working 40 hours a week, eight hours a day, but since I'm not, I have plenty more time to do artwork. That's about all I can really think of. I probably answered a lot more than what you had last asked.

MNK: No, that's what I like. I like when people take off and just --

(149) TG: Yeah.

MNK: Tape's cheap, and we got plenty of time and --

TG: Yeah.

MNK: So anything you feel like saying. You mentioned having taken a, a cartoon drawing class at some point?

(152) TG: No, I took a, at home, a cartoon course, Famous Artists Schools out of Westport, Connecticut, probably about 1958. And it was a three year home study course, and I had paid it off in the first six months because I did sell cartoons there. The only problem with it is magazines have changed down through the years. Now it's more allotted to advertising space and there's very few magazines buying cartoons. It's just, it just seems that's not the way it's going. It's all photo, and I guess it's, you know, times have just changed. And it's just not that way. The *New Yorker* and the *Saturday Evening Post* are the top markets, and there's an awful lot of competition, but just not enough magazines buying cartoons. And you can spend a lot in postage because when you send a batch of cartoons off, you have to include a return address envelope back to yourself with the exact amount of postage on it in case they don't buy those cartoons. And then if they think that they may be able to use a cartoon, they'll keep it. And, and if they decide to use it, they'll go ahead and publish it, you know, go ahead and pay you on publication. And that's kind of a pain in the

(168) backside too when they do things like that. But, you know, it's -- And then sometimes they will have kept it and then they find something better, and they'll send you your work back months later and you can't send it onto another magazine where it might have sold. The, the idea at that time has passed, you know, you can't use it for another magazine, you know. And since it's that way, and since so much money can be poured into postage and all of that,

I started going ahead and painting locally because this town is that kind of a town that appeals to artists all the way around, you know. We have so much here. And it's nice to be able to catch it.

MNK: What do you mean?

(177) TG: The architecture, you know. And then it's a nice valley, you know, to paint. And you have these wonderful buildings and you have a river and different things going on that you're excited about, and you want to be able to show that. The -- And build up the cultural influence in Wheeling because that's really -- What it really needs is, is to have people believe in what they're seeing around them for the first time. Because a lot of times people, because of the times we live in, they'll say things like, 'what Wheeling needs is more commerce and industrial things in here.' They don't need this and that and the other thing pertaining to the, the arts or anything like that, but it's just because they don't, they don't think that way, you know. But Wheeling will never be what it was in the past. And I think it's nice that we have, you know, the Heritage Project going on and the Gee Building being turned into the Artisan Center coming up because people need to, to see a lot more going on than just, you know, lamenting the past, you know. And perhaps that may, may even change the tide there too. Maybe business will come in when they see the people are
(194) more interested in this and going out to these things and cultural things that will be presented in town. That's like I said about the theaters. It'd be nice to have theater brought back into town where people can see that. It's not just ink and paint or oils or anything like that. It's broaden the field of arts all together. And I think that that's one of the things that would help downtown Wheeling a lot. A lot would be just to go ahead and put a broader spectrum on it as far as the arts are concerned. And bring a little bit of what's even out at the Stifel or out in Oglebay Park. Bring some of that in downtown Wheeling where the lower classes can get at it too.

MNK: You were talking about the Famous Artists School. Could -- What, what did the instruction consist of there, and how did your artwork develop during the three years that you were associated with that?

(208) TG: Well, the school itself besides cartooning, which is what I took, did other fine arts courses

and things like that. They sent you everything that you would need from a miniature drawing board to your first bottle of ink and a set of pens and pencils, and an exceptionally good group of books to follow for each lesson. And it was very thorough. As a matter of fact, the books are probably worth something now because I've seen an ad in the paper that if anybody had any of the old original cartooning books from the Famous Artists School to let them know. And I thought, 'well, I got a prized thing here.' But you -- They tell you that through the, the course on each lesson, to constantly practice whatever they're emphasizing. If it's perspective, you know, and how to go ahead and do it. And then they would give you your work assignment at the end of that month's chapter. And you would draw it up on illustration board the way they specify it to be, and then you send it off into the mail. And then they send it back to you. They have their teachers at the school in Westport would use tissue overlays, and they would draw on the tissue overlay over your picture what it was that you should have done. And they would grade you in accordance with that. And then they told you to go onto the next lesson, you know. I never

(226) was ever, ever had to repeat a lesson over again. But they would tell you where you were weakest and, you know. And it wasn't that important at that time, but if you do have the gist of the idea. But to keep it in the back of your head on the next lesson to incorporate that into the new assignment what you had learned in the past, you know. And they could pretty well tell.

