

William Carney: *Five Generations in the Steel Mills*

Michael Nobel Kline: Say 'my name is.'

William Carney: William Alan Carney Junior.

MNK: Say 'my name is.'

WC: Oh, my name is William Alan Carney Junior.

MNK: I'm sorry. One more time.

WC: William Alan Carney Junior.

MNK: Okay. Test. Okay. And this is what, the 24th?

WC: Of May, 1994.

MNK: Twenty-fourth.

Carrie Nobel Kline: Is that misbehaving? Got your mike on?

MNK: Well, why don't we start off if you would -- Just tell me a little bit about your people and the place you were raised.

(010) WC: My family came here somewhere in the 1840s, 1850s. I'm not exactly sure when. They came here because of the potato famine. That's my dad's side of the family. They were farmers. They continued to be farmers after they reached Wheeling. My first grandfather that came here came with the B&O Railroad as a tunnel Irish. One of the men who built the tunnels for the B&O Railroad. After he got here, he continued to farm. He owned, and the family still owns, the hill behind the Ohio Valley General Hospital.

MNK: Could you include names?

(017) WC: The first one was James Carney. The second one was William Carney. The third was James Carney. The fourth was William Alan Carney Senior. And I'm William Alan Carney Junior. And then my sons would be the sixth generation here in this country. The first Carney came with a brother. I'm not really sure what his name was. He ended up becoming a contractor and helped to build the streetcar lines in Wheeling. And also, I believe, helped

to build the ... to Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel. Corporate headquarters building. The other side of the family, the Wests, came here in the 1700s and owned the beautiful, what the old newspaper called mansions, at Tiltonsville, Ohio. People that stopped there included Daniel Boone and some famous Revolutionary War generals who paid their respects. Almost all of that side of the family became doctors except for my great grandfather who went into the pottery business. And he came here to Wheeling when my grandmother, I'm not sure of the year, when my grandmother was about eight years old and worked for the North Wheeling Pottery Company. And they lived in North Wheeling for the rest of their lives. All of us, except for my boys, have worked for Wheeling

(037) Pittsburgh Steel Corporation or the predecessor companies. There have been five of us, five generations now. The first generation really didn't work for the company, but he helped to build one of the plants. So we take credit for that.

MNK: Can you talk a little bit about that in detail?

WC: I -- You mean about him building the plant?

MNK: Yes. Which one and where?

(042) WC: To tell you the truth, I'm not really sure which one it was. Although, I believe, it would have been LaBelle because that's about the time that LaBelle would have been around. The second generation worked for LaBelle. My great grandfather worked for Riverside. My grandfather worked for Whitacker Glessner. My dad worked in downtown Wheeling all of his life, 47 years I believe, and ended up being the computer center manager. And I work in Mingo Junction, Ohio. I've worked in production control department for the last 35 years. And I'm in management. Two of us were in management, and three of them were in the union. That's about all I -- That pretty well covers that.

MNK: Yeah.

(055) WC: My grandfather quit. My grandfather quit Wheeling Steel during a strike because a couple men were killed. And he just figured that wasn't a way to live. And he walked out of the mill that day and never went back.

CNK: He had been working during a strike or how --

WC: No, he was -- No, no. But I do have relatives that, on my mother's side of the family, who

were strike breakers and went into the mills. Yes.

MNK: Remember the year of that strike and some details about it?

(061) WC: I think it was in, either 1919 or 1920, but I'm not exactly sure how many were killed. My father said two. I can only find one, you know, that I think was killed, but --

CNK: And how were they killed?

WC: Someone shot them. There were a lot of killings around here. A lot of killings in the mines and the steel mills and the, the people who were trying to form the unions were thought of, and the newspapers called them, Bolsheviks and Communists. And it made no difference whether you really were or you weren't, if you went out on strike, you were a Bolshevik. And that's in some of these binders here about that.

CNK: So people were, were shot on the picket line basically?

(071) WC: Yes, right. Trying to cross the picket line or shot from a distance. A sniper. Shot trying to go home. One of the worst -- You read about the Matewan in southern West Virginia. You read about that, and there a movie made about it. But there was also a bad killing, and that was at Wellsburg just a few miles up the river here. And that the sheriff was murdered and eight striking coal miners were all murdered in the same day. And you don't read about that one, do you?

CNK: What did --

MNK: What year?

(078) WC: Around the same time, but I'm not, I'm not exactly sure.

MNK: Around that 1920 or so?

WC: Yeah.

CNK: What do they say about that? Who supposedly did it and why?

(080) WC: Well, the striking coal miners killed the sheriff in a gun battle. There were open gun battle at the McKinleyville Mine. McKinleyville Mine is real close to the Pennsylvania border. There were people tried and convicted of it. Today -- I went up and tried to -- Somebody gave me a man's name and I don't remember who it is now, but I went up and tried to talk to one of the people who's still alive. And the only thing he would really tell me was, "I know where the gun is that killed the sheriff." And that's all he would say. So there's --

Still today won't talk. Well, murder -- You can go to jail anytime for murder right. So --

MNK: So this is -- This valley has had a really stormy --

WC: Yes.

MNK: Labor history.

(090) WC: Right. Right. Been the hotbed of, of the formation of unions and also the beginnings of union. And at least some of the first strikes were pretty violent.

MNK: So you, you showed me a while ago a picture of a farm where you started out?

(095) WC: Actually my folks were divorced for about seven years. Therefore, my mother, my sister and I left Wheeling and moved to St. Clairsville, Ohio, and then Mount ..., Ohio. And then my folks were remarried, and we moved back here.

MNK: Interesting.

WC: In 1948. Yeah.

MNK: How did that happen?

(100) WC: I don't know really. I don't know.

MNK: So they were, they were apart for seven years and then --

WC: Yes.

MNK: Seven long years.

WC: Right. Right.

MNK: Interesting. And so at, at that point you came back to Wheeling?

WC: To Warwood. Yeah. We moved to Fifth Street in Warwood, and we've been here ever since.

MNK: How did you feel about the family getting back together?

(106) WC: I was only in the fifth grade or so. I -- But it was all right. I mean, you know -- I liked living on a farm though. But it, it was all right. The first high school football game I had ever seen, I played in. So being out on the farm and all you had was a car, you know, to get you in town to buy groceries once in a while. Then you didn't, you know, you didn't -- I didn't know what football was. And I remember going out for football and putting my hip pads on backwards. And somebody come over and said, "Are you being funny," you know, "That's not the way they go." So --

MNK: Yeah, I did the same thing.

WC: Did you?

MNK: Yes.

WC: Yeah.

MNK: Put my pads on backwards. So what do you remember about school then?

(119) WC: I remember that -- You mean a school on the farms?

MNK: Yeah.

WC: Don't remember too much except that I've been told that at one point in time Roy Clark was in my class. That Roy Clark was in a St. Clairsville classroom. I don't know for how long, but somebody's told me that supposedly knows that we were in the same class together. But I don't remember that. I remember playing marbles. I remember riding a school bus. I remember one day -- We lived about three miles out of town. And I remember one day my sister was kept after class for some reason. She was a good student. It wasn't she did something wrong. But we missed the school bus. And I remember being so concerned that I had to get back off the school bus and go find her. And when I found her, we had missed the school bus. So her and I had to walk. I was probably in the fourth grade. She was in the second grade. The three miles to the farm. And that was a frightful day. I remember once my mother -- We were living in an apartment for only a couple months in Marion, Ohio. And we were downtown. I sold *Grit* magazines in bars and earned money so that I could take my mother and my sister to a movie. And we -- I took

(137) them to a movie then we stopped to have a Coke. Well, my mother had some type of an attack in the drug store. And they took her away in an ambulance and left my sister and I standing there. And trying to find my way home and climbing in the, the window of the house. We had no phone. I had no idea really -- I was so little, I had no idea where my relatives lived or how to call them, you know. I didn't -- So we just stayed there until my mother come home from the hospital.

