

James Reader

Transcript of the oral interview with James Reader conducted by Emily Salvette on October 14, 2001 at the monthly meeting of the Pittsfield Township Historical Society at the Pittsfield Receptions Center, 701 W Ellsworth Rd., Ann Arbor. Mr. Reader reviewed the transcript in October 2001 and made spelling and content corrections and additions. His additions are italicized and enclosed in brackets [like this], and interview notes are enclosed in brackets {like this}.

Interview Summary

James Reader served as the Pittsfield Township Treasurer from 1967 to 1987. He helped guide the Township through two decades of dramatic and rapid change from rural to suburban area. This interview deals primarily with the management issues that faced township officials as they sought to professionalize the way the Township did business and served its growing number of citizens.

Mr. Reader was born on June 29, 1913 in Asia Minor. His family immigrated to the United States in 1923. He spent much of his youth in Cleveland, Ohio moving to Ann Arbor with his family in 1933 when his brother entered the University of Michigan Medical School. As a young man during the Depression, Mr. Reader ran the family grocery store in Ann Arbor necessitating that he cut short his own Studies at the University of Michigan. Mr. Reader went on to become a businessman by profession. He was Vice President of JR Paper Company in Detroit. His management skills were critical in transforming township operations to the modern (and model) standards that are still evident today. Mr. Reader and his wife of fifty-two years, Helene Diamond, and daughter Adele still live in the Ann Arbor area.

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- Informal conversation about Township management and professionalization of services

James Reader Interview

I:
Interviewer (Emily Salvette)

R:

Respondent (James Reader)
MT: Marcia Ticknor
D: Don Swan
DW: Doug Woolley
DL: Don LeClair
GW: Geri Woolley
BL: Betty LeClair

Side 1:

I: Do you want to just say a few words like your name and your address.

R: My name is James Reader and presently I live at 429 Sumark Way, Ann Arbor, Michigan 48103. However, I moved into the township in 1952. And our first home was in 2045 Hogback Road in the east part of our township. And that was my first contact with the township, was when Professor Smith, who had a subdivision just north of me [in Ann Arbor Township], wanted to annex his property into the City of Ann Arbor. And I was alerted that they were trying to annex all of Hogback Road, and I was made aware that my property line ran through the center of their own. So at that time the way annexations took place was that the City of Ann Arbor would hold an election, so would the township, and what would they do, they combined the vote of both municipalities, and then whatever the outcome was, this is what would happen. However, there was one kink in the law that said the people living in the affected area, their vote took precedence over the combined vote.

I: Huh!

R: And my wife and I were the only two that voted against that annexation, and our two votes defeated the annexation.

I: Oh. For heavens sakes! I am taping it now. But we're going to stop very quickly.

DW: Okay. We'll move the chair around here so we can hear good.

I: Yeah, yeah. I'm going to have to stop you, Mr. Reader ...

R: Sure.

I: ...because we can't get [break]

MT: Our treasurer, right?, for how many years?

R:

Twenty years. [1967-1987]

MT:

Twenty years. Okay. And Emily Salvette will be doing the oral history interview this afternoon.

I:

Thank you. We are ... I'm going to speak into your microphone a little bit so I can do the set-up. We're at the Pittsfield Township Recreation Center, 701 W. Ellsworth Road in Ann Arbor on October 14th, 2001 and we're interviewing James D. Reader for the Pittsfield Township Oral History Project. Mr. Reader, thank you for being here. We ...

R:

Thank you.

I:

... appreciate it very much. Ah, would you ... just to start with some of the housekeeping details, you were born in 1913.

R:

Right.

I:

In Asia Minor.

R:

Right.

I:

You want to be more specific? We don't mind.