MNK: So it was helpful critiquing you were --

TG: Yeah.

MNK: Getting along the way.

(232) TG: And like it -- An art course like that doesn't teach a person how to draw. You have to learn to draw or they would never accept you. It doesn't teach anybody how to draw. You have to know how to, you know, draw a line and, and make things. But it sort of like refines and hones down, you know.

MNK: Did you draw much as a child?

TG: Oh yeah.

MNK: Can you talk about that?

(237) TG: Yeah. I was always real big on animated movies. And any time we ever went to the movies, cartoons was the thing that I understood the most. And I used to take books, and on each page I used to go ahead and draw something and flap the pages just to go ahead and see them move. And I was so impressed with movies I used to come home and go ahead and draw every movie that I ever saw, you know, that impressed me so much from the beginning to the end. Now, now as an adult, I'm, I'm painting the movie theaters themselves that I saw these films in. So it's kind of a turnaround! That's really strange too now that I get to thinking about it. But that's funny that the, that the -- When you start, stop and think that there's not been a time in my life that I didn't go ahead and draw or paint or, you know. Whenever any colors come out, crayons or anything, you just, as you was getting, you went through that stage. You were using them and gradually moved on to paint. I use mainly watercolor today because I like that medium, and it's more immediate. You can change things where you can't do that with oil. And, and I like

(254) it. It, it's just great, a great area to paint in was watercolor. And I don't consider myself a watercolorist though. As far as being an artist is concerned, I think of myself as more an illustrator and just use color as a byproduct, you know. You remember how something looked and you fool around till you get that color exactly right. And -- But it's essentially the drawing that's important. You have to have a pretty good knowledge of what it is that you're doing when you're about to paint something. That you get the drawing right because there's an awful lot of ideas that people have that you just pick up a brush with color and just put it on a canvas like. And you can do it in a half hour like they do on the TV shows, Bob Ross. And that's fine if you're going to be painting woods and distant hilltops and mountains and trees and the moonlight coming through and all of that. It's nice to see

(267) those techniques being used. Artists have been using them for years. But it wouldn't do, suit my purpose because I do window frames and you have to have the ledges all right and the perspective all going, flowing in the same direction. And that they don't show you on television. It takes a little bit of time and patience to do that. And -- Not to say that there isn't anything wrong with Bob Ross stuff. I use a lot of that ideas myself, you know. You know just when to use watercolor techniques in a painting. If you want to make the

softness of the clouds, you lay the painting flat and flood it with water and play it around a little bit with a brush till you get that desired effect. After I've sketched something, I usually sit it upright with a, sort of dry brush it straight from the tube and maybe mix something else in there to give it the right contour and values and all that that every artist wants to bring out in a painting.

MNK: Is that why your colors are so strong?

(280) TG: Yeah because they're more vibrant.

MNK: ... tube.

TG: A lot of times I'll light that, you know. It's a -- And then if something is white, it's never ever really completely white. I'll usually put a little yellow in there, mix it in there with it. Like if you're painting the side of a white house in the sunlight, it's not just white. You have to allow for the fact that the sun is, is got a little color to it too. And that the house, even though it's a white house, in the sunlight it's got a little tinge to it. It's not perfectly white. You know what I mean.

MNK: But you're painting, you're painting a lot from memory. Would you call this memory art that you're doing?

(290) TG: Yeah. But it is a lot of times too that I think in my mind that I can sit down and go ahead and paint something that I -- 'Gee, I passed this building all of my life, I can --' But when you sit down and start drawing it, then you realize you don't. And that's where it's nice to be able to fall back on old photographs. And a lot of times it will spurn you on to remember how things were, you know. Because I find that out now that I'm doing the theater here in town. I can remember the sides and the building and all that because I have photographs to go ahead and work. But I can't remember exactly what it was on the, on the marquee that faced Market Street. And you have to go around and find old timers that might remember what -- Well, there wasn't anything up there but the name of the theater, and that was written out in script or something like that. And -- But it stops the idea of the painting. But a lot of, most of it all comes from memory, you know. You can remember just about what was there, and you try to incorporate that old feel as it, as it was as you remembered it into the picture too. Especially with the people because I put a lot of people in my pictures.