CNK: ...

WC: Yeah, it was.

MNK: So then -- Back here in the Wheeling area, then you continued your schooling here?

(147) WC: Yes. Warwood Elementary School and Warwood High School.

MNK: You have this most remarkable interest in local history. Do you remember where that started or --

(152) WC: Not really sure. I've always been interested in history because my family was here for so long. And at one point in time, I was really interested in what was my grandfather, my great grandfather doing while this took place in Wheeling, you know. That sort of interested me. So one of the first things I do was try to study what my family was doing. And although it's not very good, it's, you know -- I've taken it back to at least when they, near when they come over on the boat. That got me interested in it. Also, I became a tour guide working for Oglebay Park and the Jamboree. And the way I got the job was by telling the girl at Oglebay Park that I was a history expert. And I really wasn't. But then I figured since I'm telling everyone this, I had better find out all I can. So that's what started it, I think. And I haven't stopped a day since. I do something every day since that day that, that I got the job as a tour guide.

CNK: Which was when?

(168) WC: Eight years ago or so.

MNK: But this, this interest had preceded that or that's when it started?

WC: It interested me about what had happened to my family, and my father-in-law was a policeman. And our whole family worked for all the great companies here.

MNK: Hey! So we were talking about this interest in history. You were interested in what was going on when your grandfather and your great grandfather were around. Was that, was that how it sort of started?

(175) WC: Yeah. When I started reading about LaBelle mill and making cut nails. And I read the *Principio to Wheeling* and I kept thinking to myself, 'You know these are the mills that my fathers worked at and maybe they were involved in some of these strikes. And maybe they were out in the picket line, and maybe they saw some of these deaths.' That interested me. I never found, although I would have liked to, I never found that they lived in the company homes. Because they lived so close to the mills themselves that they didn't have to live in the company homes, you know. Like old Tennessee Ernie Ford talked about the company stores and -- Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel owned probably half of the town of Beech Bottom at

one time. Those houses are still standing. Probably owned 50 houses at Yorkville. And about half of those are still standing today that they rented to the employees. Those were the first houses in the towns. So the people had to rent the houses in order to live. But once you rented the house, then you were theirs. Because then they owned you. I've seen corporate records at Beech Bottom where a man at the company store charged more than he received. So you couldn't go out on strike because you owned your soul to the company store. You rented their house, and that would mean that your family would have been outside. And how would you have gotten to work then if you couldn't live

(199) in the town. You know, there -- In those days there weren't streetcars even that came this far. So how did you get there, you know. So they sort of had you.

MNK: Do you -- But that wasn't the experience of your forefathers?

WC: No, it didn't seem to be in any case in any of them.

CNK: But you were already reading these books when you started to wonder 'how did my family fit in.' Those are unusual books for people to just pick up, *Principio to Wheeling*.

(205) WC: Well, I worked for Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel so I was interested in the history of my own company. And they had a library at one time. And it was a fine library, and you could borrow their books. So it was just fascination, that's all. My whole -- Well, I can't say it. I have a cousin that graduated in history in college. My son is --

MNK: I missed that part about your sister teaching.

(211) WC: My sister teaches in Buckhannon. She teaches history. I have a cousin who graduated in history in college. He works for Elby's now. My son is getting his master's degree at Old Dominion in history.

MNK: So it's just a --

WC: Sort of a family tradition, yeah.

MNK: Did you study history after high school at all?

WC: History courses?

MNK: Yes.

(218) WC: I've taken one history course from Dr. Javersac at Wheeling College or Wheeling, West Virginia Northern Community College. That's the only history I've had. No, the rest has

come from books and newspaper articles.

MNK: What is your sense of how, how the Irish fared in, in this valley from --

WC: The valley was settled by the Irish, the Scotch and the Germans. At least Wheeling was. Up and down the river, it's not the case. My mother's folks came from Wales and were brought here to Martins Ferry to work in the tin plate mills. Americans believed that the Welsh were the best tin platers in the world. Therefore, when they wanted to recruit and wanted to open mills up -- Tin plating was sort of an art. And they recruited and brought people here from over there. So each of these towns -- Like in Follansbee, I think the Polish and the Irish and the Greeks settled up there. But Wheeling was the Irish, the Scotch and the Germans. And I don't really think that since we outnumbered everyone else here for a number of years, the Irish -- I don't think that there was any bad feelings against the Irish. At least I haven't found that. It could be the case, but I haven't found it.

(240) My grandfather who was, worked on the tunnels, would have been thought of as nothing more than a Chinese Koolie. They were really thought of as a low life. That's the reason they had two nicknames for them. Either the Tunnel Irish or the Shanty Irish. Shanty Irish lived in the shanties along the railroad. And the Tunnel Irish were the men who built the tunnels. And they figured if you were from Ireland where there were coal mines, that you must know how to dig a tunnel. So they gave you a job. There were 5,000 Irish workers working on the B&O, and they had 50 police officers in order to stop the fights and things at night. They had their own police force. There were killings. There were two different factions, which I never learned which was which. But were two different

(254) factions of, of the Catholic Irish that hated each other and fought each evening, I guess.

MNK: And that was right here? Which --

WC: That was -- It was strung out from Baltimore to Wheeling. Don't know which tunnels he worked on. Have no idea. Would love to know, but I don't know. And I don't -- I'm not too sure that Baltimore and Ohio would even know now.

MNK: They didn't keep any employment records ... ?

(261) WC: I don't think so. I asked the man who was here writing the book, and he didn't seem to know of any. I -- It's up there somewhere. Well, anyway -- He didn't seem to know that

their records dated back there. And he had been going through their corporate records for a number of years.

MNK: Tell me about your own history with Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel.

(268) WC: I started in 1959. I started as a mail boy, as did my father. I worked for about a year as a mail boy. Then I became --

MNK: Can you describe that a little bit? What that was.

(271) WC: That was taking mail to the, each of the floors throughout the corporate headquarters in downtown Wheeling. All the way from the 12th floor where the executives were down to where the janitors were. I met some of the really great people involved in our industry. Mr. Neudifor, Mr. Steele, the Whitackers, Holloways. These were people I'd deliver mail to. Then I went into production control, and I've been in production control ever since. I was in production control department for about three years when they made me a supervisor. And then I was the first supervisor sent from the downtown offices to the mills to work. And I was told the day that I left that if I screwed up they would never, ever send another supervisor out to work in the mills. So I had a double -- I needed to perform very well so that other guys my age could be sent to the mills to work also. I became a supervisor of the lithograph department in Yorkville, Ohio. And then I became administrator of production control at Yorkville proper. Lithograph was just one department. Then I was taken from there down to Benwood to work in the pipe mill as a supervisor of production control, administrator of production control. And then I left production control and became the assistant manager of the real estate department for about three years. I then went back to Benwood, per my request, and started all over again!

MNK: At the pipe mill?

(299) WC: Yeah. Started as a supervisor and then I became the superintendent of production control Benwood. And while a superintendent, they closed the mill. And closed it up. And then I went to work back in Wheeling. That was my third time back in Wheeling. And although I worked in Wheeling, I actually worked for the Steubenville complex. But what we did down there was schedule the units from downtown Wheeling. Then I was sent to the mill, then back to Wheeling, and then back to the mill. And that's where I've been for the last five or

six years. I work in the Mingo Junction 80 inch hot strip shipping production control.

MNK: Means? Eighty inch?

(311) WC: Eighty inch hot mill. It's, it's the biggest mill we have. It reduces, it reduces the steel from the slabs and makes them into coils. And then my job is to make sure that it all gets shipped. All the steel to any of our plants comes through my department. So the steel that passes through my department each day keeps all of our mills up and down the valley supplied with steel.