R:

Well, Asia Minor is part of Turkey, and in 1922 the Turks decided that ... to get rid of all the non-Moslem people in their country. So there was a mass exodus. And we became refugees and lived in Greece for one year. However, my father decided that he wanted to come to this country and he had a brother who had been in the United States since 1913. So he wrote to him and asked ... expressed the desire to come to this country, and he had to supply the necessary affidavit that he would be financially responsible for us to come here. However, at that time, the immigrants of every country were subject to a quota based on some formula and so when my father left the little island where we were living and we went to Piraeus, which is the seaport of Athens, to the American Consul, and he went in and expressed his desire to come to this country and he was informed by the American Consul that the quota was filled for that year and then he will not have a chance to come to this country in five years. He had to wait that long. However, as he was leaving, why, someone called his first name and he turned over and looked over and it was a cousin, first cousin of his in the American Consulate, and she said, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I'm trying to get to the United States and the American Consul told me I have to wait five years. She says, "Just a minute." So she went and talked to the American Consul and that fall, October 1st, we sailed to the United States.

I:

What year was that?

R:

It was the year of 1923.

I:

1923, okay.

R:

Yeah.

I:

Huh.

R: So it pays to know people in the right places [laughing].

I: That's nice. Still does. [laughter] And did you grow up in Cleveland, Ohio?

R: Cleveland, Ohio, that's where I went to public school, and after ... upon graduation from the public school and since then I had a brother already attending the University of Michigan, I decided to come to Michigan. In that spring, my whole family moved from Cleveland and we established our permanent home in Ann Arbor.

I: What did you study at Michigan?

R: Well, unfortunately, I didn't finish my studies. I was dismissed for poor scholarship. I just couldn't cut the buck. {Mr. Reader was too modest. After 3 years of study, he left school of his own volition to run the family business.-EHS}

I: It's a tough school.

R: Yeah.

I: And did you ... did you meet your wife? Is she from Ann Arbor?

R: No, from Detroit.

I: Your wife Helene. [Born in Mass.]

R: Helene, yes. The way we met was my mother was in Detroit, and she was going to ride with me back to Ann Arbor, and she asked me if I would you like to stop and see one of her school chums that she had ... knew from the old country. So we stopped there, and according to Greek custom, when you enter a Greek home, they all ...was to offer you sweets and a drink and so forth. And after all that happened, she said to me, "When you gonna get married, Jim? What are you waiting for? I have just the girl for you." [laughter] I said, "Mrs. Gaggos," I said, "I'm already dating someone in Ann Arbor and I'm not interested." But she kept on me, harping what a wonderful person my wife is. So the following week I was ... I was in my office and I had cleared all of my correspondence for the day and I said, "I'm going to give that girl a call." So I got on the telephone and I called her and I told her who I was. And she said to me, "Stanley, don't kid me." She thought it was a young man that she worked with. She worked at the Fort Wayne in the Army Post there. And so I convinced her that I wasn't Stanley and told her that I had a couple of tickets to a musical at the Cass Theatre to see High Button Shoes, and ... and I'd like to have her join me. So we ... we went through the theater and went to the Van Dyke Club for midnight supper. Took her home, thanked her very much. I said, "I'll call you." Well, the following week I called her and she was no place to be found. She had gone to Indiana to attend an engagement party. But that weekend she came back, so we had another date. To cut a long story short, 23 days later we were engaged to be married.

I: Oh, my. Wow.

R: So ...

I: And what year did you marry?
R: Nineteen Forty-nine.
I: Nineteen Forty-nine. So that's been a long marriage.
R: Yeah. Fifty-two years.
I: Yes. Well, congratulations.
R: Thank you.
I: And you have one daughter?
R: Yes.
I: Adele.
R: I had a son too, but unfortunately he was taken away from us. He was killed in an automobile accident in 1979.
I: Oh, I'm sorry.
R: And ... but the Lord spared us our daughter. They were both in the same car.
I: Oh my.
R: Yeah.
I: Oh.
R: So ...
I: And does she live near?
R: She lives with us.
I: Oh, how nice.
R: Yeah.
I: Oh, that's wonderful. And you came to Pittsfield Township, you were starting to tell me, in 1956?
R: ♦2.
I: '52.

R: '52. Yeah, so ...

I: And where did you live when you first came to the township?

R: 2045 Hogback Road. It's in the eastern part of the township.

I: Okay.

R: And that time of course it was a rural township. The only urbanized section we had was the Oak Park subdivision [and Clubview subdivision].

I: Where is that?

R: That's bounded by Carpenter Road and Golfside.