MNK: I was looking at the pictures over at Jim's. I was wondering if, if any of those people was you. If you ever painted yourself into the --

(309) TG: Not necessarily.

MNK: Eating an ice cream cone or, or a --

TG: No. I probably had done that at --

MNK: ... across the street?

(311) TG: No, I don't really paint -- No, I can't really say that I've ever done that. A lot of times I just like to be able to, to paint people on the street. One of my favorite artists is William Hopper. I don't know whether you've ever heard of him, but he was back, popular back in the '30s and the '40s. But if you ever see his work, it's like this thing on the wall here. There's no people on the street, and it looks lonely. And I just don't feel that way. I, I think people relate to crowds and things like that. And I like to have as many people moving about in the, in the picture. And it sort of like gives it a little touch to it, you know. Because anybody can sit and draw a picture of a building or a set of buildings or something like that, but when the artist gets creative enough to go ahead and add the people and have them moving around and relating to one another, there's where the real creative and the fun side of a picture comes into play, you know. Because other than that it would be boring just to sit down and just draw a picture of a, of a building itself no matter how realistic and, and arty it looks, you think it looks. It's just a copy of something that's already there,

(327) you know. The real part in the, that I, I get off on so much is, is adding the people and the little effects to it that, you know, that an artist has. Excuse me.

MNK: In the paintings that I've seen, it looks like, like most of these were, the scenes could be placed in the '50s somewhere. Is that --

(333) TG: Yeah, because that's, you know, when I was growing up in the -- Like I said, I was born in 1940. So I can remember that very vivid, you know. And like I said, the thing of it is you want to get that out of your system of, of what the past was before you start painting things of the future, you know. You think, 'Oh, gee whiz,' you know, 'that was such a beautiful building there, and like they're going to tear it down.' Well, I'd better hurry up and sketch it, you know, before it's gone, you know. And it is gone. And you want people in the future

to know. And if they're so much interested in old photographs, they might be interested in the paintings too, you know. Because they have somebody that was around at that period that knows and might see that as something they would like to collect as well, you know, is the old photographs. A lot of people seem like they react to what they see that I've painted and that they're interested in. And I like that, you know, because it means you've touched something in somebody. And that's what every artist is trying to do, you know. Especially if you're a realist painter, you're trying to connect the poles with everybody,

(352) you know, when they look at your work. And that's about it. That's all I can think of on that.

MNK: If you were, if you were describing this -- I know that you love to work with a brush and, and to create images. But if you were describing this valley where Wheeling is located to somebody who had never seen it before, how, how would you set about telling them about it?

(360) TG: Home! It's home to me, you know. I have a chance to go to North Carolina. My, my son wants me to come out there because of job opportunities are great, but I, I don't feel like I want to go because Wheeling has been home to me. And I think we're on the threshold of something else now. And the next couple of years is going to tell one way or the other, you know. And I, I like Wheeling. I've always called it home, and this, you know, it's a town that's always been good to me. And other than describing the valley to them as far as the hills and things like that, but in doing that you'd almost have to tell about the down side. The economy is gone and this and that and the other. And you don't want to do that. But it's mainly, it's, it's home, and it's, it's still here. And no matter where you go it's always here waiting for you when you come back! And it's nice. It's, it's nice to see the changes coming about because I think the one thing that hurts this town in a worst way is the people putting it down because of the lack of the economy. They, they just don't think things are going to go. And I don't think people should really think that way. I think they should

(380) be positive about it. And it's really great to go ahead. And even in this area of town that we're sitting in here in North Wheeling is, is a different area than what Center Wheeling is even though both areas are trying to bring the past of those areas alive once again.

Downtown Wheeling is trying to do it as well. And, and it's, it's home. It's nice to see home,

you know, remembering itself and bringing itself anew. That's how I would describe it, I guess.

MNK: ... nice.

(390) TG: I'm probably -- Anybody else would say the same thing about where they live, you know because there's an awful lot of things going on across the country in other cities too. And that's where we get an awful lot of our guidelines from. If it works in Virginia, maybe it will work in Wheeling. And that happens too.