CNK: How old were you when you started did you say?

WC: Eighteen or 19. I forget.

CNK: Did you always know that you would work at Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel?

(322) WC: No. My dad got me the job. I was out of the service and didn't have anything to do and wanted to get married. And that was a job. In those days you could get jobs anywhere around here. And that was just a job that I applied for, and my dad saw that I got it. So --

MNK: In the late '50s?

WC: Yes. Right. There were still good jobs here. Marx Toy, Picoma, Wheeling Machine, the big steel mills. They were all up and down the valley. Now 75 percent of what I just named is gone.

CNK: What was this real estate division? What kind of real estate was that?

(333) WC: Corporate. I forget how many thousands of acres the corporate Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel owns. But they own coal mines. They own company homes. They transfer employees, so we had an employee relocation plan. And that meant that we bought -- We took over by power of attorney the right to sell employees' homes who were transferred from one work location to another. So that was some of what I dealt with. I also dealt with writing leases and right of way agreements and easements and things like that.

CNK: What was that like? Were there any good stories from that?

(343) WC: Well, I still work for the company, so yeah, there are good stories but I can't tell any of them!

CNK: We'll wait till you retire!

WC: I'd be glad to tell you! Right! There's a couple whoppers!

MNK: That's great. So in -- Since you went to work in the late '50s, you've seen a lot of changes in, in Wheeling I guess. Have you?

(353) WC: Seen a lot of changes in, in the number of people that you have working. And I would say that we -- At one point in time when we owned the Portsmouth mill in Portsmouth, Ohio, we had 28,000 employees. We had sales offices all around the United States. Today we're making more steel than we did then, and we're doing it with 5,500 employees. So you can see that there's been a lot of reductions and selling off mills and closing them down. And just doing things better. It's not all bad though. It's, you know -- We are making steel better. We make good steel. We have some great accounts that think we're tops. So, it's not all bad. But it's also meant that these towns up and down the valley where the great industrial strength was and the great industrial wealth, that there are no longer jobs for young people. And that's the reason that our population, particularly here in Wheeling and some other places in the valley, has dropped so dramatically. You stop and think about it, we've gone in a short period of time of only 30, 40 years from around 65 or 70 thousand down to 30 thousand. And the young people are moving away. And all that leaves is the elderly people.

(379) MNK: That's true of your own children is it?

WC: My son is a doctor in Houston Medical Center. He's there -- I mean, he would be anywhere in the country. He went there because it's a prestigious place to be. My other son Brent is getting his master's at Old Dominion. And my daughter works out of Pittsburgh as a travel agent. So in a way, yes, they've all gone out of the valley to look for employment.

MNK: And that's true of the children of most of the friends your age?

(390) WC: Yes. Yes. Almost -- I'd say 90 percent of all the people we know, if they have children our age, the children are no longer here, yes. Now some of them -- In some cases people are moving back because of what they run into out there. The crime and everything isn't so great. I mean there's cases where kids are now coming back, but I don't think they're going to fare any better here than they did before. This is a relatively safe place to live.

MNK: So you -- That this -- All of these reductions are due to more automated system of production?

(405) WC: Sure, yes. In those days when I was telling you about and we had Portsmouth, they were hand dipping tin plate. Of course they don't do that anymore. It's all continuous lines and continuous in ... Continuous tin plate lines.

CNK: What does it mean, tin plate?

WC: Tin plate is tin coated steel. Like they make tin cans out of. That's what tin plate is.

CNK: And that's what the Welsh were supposed to be best at?

WC: Yes.

CNK: Why? What's the process that they do?

(415) WC: Of coating, putting tin on steel? I don't know the process. I don't work here per se. But in those days it was considered to be a real art, either to get the temperature or the ingredients in the, the tin plate itself. Getting the tin to put on the steel. I don't know exactly what made it so --

CNK: Was that something that women were supposed to be good at?

WC: No, the -- No, I don't think so. The women did it in the Second World War though. I don't think they were the tin platers. I think by that time we had continuous lines. But they were the sorters and the inspectors. One of the worse cussing women I have ever -- One of the worse cussers I have ever heard in my life was a woman supervisor in Yorkville. Yeah, she'd start you right now man. She'd -- She's tough!

CNK: Women would supervise the men?

(431) WC: She did. She supervised the sorting floor. Yeah. Where you would actually -- The inspectors would take these sheets anywhere from 20 or 30 inches wide up to 50, 60 inches long. And they would turn those sheets to inspect to make sure that each sheet was okay. They don't do that anymore. I mean that was labor intensive type of operation. But yeah, she, she was a supervisor on that floor. Good supervisor. I mean she was a good supervisor.

CNK: Was it sort of broken up by ethnic groups? Like the Polish would work on this line, and the Welsh over here?

(444) WC: No, I don't think --

MNK: ...

WC: Not, not in --

MNK: Are there other examples of, of particular ethnic groups that were especially good at a particular thing like the Welsh were?

(447) WC: No, but I'll tell you what, I -- Just from people telling me that were around long before I was, they had a lot of the Afro Americans, African-Americans picking up the tin plate because they weighed a couple hundred pounds. And they talked about the fact that those men had huge arms. And that's all they did all day long was pick up those piles of tin plate out of the tin pots, and then move them. And they were huge. And that was the worse job you could possibly have. And I think, you know, anywhere you had Afro Americans in those days, they had the worst jobs. Like on the railroads. They were the firemen on the railroads until it became push buttons. And then they -- Yeah, when they could become push buttons, then the union fought to get those jobs away from the blacks and give them to men who wanted to not work so hard. And that was one of the great cases of -- What's his name Houston, the attorney, or Thurgood Marshall was fighting that in courts, fighting the railroad's union for not allowing that to happen. Because those jobs were given to the blacks. And they were their jobs, and just because they gave it, became easier, how can you take it away from them. I didn't mean to diverse there, but --

(472) MNK: No, that's okay.

CNK: No, that's interesting.

MNK: Interesting.

CNK: I was curious about this management as opposed to, what do you call the other, production?

WC: You mean --

CNK: Production side? You were -- You're management and the generation before you was management?

WC: That's right.

CNK: And the first three --

(478) WC: And they were -- Yes, they were the union workers, yes.

CNK: Talk about that distinction. What it means to be on one side or the other? What kind of -- Is there a sort of a void in between? And how you related, you know, to other people at the plant. Did you pretty much stay with management?

(484) WC: Well, I think that that's even the case today. But I think it is -- We're all workers if you can think of it like that. We're all employees. And I heard a man who changed my philosophy. His name was George Essler. He's the vice president of operations. And I moved him into Wheeling. I took over his home which was up along the, up along the Mon River. I took over his home when I was in real estate. I remember him saying that day that he had to get out the next morning for a meeting with his supervisor. And I kept thinking all the way home after looking at his home that day, 'why did he call his boss supervisor?' His supervisor was the president and chairman of the board. But it sort of put it in the right perspective for me. We all have bosses no matter what level you're at. They have bosses who, who are management employees. I mean the labor has bosses, and that's us. And we have bosses also. So, we're all employees all the way up to the chairman of the board. There is a division. There was more of a division years ago. Management employees in some regards were, were treated better. I think. Today I think we're all treated equal. They don't have any more rights than we do. And in some cases, I don't think they're paid, we're paid that much more than they are. If we are paid that much more than they are. We don't get overtime, and they do, you know. And I'm sure the supervisors in some case -- I know when I was a young man with a young family, I would have done anything to get overtime, you know. But I couldn't no matter, you know -- But I was expected to get the job done no matter how many hours it took. When I was at Benwood,

(518) I worked one year without a vacation. I worked 12 hours a day, and I was in that mill seven days a week trying to help to save the plant. Didn't work, but I did my part, you know. And nobody told me I had to do that, but I knew that, that it was required. So boss one time told me, "It's whatever it takes. If it takes six hours, it's six hours. If it takes 12, it's 12."