I: Okay.

R: It's on the south ... south side of Washtenaw and Packard, and that too, sandwiched between those two roads. But the only ... the only representative we have on the township board was Perry Brown. And I was the second one to get on there, and the reason I got on there was Morris Garter who lived on Golfside called me one night and he was quite disturbed by the article in the Ann Arbor News that the township board had zoned properties on the south side of Packard, zoned for 12 hundred apartments. And the Meijers site which is on old Ellsworth and Carpenter, that was zoned for a mobile home park. And that excited us, what's going to happen to our area. So Morris Garter called me and says, "We're going to have a meeting at the town ... at my house, and I want you to come." So I went there and that was in 1960 ... let's see ... yeah, 1966. And I went there and it happened to be our meeting was held after the primary, the August primary. So we could not circulate a petition and get on the ballot that way. So the next best thing we could do is conduct a write-in campaign. So before the night was over, I agreed to run as treasurer. [So we formed the Homeowner's Party.] Clair Shefrin was running for Clerk and Jim Greenwood was going to ... as Supervisor. But we were all running on the write-in candidates. My good fortune was that that particular year my predecessor, Charlie Leverett, refused to run for reelection so the slot was empty, so all I needed to do was get two votes and I was in.

I: Uh-huh.

R: So the whole group ... I was elected and I reported for work during tax collection time so I could become acquainted how the thing worked and I worked with Charlie and his wife several days, and then I first of the year, why, I took office in Pittsfield Township's ...[on January 1, 1967]

I: So that would have been 1967?

R: '67. And not knowing too much about the workings of the Township government, so I tried to question people. In the office, we had ... the office consisted of one girl that answered the telephone and did all the typing, and the Clerk was there most of the time and the supervisor. But the ... I found out that the treasurer would only come once a week and collect all the

receipts and make the deposit. But he would be there during tax collection time more than once a week. So after a few months I found out that there were too many receipt books in the township and I had to do something about it. So I devised a system by which I had receipts made out in triplicate and they were put in a container which was locked and the receipts written, the first one go to the ... whoever paid the money and the other one would go with the cash. And then I'd go in and balance out and make out my deposit, and that way there was a first centralized receipt that we had in the township. And another thing happened was I noticed that everything was in pen and ink and it was done manually. And that ... it was time consuming work. So I had to do something to speed that up. So I bought ... Great Lakes Federal was changing their system and they were upgrading it and they had a couple of Burroughs Sensamatic machines that I could pick up cheap, so I bought them when they had Burroughs reprogram that for our ... to fit our needs. So that was the first time we had mechanized bookkeeping, so to speak. Then we added another person onto our staff who would do our utilities billing, and that was the total of our staff, and pretty soon my work got...I could see there was so much that wasn't being done in the township. For example, we had no applications for re-zonings and so forth, so I ... I saw the job needed was ... to be done and I had to took and did all that work. However, before I did anything, why, well, we do, especially with Bill Perlman and I would visit various townships and ask how do you do this, how do you do that? And we gathered all the information and come back and decide what we were going to do. But the beauty part about during my tenure at the township, was I had some very fine people to work with, very cooperative. We made some major decisions at that time. For example, we made the decision, our utilities department, is it going to be tax supported or revenue supported.

I:

Uh-hm.

R:

And the board said it's going to be revenue supported, which I think that was a wise decision. And then we also strove to do is that every ... everything we did in the township, like planning and zoning and all that, that has to be supported by fees, so established a fee schedule for each one of these functions. For plumbing for electrical, for building. So it was the period in which things began to gel, and ...[fees collected covered the cost of the service provided]

I:

Was it a time in the township of rapid growth in the late 60s then? Or was it still pretty much stable?

R:

It was pretty much stable.

I:

And what was about the population at that time?

R:

I would say roughly around 12,000. [8,000]

I:

Okay.

R:

Because when I moved in, I think we were eight or nine. So we had grown about 3,000.

I:

And to put it in reference, we're at about 35 [thousand] now in the township?

R:

Somewhere I think.

F:

I: Thirty.

R: Thirty? Okay. Just for the ...

I: But ...

R: ... context of the interview.