MNK: The Park Service certainly has taken a, a lot of interest in this.

(396) TG: Yeah, and it would be certainly nice when we see what the riverside project, how it's going to work out. Like I said, in the next few years things is really going to be changing a little bit. And I think people should be more positive and optimistic about that, you know.

MNK: And if somebody handed you a brush and paper to design this new riverfront, what would you -- How would you -- How would it look to you? How do you remember it as a kid, and how would you like to see it?

(404) TG: Well, I wouldn't necessarily do it as it was when I was a kid because then it was a river, you know. We had boats and things like that coming in. And where the Wharf Parking Garage at that time was all cobblestoned over. You could walk down to the water's edge, but it was unchanged for years. They used to tie their boats up there in the mooring post. A few places down there you might even see the rings on the wall yet. But the Civic Center being there and, is nice because that's the start of everything. But it doesn't seem to be too much space between the storefronts on Water Street and the water's edge in town itself to do too much of anything other than make it into a park. Years ago it used to be called Nippo Park for whatever reason they ever called it that. N-I-P-P-O. I don't know what that name ever was, but I guess they had picnic benches and things like that down there. But they had paved it over with cobblestones as far as I remember when I was growing up. And it was -- Of course the B&O yard was down there at that time on 11th Street, over 11th Street. And that was before the Wharf Parking Garage. And it was pretty shoddy back

(425) in those years, and Wheeling just didn't use those, those places. But that -- You can't really blame them at that time because they had flood problems then. Now we got the flood wall,

and things are, you know, we're not having the serious flooding that we had had in earlier years so in a sense they're, you know, the old warehouses and things like that that was on a riverbanks down through South Wheeling and all that may, you know, be taken, taken care of because they're only still standing there. They're not really being used for any real purpose, and it's just a waste of space. And I think that if industry ever does come to town, that's what they should do. And there was talk about putting in a mall down there in some of these here warehouses down in Center Wheeling between 20th Street and 23rd Street, but it sort of like fell through. It hasn't -- But it was such a good idea at the time.

(441) And that would help the riverfront project along. And then in that area down there too since they took out the tracks is a lot more space than what there is in Wheeling's area as far as the riverfront up here. That there's plenty of grassy areas down there, and it could be utilized into public shopping areas and a bike path going through. Restaurants and probably one big hotel because they do kind of talk about that. And I wouldn't want to see it turn into a parking lot! You know, since we're already going to have the, the visitor's center right next to the Civic Center anyway, I think that would take care of its needs. And with moving everything down into Center Wheeling area that might kind of clean up the area of town down there too because it's an all together different area at night, you know. You have, still have your places of prostitution that operate even out on the street. And it's just not a good thing. It's not there through the day, but it's people coming from other areas of the city and coming down there at night, you know. I don't know whether you're

(460) familiar with Wheeling. Well anyway, they call that area down there between 20th and 23rd Street the meat rack because there's an awful lot of people circling around for purposes of prostitution. And in moving things down that way, maybe that will change that, you know. Take -- Because I guess there will always be an area of town where that's going to be alive, but it's, it's kind of a shame to have it in my neighborhood! You know, because I say it's not that way through the day, you know. It's not the, the image that you would like to think that, that an area of town has, but, you know, but it's there.

MNK: What about the waterfront itself. Would, would there be, would there be a fishing wharf, for example, for people or would that -- How would, how do you envision --

TG: Well, there is --

MNK: You're a real ...

(475) TG: They do that now, you know. The wharf down there at the mouth behind the Civic Center they, they fish right off the retaining walls where the railroad had that separates the, the river from Wheeling Creek and center and downtown Wheeling. There's an awful lot of fishing going on down there now. And some people go down on the amphitheater and fish. Then there's a marina on the Island. And -- So it's, it's there, and there's where the ideas are coming from is to go ahead and, and do that. They'll probably put in a fishing, fishing area like that. And it's nice, but it would be nice if we still had a railroad system in Wheeling. But if we did, we wouldn't have the riverfront project because it ran along those lines. But I'd still like to see a little railroad, you know, be able to take you back and forth to Pittsburgh and give the people another way of travel. But, you know, most of all that has been turned over to the bike paths and things like that. But that's a sort of a mode

(493) of travel I would have liked to have seen come back in. I would have like to have painted the interior of trains and things like that anyway. It would have been nice, you know, to have painted the railroad.