MNK: But it usually took 12 and not 6.

(530) WC: Yeah, in those days it did because there were very few of us, and we were trying to, to accomplish a lot.

CNK: What does it take to save a plant?

WC: Less people usually. Less people. We did -- It's ironic because we, we reduced forces by 75 men. That's a lot of men in a small plant. The force was only like five or six hundred. That

many men didn't work though. So we were really reducing the active employees by that amount. After it was over, we sat down, my boss and I, just playing around with figures because it really wasn't any of our business. But we figured up that if the price of a coupling, a steel coupling, a casing coupling for oil wells, which we were heavy into manufacturing pipe for oil wells. If a casing coupling dropped a dollar a coupling, it meant more of a savings to us than those 75 employees. And after we went out of business, the coupling manufacturer dropped their cost by five dollars a coupling. So, we went out of business because the bottom dropped out of the oil business in this country. And although we made and were recognized as making the best continuous weld pipe in the United States, it didn't make any difference. Didn't make a bit of difference because continuous weld pipe was thought of less than seamless pipe. And seamless was still selling some of theirs for oil wells, but when they had the choice between seamless and continuous weld, they took the seamless.

(562)

MNK: Jack Brennen was telling us a lot about that yesterday. Do, do you know him?

WC: No I don't.

MNK: He worked at Benwood --

WC: Did he?

MNK: Pipe mill.

WC: Did he?

CNK: Fifty years.

WC: Oh really. Where did he work?

CNK: He was a foreman, wasn't he?

(574) WC: Yeah, that's -- He's probably before my time. When did he retire?

CNK: Seventy-two.

WC: Yeah, I didn't go there till '75. Jack Brennen huh?

MNK: Yeah.

WC: Yeah.

MNK: He's 86 now.

WC: Oh really?

MNK: Yeah, we should have --

WC: It was a --

MNK: We should have had --

WC: It was a --

MNK: You along on that interview. You --

(580) WC: I'll tell you what, it was a great place. It was a great place to work.

MNK: That's what he said.

WC: Pipe was in -- Steel pipe was invented by Wheeling men in Benwood. The first place in the world that, that pipe was ever made out of steel was by my company. And now we don't manufacture it, you know, which tells you a lot.

CNK: What's going to happen to the steel industry?

(590) WC: I think it's going to keep getting smaller. And I think some day it will all be mini mills.

CNK: Mini mills?

WC: Mini mills.

CNK: What are they?

WC: Just smaller than what we are with less people. And basically a different process than we can have. See, we, we -- You can't, you can't -- In our company or U.S. Steel, we can't put a mill in like that today, at least I don't think we can, and have so few as employees as they do. The mini mills do. The union wouldn't let you do it. So why put the mini mill in if you have just as many people running them as you do today.

MNK: But eventually they'll be forced to do it.

WC: The steel industry per se will, yes.

MNK: Well, what has this meant for all these changes that you, you have seen since the late '50s when it sounds like Wheeling lost half its population? What, what has this meant for the city itself? What have these changes meant?

(615) WC: I think it's meant a lot of our homes standing vacant. Property not rented and being run down. The downtown area closing. People have, as we talked before, people have left. There aren't any jobs, new jobs that you can have. There aren't any high paying jobs like you could get from before. That's what I think it's meant. That was almost inevitable, I

think. I don't think there's -- I don't really think there's anything we could have done to stop that. We could have stopped the downtown dying by having the Fort Henry Project which was the Urban Renewal Authority's project that they wanted to put a mall in downtown Wheeling. And some of the exact same things that they're talking about today putting in were included in that. But the, the newspaper did not support it. Big businessmen got, were against it. And it was voted down by the citizens of the city. And then the mall, the men who built the mall decided that they would build the mall. My boss talked to the man who built the mall because we were dealing with him for some property for the corporation. And he asked him, "Would you have built the mall if Wheeling had built theirs?" And he said, "No way. Valley can't support two malls. We'd have gone somewhere else and sold the land to someone else."

MNK: So they wanted to turn the downtown into a mall?

(655) WC: Yeah. They wanted to cover part of it and change the traffic flow. And have a museum down by the wharf and have the wharf. And have a transportation center. And have the bridge, some type, something with the bridge. Same thing that they're doing with the Heritage Plan, but it's 30 years later. Some of the people against it have died and now can't fight it. Some of the men who fought against are now out of business or in the mall, you know. It's terrible.

MNK: What were the arguments against them?

(672) WC: Some of their business would not have been included in it. I think they thought that there was, their downtown area was so viable, which it was at the time, that, that nothing could stop them. And a mall wasn't going to stop them.

CNK: When was this?

WC: I want to say the '60s, but I'm not really sure. I'm not really sure. I've got the plan here somewhere. It was a great plan. It brought everything in. The river and bridges and buildings and everything. People were against it because it would have destroyed some of the appearance of downtown. And some of our people, particularly the newspapers and some of their relatives, were or are very interested in those buildings and the way they look. And their age. And the restoration of them. And the fact that, you know, they were built in

the 1800s. And for that reason alone, they decided that they would not support them. Does that make sense?

MNK: I, I don't -- Yeah, I guess, I guess if the plan was to knock all the old buildings down and --

(705) WC: Wasn't really, but you wouldn't have been able to see the buildings.

MNK: The fronts?

WC: They would have been covered up, you know. They would have been like the tunnels. You either drive through or walk through, and you wouldn't have been able to look up and see the buildings. Unless you were on Wheeling Island or somewhere else in the city looking down at it, you could have seen it. Now a lot of those buildings that they were trying to protect, they're tearing them down anyway. L. S. Good Building, Bing's. That burned down. Somebody burned that down on purpose. So --

MNK: Yeah, you, you feel like some of this was inevitable because of the automobile?

(726) WC: I think that when people are able to go a lot of miles in a short period of time on super highways, that the shopping centers was going to do the downtown areas in. My mother and dad lived in Wheeling, or at least my dad did all his life. And he thought nothing of going out in the morning and catching a bus or a streetcar and going to work. And he could go to movies, my mother could go shopping. And they didn't need an automobile. So my dad, although he was a manager of a department in Wheeling Pittsburgh Steel, did not own a car because he didn't feel that he needed a car. And I taught him actually to drive, and he bought his first car after I was married.

MNK: Interesting.

(747) WC: Yeah.

MNK: He didn't think of taking the family on a vacation or --

WC: We took vacations. We caught a train.

(side 2) MNK: On the train it'd just go anywhere?

WC: Yes, we did. We went to anywhere there was a ball field. I saw Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, Stan Musial. One time I went down to -- We went to a Cleveland Indian game and I saw Erly Wynn, Mike Garcia, and I asked -- I called out the wrong name, and he come over and he signed the wrong name on my program. I called for like Erly Wynn, and it was

actually Mike Garcia. But when he came over, he signed the wrong name so he wouldn't embarrass me. Saw a game where Dominic DiMaggio put his glove down on the outfield. And he came in, and he hit his own glove with a ball. And the next year -- He got an inside the park home run the next year. They changed the rules that you had to pick your glove up and bring it into the clubhouse with you, to the dugout. Yeah.

CNK: Who were the fans in your family?

(013) WC: My dad was a baseball fan. And so was, so was I. We listened to the Cleveland Indians on the radio. It was the summer thing to do. You know, sit outside on the porch and listen to the Cleveland Indians. My dad -- As a matter of fact, my dad was sitting out on the porch one night listening to the Cleveland Indians when Mike Russell, who was Big Bill Lias' cousin, he stopped and talked to my dad. Asked what the score was and what their record was. And he lived up the street from my dad. My dad lived in East Wheeling at the time. And Mike Russell went out that night and was machine gunned to death in front of his house while his wife was watching from the second floor window. Big Bill Lias' cousin.