I: ... as I say, there was a job to done and there was no one to do it. I undertook to do it.

R: Your office had ... sounds like it had about five people in it.

I: Well, there was no centralized purchasing, which I introduced in the township.

R: Okay.

I: I introduced public bidding. We joined the Michigan Purchasing Associ ... State Purchasing Association, which I got a lot of information from them. They gave us the ability to be able to buy on state contracts our big items. I had a good working rapport with the county purchasing department because they were part of the state, and we combined our needs with their orders, therefore we could afford to get a better price, so we were saving some money.

R: Uh-huh.

I: But individuals could go out and buy something so long as it was limited under a hundred dollars. But anything more than a hundred had to go through the purchasing.

R: Hello. This is Don Swan.

I: Hello, Don.

D: How are you?

R: Have a seat over here.

I: [laughs]

D: We're taking a little break here

R: So good to see you.

D: Good to see you.

I: Were you working out of ... was this building here then? Okay. So you were working out of this ...

R: Well, no. I was working out of the other part of the building.

W:

I: This part of it wasn't here. This place ...

R: This part is...

DW: This is an addition. It's an addition.

R: You might explain, Jim, there's been two additions to the original building, hasn't there? There was the original building that you were in.

DW: Right.

R: Then you added this part.

DW: Right.

R: And then they've added this part. Remember in the garage, didn't they do the same thing at the same time?

DW: No, they ... there was the original building in the hall. That was the original. Then they added this.

R: They did?

DW: Yeah. It was ... I've forgotten the year that we did that. But getting back to the utilities ... getting back to the utilities, since we decided it was going to be a revenue-supported system, then we had to devise a way to keep the department going. So again we went out to other municipalities and found out the charges for ... connections charges and so forth, and we came up with an ordinance that provides that anyone hooking on to our system, they would pay a benefit charge or a capital improvement charge, which went into the future expansion of our system. And that proved to be quite successful I think. How much money did we have in that ...?

DW: At what time, do you know?

R: At the time you came in?

DW: Well, it'd be about three million then I think. Up to seven million when I left.

R: So you see, we were on the right footing. Another major decision we made was people were clamoring for disposal of solid waste and ...

I: Trash collection.

R: Yes. And at that time I think our supervisor was Bob Lillie and he led us into ...

DW: Contracting.

R: ... contracting for this instead of billing our department and have to ... the headaches of labor renegotiations and breakdown of equipment and so forth. You see, it's more cost effective for

us to contract this out, and that's why we have gone that route. I know we are the envy of the [Ann Arbor] city fathers because they wish they could do the same thing, but it's too late. They're stuck with it. So there were many innovations were introduced by ... while Bob Lillie was our supervisor. We became a charter township under his leadership.

I:

Before you became a charter township, you had a township board of how many people?

R:

Seven. [and the magic number was 4 to enact legislation]

I:

Seven. Were they cooperating in these innovations? Was there dissension?

R:

Well ...

I:

How did the politics work?

R:

... as the character of the board changed, there were more people from the urbanized section. It became an easier job because their interests lie in innovations, because the rural representatives kept diminishing every year.

I:

Are you saying that you felt like the rural elements of the township were inherently less progressive in doing some of these more ...?

R:

They were. They were. They were. Of course, you take Mr. Morgan, our Clerk, he held the job as Treasurer at one time. A Clerk, a Supervisor. So there weren't enough people running for these offices.

I:

I see.

R:

So ...

I:

It was a dynasty kind of before you ...

R:

More or less.

I:

Yes.

R:

More or less. Because I remember when I first came into office, they ... they looked on me as a rebel, and they'd give me very little information. They closed the door and they'd talk behind the doors and I wouldn't know what was going on. But gradually they were convinced that I wasn't about to tear the township apart and I was there to learn and to help. So finally I sold myself to the other members of the board. But ... and I went around looking for prospective people to run on the board. A good neighbor, Doug Woolley, was next to me and I told him how little time he would have to spend.

I:

Right.

DW:

Because meetings as a ...

R:

I conned him in [laughs] ... into running for office. Then I ran across Jim Aldrich at the bank, I conned him in. So that's the way we recruited some good people.