MNK: Do you remember the, the railroad in the '50s?

(499) TG: Yeah, just barely because even then it was getting down to, towards just freight, you know. And I can just barely remember the streetcars and things like that that we had, you know. I know they made a lot of noise and you could hear them going across the old steel bridge at night. Clatter, clatter, clatter, you know. And that's, that's something that is, is gone, but at the same time I can understand, you know, we'll probably have shuttle buses and, and something just every bit as good in the future. Maybe even something made up to look like a trolley or something that would transfer people from one end of town to the other with the riverfront project in place. Because you almost need some sort of conveyance like that anyway. But I, I really see where downtown Wheeling has a, has a future because so many other people are talking about it, and this is something that's, that I believe in. And I think that's the only way it can go is to go ahead and, and pursue those ideas, you know. You got to educate the people to change. Because like I said, there's a lot of people here in town that

are, have lived here all their lives, and they just think that the only thing that's
(522) going to make Wheeling anything is, is business and commerce coming in. But, you know, it
just seems to bypass us. And tourism is the way to go. And, and I think it's, it's another
good thing to bring as much cultural stuff to people in Wheeling as possible and to use what
we have now as a, as a way to go ahead and do that. As I said that the theater, you know,
the two remaining theaters we have, it would be nice to be able to use them. And one's
sitting vacant up there on Chapline Street in the Board of Trade Building, the old Court
Theater. And although movies would not go anymore, you could at least have a lot of
concerts and plays and things like that. Because there's a lot of young people here in town
and theater groups and all of that that would love to go ahead and just bring the Brooke Hill
Players into town. They'll go ahead and put on a show in town. And to fix the theaters
(542) up and use them again. And they're really beautiful, you know, the few that we have. Now
the Victoria Theater on Market Street is now a church. And it's -- If the stage is used at all,
it's for their church services. Or occasionally they will bring a religious group in, but it's far
from being the vaudeville house that the Victoria was years ago. And when there was talk
about restoring the Victoria Theater and saving it, people were very enthusiastic. But it --
After it was all done, they gave it over to this church group. And they -- It really sits there
in quiet through the week, you know. It's -- People who are tourists, when they come to
town they don't want to sit in their hotel room watching HBO, they want to get out and, and
get around and see things. And I think the weekends is a great place to start with
(558) the theaters, you know. Bring something in town where people can, can go and see things.
Maybe that will change in time. I hope so. Maybe somebody else other than me will, will
think of those things and use it, you know.

MNK: You were -- Talk about the warehouses a little bit.

(564) TG: Well, they were the old Wheeling Stamping Works down there. And their warehouse were
right next to the tracks, the train tracks that used to go from that point out through East
Wheeling. And if that was all leveled off and the warehouses themselves probably could be
fixed up inside. But when they had talked about that idea as far as bringing in a mall here
in Wheeling the, they couldn't find anybody to sign on a dotted line because they want to

move into a new structure, you know. They want a new building. And they would probably more easily attract those kind of businesses if they built it, but like -- There's so much about the old warehouses that are, that are, that could be used, you know. You could probably turn them into exactly the little businesses here and there, you know. And -- But it hasn't, hasn't worked out that way. And I think the mall project is now defunct as a result of it.

MNK: ... seen --

(585) TG: The building still stands.

MNK: Malls that were situated in old --

TG: Yeah, and they, they --

MNK: ...

(587) TG: Could be here, but the thing of it is is that you got to get the business that they want to come into something new. They don't want to have to come in there and build from the ground up and pour their money into a place and then find out it's not going to work. So I don't know, there has to be an awful lot of things worked out, I guess, before they could do that. But the buildings just sit there, and you know they have to be rat infested. And maybe there is storage of some kind from other businesses that may go in and use those old warehouses for something. But that's not, you know, it's, it's just a waste of space. And as we're going into a new century, you know, in the next 10 years, it would be nice to be able to, to do something with that, you know. If you're going to have the riverfront project run down
(602) into that area, you don't want to see the back of an old warehouse that's just sitting there, you know. It would be nice if it could be used.