CNK: So was your dad, do you think, maybe the last person to see him?

(024) WC: No, he went and picked up gambling bets and things all around the valley that night before, before he was done in. He was on his way home early, either early in the morning or in the middle of the night. His wife was waiting for him, looking out double windows. Bullet hole in the wall down there still today. If you know what you're looking at, there's a bullet hole there.

CNK: So who got him?

(028) WC: I think Big Bill Lias got him. Yeah, I think he was trying to take over what Big Bill Lias had.

MNK: Moving in on him.

WC: Yeah. The year before, maybe a couple years before, Big Bill Lias' first wife was, well, she was either murdered or committed suicide in Mike Russell's house with Mike Russell's wife in the same room. Mike Russell's wife was tried for murder but found innocent. Her defense was that Mrs. Lias was trying to commit suicide and they fought over the, over the gun. House is still standing in South Wheeling where that happened.

MNK: How -- Talk a little bit about that. Let's see, here we got a, we got this small city that's --

WC: Put this over there for me will you?

MNK: That's a, that's virtually owned by all these big steel mills.

WC: Yeah.

MNK: And presumably controlled by steel mill economics and everything like that. So how is it that -- How's this lawlessness come about?

(044) WC: That, that's a good question because I'm not, I'm not really sure myself. I think that if you go back to when the, the immigrants came over here, they usually came without their wives. They usually came to earn money to send back to bring their wives and their family here. Therefore, when you had steel mill towns and coal mill towns, usually outside of those steel mill entrance gates you had houses of prostitution, illegal gambling or any way else they could get those men's money. The men being alone is probably one of the reasons why they frequented the houses of prostitution. In order to keep the men happy, and the men really weren't that happy. I mean the conditions that some of these men worked under, 12 hour days, seven days a week, no vacation, no time off. If you weren't there, you weren't paid. There was no sick pay or anything like that. These men needed a place to go get a drink, to wind down, to raise some hell. And I think that the owners of the steel mills and the coal mines sort of tolerated it. There were times in our history where

(059) we tried to stop it, but were really unsuccessful in stopping it. There have been times in our past where the question was raised at a city council meeting whether or not they should enforce the laws. And either no decision was made or they voted no. Brought a lot of money into Wheeling. Wheeling was known as one of the best gambling places between, if not the best, between Pittsburgh and Chicago, or New York and Chicago. This was, although a small town, this was really a wide open town. There wasn't anything you couldn't get here. It had -- It wasn't until the last few years that dope was very prevalent. I've read very little about dope until 20 years ago. But the gambling was here. And night club acts. And Wheeling was open all night long. At one point in time -- Hi. Do you want me?

?????: No, just wanted to know if anybody wanted anything to drink or --

WC: Oh.

MNK: Oh thank you, no. I think --

CNK: Yeah, we're fine. Thanks.

(074) WC: There was one point in time where one of the city organizations of women would meet women at the B&O train terminal getting off the train, and warn them of the vices in Wheeling. So it was a pretty wide open town.

CNK: What would they warn them?

WC: They warned them, I would assume, about going into the gambling places or getting caught up with the prostitution and that. And I think also -- West Virginia was dry before the rest of the country. So that opened up bootlegging here. And that's how Big Bill Lias got his start as a bootlegger here at age 13. He was running booze for his brother at age 13 from Ohio to West Virginia in his brother's bread truck. But it was really booze in it. So that's really how he got his start. That's -- As an explanation, that's about the best I can do. I don't really know why they tolerated it. We had a lot of influence. We had a lot of wealth. I can't explain to you -- I can't really explain to people on motor coaches as a tour guide about the wealth in this town. If there's a story about Wheeling, West Virginia, we've gone all the way through gangsters and pioneer days and Fort Henry battles. I mean we've had

(092) it all. But the wealth is the story because -- I mean they were all over the place. Every time I -- It's almost every time I go and read a newspaper it's about these huge parties and mansions being built. And mansions being built and chauffeurs and gardeners. And they were all over the place. And if you really ride around Wheeling today, you can probably still find what I consider to be true mansions, 30. And there's probably, if you take the size of some of the homes, there's probably 50 true mansions left here in this town today. Some of them been torn down.

MNK: But at that time --

WC: So -- Huh?

MNK: But at that time -- At the turn of the century are we talking about?

(101) WC: No, we're talking the '20s and '30s. So there was so much influence here. These men were powerful men. They were powerful men not only here, but in the steel industry across the nation. Mr. Stifel was one of the prominent textile manufacturers in this country. The

glass factories. Some -- One of the glass presidents ended up being a U.S. senator. I mean there was real influence here, but they didn't stop the crime. And there had to be a reason. And as far as I know, the only reason that I can come up with is -- I mean I'm sure the men, they didn't get a percentage of it, you know. I can't visualize that. The only explanation I have is so that the boys would have something to do. Boys being the employees. It's a real stigmatism on a town. When people know you from Chicago to New York City as being a den of prostitution, which they did. I mean I've had people on motor coaches say that when I mention prostitution they acknowledge the fact that that's what they've known Wheeling for was prostitution.

MNK: We need to --

(116) WC: Has great baseball teams. The mines loved -- Well, actually some of these towns, it's the only thing to do. Some of these towns were so far removed from the bigger cities like Wheeling that you had to have something for the men to do in those towns. Most cases there weren't the vices out there though. But they did sponsor baseball teams and picnics and things like that to keep their employees a little bit satisfied.

MNK: Because there wasn't enough in the paycheck to satisfy them!

(124) WC: That's right, yeah. There is a company store as you're leaving Warwood down by Center Foundry. One of those brick buildings on the left was a company store for the Costanzo Coal Mine. Mr. Costanzo though was not a bad employer. And it probably, if anything, probably put him out of business, it was because he paid his employees a little too much and didn't end up competing. So -- But, you know, there were bad mines around here.

MNK: He was pointing out the boxing pictures up there. This was another of, he said -- Explain it to Carrie.

(132) WC: The picture on the right is Jack Dempsey. And he's shaking hands with Joey Maxim who was here to fight some unknown boxer. Brought here by Lias and his people. If you look behind Jack Dempsey, you see a race tote board there that they were keeping track of the winners of the races. So where Jack Dempsey and Joey Maxim were was one of Bill Lias' bars there. And, and what was going on there was illegal. I remember, and this is not to say anything against my father-in-law because he was a policeman here, but you could do it

any day of the week. They didn't know me from Adam. I wasn't a gambler. I didn't frequent those places, but I could walk in and get a ham sandwich and hear the bets being placed. You know, some of the best places in town to get something to eat, the great turtle soup and things like that, were in these places. And you just walked in the front door. And then those -- Some of those times there weren't air conditioning, so they left the doors open. So you could walk by a bar and understand what was going on without being too smart. One time when my father-in-law was a, come back from the Second World War, he was a marine.

MNK: His name?

(147) WC: Harry Parshall. He came back and he was walking up Short Market, which was between the building where that took place and Stone & Thomas. Now where you see the little park down there today, there was a street there also beside it that ran between the two. And there was a bar up there. And he was walking his beat, and it was late at night. And he walked underneath this window, and he could hear people saying "seven come 11" and "baby needs a new pair of shoes." And he's smart enough to know what's going on. So he calls the main headquarters, and says, "You got to send some people. We're going to go raid this place. The guy says, "Now, wait a minute. Where you at?" And he told him. He said, "No, we don't want to raid it. I'm not going to send any men." And he said, "Well, this is illegal here." And he said, "Well, I'm going to raid it." He said, "Go right ahead, but I'll tell you something. Come next winter you're going to be in the only beat in Wheeling that you can't go in and get warm or get something to drink to keep you warm. In the middle of night, in the dead of winter." That was telling him, you know, 'you don't raid things unless you're told to raid them.' You know, he was an honest policeman. You know, it was -
(164) - In those days it was everywhere.