I:

And anyway, if you wanted to talk about the charter project, turning this in ... the changes that went on then.

R:

The charter township of course it gave us the ability to do a lot of things we weren't able to do before under the common law township. And for the first time we had a zeal to ... to preserve the integrity of our boundaries and not to let the City of Ann Arbor gobble us up, or Saline. So how do you do that? Well, first of all, you have to provide services that the people need, like police protection, fire protection, sewer and water. And we proceeded to establish those things, and that's ... it gave us the power to be able to do that. So but if we didn't know how to do anything, we'd always talk to someone that was about the same size township as we were. We would go to Plymouth Township. We would go to Okemos and ... And of course we joined the Michigan Township Association and once a year we had meetings, and there, why, we had seminars pertain to our own work; the clerks would have their own seminar, the treasurers would have seminars. And about that time we were introduced to the Uniform State Accounting Procedure. So we all had to go on that. So I had to go to school and learn how to do all that, and the state assigned account numbers to all our activities in which would be throughout the state; every municipality would have the same account number. So the state auditor came in to audit your books, if you looked at account 303, he knew exactly what to look for. So we went with the Uniform Accounting Procedures which ...

I:

When was that?

R:

My memory fails me. It was ... it was before we moved in here, so it was earlier.

I:

Oh, okay.

R:

Yeah.

I:

Were you an accounting professional in some place in your business?

R:

No. No, I was a business man. I was Vice President of JR Paper company in Detroit and I grew up in a business environment, so I knew business. And that's one thing I try to do on my ... My own work is to try to run my office as a business and I learned how to invest money in some funds that were idle, and in some years I made tremendous amounts of money, because according to state law that I had ten days in which to turn tax collections over to the other municipalities, and between the time I had to turn them in and the time I receive, I'd invest it.

I:

I see.

R:

So I made ... One year I think I did about 600 thousand dollars I earned.

I:

Wow.

R:

So, I know the ... I did not break any laws, because the law says within ten days after I receive the money from the taxpayers, I had to turn ... but I put it to work.

I: Well, and the taxpayers appreciate that I'm sure.

R: And then we were the first township too to declare a dividend.

I: Yes.

R: I had taken monies that I had received in a special sewer assessment and those bonds were sold at the very low figure, interest figure, and I was ... we had quite a few prepayments and I'd invest that at six and seven and eight percent, and when I finally retired the bonds, I had a surplus of about six or seven hundred thousand dollars, so where does that money go? The people that paid that assessment. So I issued checks for everybody [laughs] in the subdivision, which was something quite new.

I: Quite unexpected I can imagine. That's very unusual.

R: But I enjoyed my work tremendously, and enjoyed the people I work with because the amount of cooperation I had, and especially Don [LeClair]. Don, you know, he ... he'd see something that was getting us to sleep and he'd make some sort of remark [laughs] -- "Wake up." I said, "Don, you know better than to say things like that." "I want to see if you're awake." [laughter] And I learned a great deal from Don Swan. He was my mentor, teach me about the utilities department. Right, Don?

D: That's right.

R: Yeah. He represented the ... our engineering firm, Ayres, Lewis, Norris and May, and we're still with them, I guess. No?

D: Retired.

R: Oh, you retired. Yeah, I know. Yeah.

I: What about the setup of the public safety department? I notice you mentioned that, or ...?

R: Well, as I told you before, that ... that one of the things that a charter township enables us to do is to establish our public safety. And we had the choice of course of contracting with the city sheriff's department or establish our own department. And we decided to go on our own. And we hired first one officer, then we hired two, and three, and gradually we add ... kept on adding and we had to appoint a chief and then the next step was to appoint a director of public safety, combining the two departments.

I: The fire and the police protection.

R: Yeah. That was not during my time. It was after I had left. That was in the late 80s, wasn't it Doug?

DW: I think it was in the area.

R:

Yeah.

DW:

I don't ... my memory's worse than yours.