CNK: So do you suppose the police were tipped off, you know?

WC: Oh sure.

CNK: 'Leave this place alone.'

WC: Oh yeah.

CNK: Who would talk to them? How would that network get established?

(167) WC: I would think that it would be the desk sergeant or some, some, one of the officers on duty. This town was not like in Chicago. Chicago the beat policeman was paid off. This wasn't the case here. These men took orders from their sergeants and their lieutenants. And the lieutenants had to have been the ones that were being paid off. And the desk sergeants and things. Those were the men that were paid to look the other way. Some had the philosophy that this brought a lot of money into Wheeling. And it did. I mean, you know, this being a big gambling place, you could walk in off the street and gamble and play cards and roulette and things like this. People came from Cleveland and Pittsburgh and Columbus and, and Youngstown and places to get into a game. Because they could --

MNK: Stayed in hotels.

(179) WC: Sure. And spent money for, for the girls and spent money at the race, the thoroughbred racehorse track, you know. And, and meals. It was great because the money wasn't going out of town. The money was staying in town. The Big Bill Lias and people that ran it were buying other bars. They were hiring employees. They were giving money to the Greek church when they wanted to build an auditorium. He was one of the big givers for that. So the money was staying here. The only time the money ever left here was when he paid off his dues to organized crime. He was a Greek gangster, but he paid, he paid for the wire service. Johnny Torio, Al Capone's men.

Johnny Torio was the guy who went from New York to Chicago to help his cousin Calissimo and then Al Capone. And he killed Calissimo. Then Johnny Torio took over. Then Johnny Torio was shot. So he gave it to Al Capone. Then Johnny Torio went back to New York City and was one of the prominent gangsters in New York City with Lucky Luciano and some of those people. So for Big Bill Lias to have a part of the wire service, he had to pay money to Johnny Torio. He also paid money to the Magidino family in Buffalo, New York, to stay in business. But other than that, the money stayed here. One of the biggest employers at one time was Wheeling

(201) Downs. It was a city within a city. They had their own police force, their own doctor and nurses and hospital and feed stables and concession stands and gift store. I mean it was, it was a big operation. Parking. I mean there was a lot of employees there. You know, so it

was important to the city. When he died, a lot of it stopped. When he lost the track, a lot of it stopped. And although they say that he was never involved in prostitution, and I can't really prove that he was. I really don't know, but I do know this. When I started -- When I got out of the service, for a few months I worked for Boury Incorporated as a, as someone who delivered refrigerators and stoves and things like that. One day we delivered, I don't know how, maybe 10, maybe more than that, new refrigerators. And it was all to houses of prostitution. And each madam when we went in, would say, "Just take it to Big Bill Lias, and he'll sign it." So whether he was giving a gift to these women -- I mean I don't know, but as far as I'm concerned, all the madams got together and said 'we need new refrigerators,' and he paid for them! Why else would you do that.

MNK: So it -- That indicated to you that maybe he was --

WC: He was more involved --

MNK: Getting some ...

(224) WC: More involved than he let on, I think. You know, particularly with, I believe, with Greek and Italian men. Particularly Italian men, which he wasn't. He was Greek, but with Italian men it, it's a -- Other Italian men look down on you if you use women to earn a living. So they don't really want you to know that. One of the -- Lucky Luciano was given 50 years in the penitentiary, which he didn't serve, but was given that for prostitution. And that was a disgrace to him. He fought that so hard. I mean he was willing to let people know that he was a gambler and to some extent even sold dope. But he didn't want people to know he was in charge of prostitution because other Italian people would look down on him. So maybe that's why, why he kept that under wraps. I don't know. And I'm really not sure he did own it, but -- And you know, you can talk to policemen today. All of them are dead. They're all gone. There's a couple guys left that worked for him as card dealers and things, you know. And they don't know that much. At least I don't think so. I talked to some of them. But the cops who were there at the time still won't talk about it. I've

(241) called a couple policemen to tell me stories. Asked them who do they think killed this guy or that guy, and they still won't, won't talk about it. And they know more than I know. I mean they, you know, they were there, and they lived it. You know, cops talk back and forth. You

know who killed people. I had a policeman tell me they knew who killed the nun up there. Up at Mount Saint Joseph when she was murdered. That they knew who did it. You know, the cops talk. They just couldn't prove it. I sort of got diverse. I sort of got carried away there. I forget what I was talking about now.

MNK: Well, just -- The sort of the, the dichotomy between this stable economy, stable industrial economy and all of this --

WC: Crime.

MNK: Crime.

CNK: What about riverboat gambling? Was that a big thing?

(253) WC: I don't think so. You mean in the past? Steamboat era? No, I don't think so. The only thing I know, and I don't know who this man is. I've never read his name. But I read a couple books where they were talking about riverboat gamblers. And they always named this one guy, and I don't know who it was. He wasn't from here. And they always mention that the second best gambler on the riverboats was from Wheeling, West Virginia. But so far they never say who his name is. I think one book is copying off of the first book, you know. Damon Runyon one time said -- You know who Damon Runyon is? Damon Runyon said one time that the best gamblers came from Steubenville and Wheeling. That these were the men who supplied the casinos and the illegal gambling dens around the United States. And it's because it was here and the men learned how to deal cards and how to run the roulette wheels and things.

MNK: From an early age.

(267) WC: Yeah, right. So when Al Capone needed somebody to run a carpet joint for him, he might send down here to Big Bill Lias and say 'who can you send me.' I met this little guy in this, in -- Alberts. I forget the guy's name now. But it's a bar down by the wharf. And great place. We used to go in there for parties. And then he'd cook us spaghetti. Get all his Italian friends. Cook us the best spaghetti dinner you've ever had on Christmas Eve for our Christmas party at work. And, you know, I used to ask him questions and things because he was a dealer for Big Bill Lias. One night we're sitting there and, and we're talking. And he said, "Well, this guy right here, Joe," whatever his name is. He said, "He dealt for Al

Capone." "You're kidding!" "No," he said, "I didn't know Mr. Capone," he said, "But I work for Mr. Giancano." And I said, "Mo Mo Giancano?" He said, "You know him?" I said, "No, I don't know him." I said, "I've read about him." He said, "You read about him?" I said, "Yeah, there's a whole mess of books written about Mo Mo Giancano." He said, "Gee, I didn't know that." I said, "Yeah." I said, "Tell me some of the stories." He said, "I'll tell you one story." He said, "Scared the devil out of me." Said, "One night I'm running this carpet joint," he said, "All of a sudden the whole wall collapsed and there's Elliot Ness in the front seat of this big truck with a machine gun." He said, "We didn't have a gun in the place." I said, "What happened?" He said, "They took us all to jail." I said, "How long were you in jail?" He said, "About 45 minutes." I said, "They find you guilty?" He said, "No," he said, "They didn't, they never find you guilty for things like that." He said, "I was back out in the street." And he said, "I don't know what ever happened to the case, but nobody ever called me to go to trial." Yeah. He just, he just didn't know that there, you know, probably doesn't read. I don't know. But he

(294) didn't know that they were writing books about Mo Mo Giancano. I asked him about the Mafia. I said, "Did you know that there was such a thing?" He said, "No, I didn't." He said, "I just was a card dealer, and I run gambling." He said, "I didn't know about all those things." Yeah. Great guy. He's dead now. He would have been -- Man, would he have been somebody for you to interview.

MNK: He's gone now?

(300) WC: Yeah. Last couple of years.

CNK: Was Bill Lias born in Wheeling?

WC: Well, the government said he was born in Greece. But he won that trial, and they didn't deport him. In, in the year 1900 he was born.

CNK: In Wheeling?

WC: Well, that's what the, that's what the court paper said. It's one of these trials here.

MNK: I was just --

CNK: Where, where did he grow up?

(306) WC: In South Wheeling.

MNK: I was just thumbing through that book. There's -- You know, that trial went on for months and months --

WC: Yeah.

MNK: And they found all kinds of people who testified that --

WC: Sure.

MNK: You know --

WC: Yeah. And you know who most of those people were? Like the doctor? The doctor was his doctor.

MNK: At Wheeling Downs?

WC: The head doctor at Wheeling Downs. And he swore up and down that, that he knew the mother when she was pregnant and stuff like that.

MNK: Didn't Bill Lias try his hand in Chicago at one time?

(314) WC: I'd never heard -- I've heard people say that, but I've --

MNK: You don't know the details?

WC: No. He owned a home in Cleveland though. And I believe that each time there was a murder here, someone saw license plates from Ohio. And when they traced it back, it was always a stolen car from Cleveland. So I think that whoever was doing the killing here, people from Cleveland was carrying it out.

CNK: Well, was the Italian Mafia strong here?

WC: No.

CNK: Not at all?

(322) WC: No. Black handers were here the '20s and that, but no.

MNK: What's the black handers?

WC: Black handers were Italians preying on other Italians. Sort of the forerunner of the Mafia, but some of the black handers really didn't go into the Mafia. I'm not really sure how that, you know -- They just sort of faded out.

CNK: Why'd they call them that?

(327) WC: Because they would leave an emblem of a black hand on your doorstep if you refused to meet their demands, pay their price, do something for them, honor them. Have respect for them.

MNK: That was their mark?

WC: Yeah, that was their mark that they had been there. And how easy it would be for you to get hurt. Yeah. Sometimes they just painted it on the side of your house or left you a card. Or sent it to you in an envelope, you know. Black hand. But there's, there were some trials here, but no, it's never --

MNK: But that was small potatoes next to Bill Lias.

(337) WC: Oh yes. Yeah. Big Bill Lias ran this place. Couple people tried to break away from him, but he stopped them. Hankish. There was a big trial here with no legs Hankish just recently. Hankish sort of tried to take after Bill Lias started to step out of the picture. And a recent trial where Hankish was finally found guilty and sent away for 40 years or something. It was testified that he actually hired a hit man to come here from New York City, a Mafia hit man from New York City to do away with Bill Lias, but the guy went up to Bill Lias' door and knocked on the door. And Bill Lias didn't answer the door, so the guy left. Guy sat outside for weeks waiting for Lias to come out, and he never come out of the house. So -- Hankish was involved with organized crime only, only because I think they sort of saw him as a pet. They -- He made friends with some of the Mafia guys when he was in prison. And he supplied one guy who I played football against, he supplied hit men to the Pittsburgh organized crime family. The Rocco crime family. And the guy's now -- The guy that I played football against was convicted of murder, and he's in life, prison for life now. That's the only ties I think there's ever been with organized crime. Lias paid
(361) them off, and Hankish sort of associated with some of them.

CNK: Did --

MNK: But by paying them off, it kept them from muscling in on him then because --

WC: Yeah.

MNK: Wheeling must have been a fat plum, right?

WC: Obviously, yeah. It had to be. Had to be. I sure would like to know what, you know, in one night they raid 39 houses of prostitution. Who owned them? I'd love to know who owned them. I can't imagine 39 different people owned them. I mean it just didn't happen, you know. Somebody had to own them. Maybe that's what organized crime owned.

CNK: Do you know who owned the real estate?

(373) WC: Oh yeah. That's, that was easy to find, sure.

CNK: We were hear from --

WC: It was --

CNK: Mr. Holloway that -- I guess that's who it was, I don't know. Somebody told us that
Wheeling Steel had owned some property that --

WC: Yes.

CNK: That ladies of the night --

(377) WC: Yes. That was at Steubenville. My boss was involved in that. And every once in a while
when they -- Out in front of the mill were all these bars and all these houses of prostitution,
and the corporation wanted to use that. Which they are today as a parking lot for
employees. They didn't want the employees parking in the mill. Obviously because they
were afraid employees were going to steal something from them. And in some cases they
did! So every time the corporation would have money, extra money, big profit year, they
would give my boss money to go buy one or two of them. And he was in contact with all the
people, you know. And tried to figure out the best price, and 'can I put two pieces together,'
so on and so forth. He come to this one, and the guy said, "Sure, I'll sell you the place." And
he showed him around. And he said it was like 20 pink rooms. There weren't any girls
there because it was daytime. But he said it was 20 pink rooms, and, and they all had the
same thing, you know. And so he bought them. But the guy said, "Now listen, I need time
to find another place to work. So please," you know, "Give me 30 days." So for 30 days the
corporation owned an active house of prostitution. A year or so after that, John
(399) gets more money. He walks down to this next little hotel, and they were like three floor
hotels and things. There's the same guy! He's got the room painted pink again! You know.
So John bought that place, and for 30 days we owned another house of prostitution.

MNK: Shame on you.

(404) WC: All those houses now are gone except for this one bar. And that guy will not sell. And it sits
right in the middle of the parking lot. One building left. But it's not a house of prostitution.
It's just a bar. But he's got a captured audience, right? Everybody comes out of that place,

their cars are parked around his building.

MNK: Takes a few of them.

CNK: Yeah. I wouldn't sell either!

WC: No.

MNK: Probably takes some of them several hours to get --

WC: To get home.

MNK: ... the keys in. That's great. What, what else -- We -- Let's see about on this subject, we heard that, that the United States Navy wouldn't let its soldiers come, or the sailors come here on leave because it was such a rough town.

(420) WC: The only place that I know that that's been talked about was Harry Hamm the newspaper editor who wrote about it in one of his columns and said that, that during -- For a time during the Second World War, the United States Navy made the entire city of Wheeling off limits. Now that's the only -- I've never tried to look it up. I wasn't really sure what year it took place. Whether it took place at the beginning of the war. And I never talked or asked Harry Hamm about it. So, I'd like to know more, but I don't know any more than what he said.

MNK: And he's not around?

WC: No, he passed away the last couple of years.

CNK: What do you suppose was the reason for that?

(431) WC: Because of the prostitution and the venereal disease. You could come in here one night and lose your whole paycheck gambling. It was, it was bad news, you know.

CNK: Have you ever --

WC: You weren't -- It wasn't unsafe though. I mean you didn't really have to worry about going down into South Wheeling and these bad places and somebody hitting you over the head and stealing your money. Whoever ran this made sure that thieves didn't bother people. So that, that also indicates that somebody had a lot of power. Somebody -- All he had to do was tell his underworld friends 'you won't rob people there.' And they didn't rob people there.

MNK: Because that would have hurt the rep then, huh?

(444) WC: That's right. Then if you had a big money spender coming down here from Pittsburgh who wanted to go to Lias' and drop \$5,000 and then go to the house of prostitution, he might not come back next time if he knows somebody's going to hit him over the head in the middle of the night walking up an alley. There were so many houses of prostitution down there that the normal people that owned homes there had on their back doors or front doors 'private home, private residence' so that you wouldn't knock on their door. Yeah.

CNK: And if it didn't say that, then it was okay to knock?

(453) WC: I guess. Either that or the people didn't care whether you knocked on their door or not. I don't know. Yeah, it's true. I remember -- You know, Wheeling was bad, so was Steubenville. But I remember going up to visit our plant in Steubenville and going across that bridge. And it was seven, eight o'clock at night. And seeing on Water Street, which was down below the bridge, but seeing all these girls hanging out and waving out of the windows. Like you see in, in Italy or Greece, you know, some of those places where -- Japan. I, I forget where you see that all the time, but women hanging out the windows and -- But that actually happened. Water Street in Steubenville. That's all gone too. There's only one house left in Steubenville. That's Judy Jordan. That's Dean Martin's buddy. He, he -- In his Las Vegas act Dean Martin said that Judy Jordan taught him everything he ever knew about gambling and whatever else. And her house is still there today. As far as I know, she's been raided very few times in her whole life. And she's up in age. And it was a recently book written about a famous madam from Pennsylvania that was killed, murdered. And Judy Jordan's mentioned in this. They traded girls back and forth. Not that she committed the murder, I don't mean that. So Judy Jordan was famous from not only Dean Martin but somewhere else too.

(482) MNK: It would be fun to try to talk to her wouldn't it?

WC: Yeah.

CNK: Who's keeping her safe?

WC: I, I don't -- City fathers. They caught the mayor -- They caught the mayor up here in the last couple of years. Not the mayor now, but Mayor Crab. They caught him going in there, I think every Thursday night. And he said he was just going in to gamble. There was a good

gambling -- There was a good card game going on. That's the only reason he went in there.

I don't know if it was true or not.

MNK: I don't know if he didn't have the crab when he went in, he probably had it when came out!

(492) WC: Yeah, that's right!

MNK: ...

WC: Judy Jordan and the woman in, in Wheeling, Alma Mae Henderson -- These two women had a lot of influence. These two women supplied call girls, clean, beautiful girls on special occasions to visiting dignitaries. People coming in for some of the large companies who might ask for a girl. And I know of at least one occasion where a Japanese executive come into town and asked for a girl. And Judy Jordan supplied him with a blond. And that's the madam up there. Alma Mae Henderson, the famous madam from Wheeling, she did exactly the same thing down here. When somebody needed something special, she was there. And you know, you had a lot of special people in town. You had one time five department stores. And those guys all had money and Picoma and Marx. All these huge businesses around with all these executives and that.

MNK: Would you -- Could you list those department stores?

(513) WC: Snooks, Stone & Thomas, L. S. Good, Stifel and Taylor, ... And the Hub. That's the five.

MNK: So these execs would come into town periodically?

WC: Big purchasing agents, executives from other steel companies. You had a lot of important people coming in here. And sometimes they wanted girls. So -- The important madams like Alma Mae Henderson and Judy Jordan were the people that you went to. Alma Mae Henderson bragged -- One time a friend of mine who, who knew her really well, we used to go up on lunch hour and she would sit at the -- There was a bar at the corner -- Had a restaurant at corner of 10th and Main Street today. And she would go up there and eat her lunch there. I don't know why, maybe she knew the owner. But -- And we would sit down every once in a while. And she wouldn't tell you names or anything, you know. You know, young guys, you ask probably dumb questions and that. But she at one time told us that she was never raided that she didn't know a half hour ahead of time. Never raided. Now she was raided. Judy Jordan wasn't raided that often. But Alma Mae was raided, and she

paid, she paid her dues and paid her fines, you know, so the city could make some money. And the girls went on their way. And I, I trusted her. I mean I believe she was
(546) telling the truth that she knew of every raid that was going to take place. She drove a pink Cadillac. And that pink Cadillac was always parked in the back of her place. And you knew that Alma Mae Henderson was around if that Cadillac was there. She lived in Benwood right south of us. One time -- Not a great photographer, I mean we think he was great. The ... in town. And I guess he was probably semi famous because he had a lot of his pictures shown in art galleries and things. You know, maybe like a world's fair or something. And he said one time she came to him and she had him do 100 pictures of her naked to give to her special accounts. Special accounts. And I think that these were the, the executives and, you know, the mayor, the city -- You know, these type of people. I think that's who she was giving these out to.

CNK: The mayor of Wheeling?

(566) WC: Probably, yeah. Or the city manager who lived in this house. Yeah, Mr. Plummer lived in this house.

CNK: When?

WC: Fifties maybe.

MNK: Wow.

WC: If these walls could talk, I could figure out the whole thing right? I know the whole story! He built this room. He built this room and a room downstairs. Little old lady that lived next door and she was telling me one night, she said, "One night I heard this terrible scream. And then I heard this moaning and I thought man, somebody just got killed. You know, somebody's really hurt." So she comes out in the back yard, and he had been sitting. He was building these rooms. And he come home from city council, and he was all drunked up. And he sit on the windowsill and fell backwards out of the window, hit this pile of dirt! He laying there moaning. He wasn't hurt. Knocked the air out of him! Everything! She helped him up, walked him back into the house! He's sitting in the windowsill and just fell backwards!

MNK: How is a -- If, if Wheeling becomes a national heritage area, if, if it's given that designation,

what aspects of the history do you think it will -- That can be talked about? I mean, can we talk about this wide open stuff? Is this going to be an attraction?

(596) WC: I don't, I don't think so. I don't think they would do that.

MNK: No?

WC: I don't think I'd do that any more than Chicago or some of these other places that had famous things like that have kept theirs open and -- It's like in Chicago. Where Dion O'Bannion was killed, where the St. Valentine's Day massacre took place. They no longer stand. You know, these are two famous things that happened. Why wouldn't somebody keep the darned building. But they didn't. And the same way here. We're, we haven't kept any of this ourselves, you know. I found a bullet hole, and there's still a building standing where Zoeller's Steak House was. They just tore down Bill Lias' bar in the last few months. So I don't think that aspect -- I don't think we were too proud of that. I don't think that would be the case at all. I think --

MNK: But isn't that, isn't that kind of intrigue -- Aren't American people kind of --

(617) WC: Intrigued by it? Sure.

MNK: Intrigued by Bonnie and Clyde, you know.

WC: Sure. Sure it is. Sure we are. Absolutely.

MNK: Americans have a, have a way almost of, of awarding heroes status --

WC: I know, but --

MNK: To --

WC: When, when it's your town and, and you want to -- If you're influenced enough that you have U.S. senators giving you money and you sit on the National Historic Trust, you want to be proud of your town for the good reasons. And Wheeling has so many good reasons that I don't think they would look at it. I would. I would love to go and see Big Bill Lias' bar and, you know, things from the old days. I would. And people on a motor coach would. But our people who are here that didn't stop it, they don't. And that's who's running the show. So if anything's going to be in the Heritage Project, it will be the Fort Henry and the industrial might of the city and the wealth and the Victorian homes and mansions and the transportation.

MNK: But they've hired us to come here and gather this spoken history presumably from the, from the workers, from the ethnic groups. And how can you talk about a city's industrial heritage without talking about the things that you and I --

(649) WC: I, I --

MNK: ...

WC: I agree. Yeah, I agree with you. I agree with -- I think it's all part of the history. When I first became a tour guide, I asked my boss, "Do you want me to tell them the bad things?" Of course she was smart enough to say, "Sure, they probably like the bad things," you know. And I think that they do. I mean they like to know where murders took place, you know, those type of things.

MNK: ...

(659) WC: Where the gangster lived. You know, an open gun battle in the streets that took place. They want to know that. Sure. And that's who's going to be coming here and paying a lot of people's salaries are people coming to see the whole story. But I just -- I'm not real sure, and I hope I'm wrong, but I'm not sure that the whole story will be told. You know, you can, you can tell them about the prostitution, you know. But would you have a voice box that would tell them all this stuff? I mean there's no place to go look at it now. They tore the whole thing down.

MNK: All the pink rooms are gone.

(672) WC: Yeah. The only one -- The only -- Yeah. The only place that's left is down behind Billy's Bar. And as far as I know, that was used as a house of prostitution its whole history. And used up to a few years ago. And it's still standing.

CNK: Where is it?

WC: It's at -- Where was Billy's? Twenty-sixth Street? I can show you a picture of it if you want to see it. Want to see it?

MNK: Sure.