R:

But ... So we were meeting our responsibility as a charter township, and that eliminated the people wanted to annex into the city. But since the incident I told you about back in ... when I first moved in the township where my vote and my wife's vote defeated an annexation, annexation laws have changed since then. Now it's up to the Boundary Commission to determine whether to let a piece of land be annexed by another municipality. And of course both municipalities have to be willing to let go, but the Boundary Commission makes the final decision, do they not?

DW:

Yes, they do.

I:

Not the people. Yeah.

DW:

No.

R:

But there's no reason why anyone who wants to annex into the city, for example, if you can provide them with the services that they need to develop their land. So one of the things we try to do is try to build a ring around the city of Ann Arbor with our own utilities, so they won't be able to cross the road and come and grab some more land. And the first thing we did was in ... we put the water line up Hogback Road, which was not there, and then the next one was Clubview subdivision, we put the utilities in that. And from Clubview we went to Michigan Avenue, in that area. And the last part was building utilities on the western part of our township. But it's all financed through charges. If we have ... We do have special assessment for when you go into a subdivision, assess each individual property. But any major capital improvements like a water tower, for example, that comes out of that fund. The oversizing, we have developers that come in that want utilities and, well, let's say we only need a four-inch line to service our property -- you can't have a four-inch line because we want to size that piece of pipe so properties in between you and the point of origin of these utilities be able to hook onto the system. Therefore we'll participate on the oversizing of the pipes so we'll be able to do this. In other words, we don't want a bunch of long drawn-out leads to service just a single property. And it ... it took a lot of fight, lot of fighting among the developers who come see our way, but most of the times they agree. Otherwise, they didn't go with me.

I:

Can I ask a touchy question then? Do you think that the ... there's been so much recently, talk about over-development ...

R:

Uh-hm.

I:

... in the township. Do you feel that you laid plans that were ... that preserved the elements of Pittsfield Township that were good, the more rural environment, the ...

R:

Well ...

I:

... natural features? Or was there ... were we trying to grow at that time and maybe not thinking about these things?

R: Well, what we have done in the past was we were one of the first municipalities in the county if you have a land use plan, and we tried to stick pretty much to that where our development was going to take place, and we planned our utilities to follow that plan.

I: Oh, I see.

R: So we had certain parts of the township that would be rural, you know, and certain parts of the township that was going to be a subdivision, so we had planned for it.

I: Uh-hm. What do you think, just to kind of wrap up the interview portion of this then, about the present situation in Pittsfield where so much bigger than before and also any thoughts you might about the future?

R: Well, the thing about it is you can't stop development for the simple reason is the ... our location. We're close the major highways and we're close to the university. And it's going to bring development and expansion. You can't stop it. To say "You can't do this," try to stop it -- it's foolish.

I: Okay.

R: Because you can't deny a person the right to develop their property, you know.

I: Uh-hm.

R: This idea that, well, I have my home here and I'm established, I'm going to keep everyone else out, I'm going to keep this ... my area, in the country atmosphere -- you cannot stop it.

I: Absolutely.

R: You cannot stop it. So the best thing to do is do it orderly.

I: Right. Uh-hm. What about the budgets and the expenditures that we do nowadays compared to when you were ...?

R: Oh [laughs].

I: I mean, is it shocking to you when you see these?

R: No it's not shocking because the necessity's there.

I: Uh-huh.

R: And I'm glad we had enough foresight to go into this governmental accounting and it's something everyone understands, you know.

I: Uh-hm.

R:

And, no, I ... it doesn't shock me. And, well, the thing of course is you have to ... all you have to do is look at our assessed value. Our income is greater. But still all in all we try to keep our levies down and I think Doug [Woolley] has done a lot of that. He's ... he watches every penny. He used to when he was supervisor.

I:

I have to make sure we get Doug Woolly's name on there as the former supervisor so that people who are reading the transcript in years to come know who we're talking about.

R:

Right. I'm so glad you came on board, Doug.

I:

Do we have any questions?

GW:

I have one question not just about the township. Were you running a store at the same time you were a student at U of M.

R:

Yes.

GW:

You had ... you went ... you also had a full-time store job.

R:

Yeah, I ran the family business.

GW:

Right. That's what I thought, that you weren't really a full-time student.

R:

No.

I:

What was the family business?

R:

Grocery store I ran.

I:

Oh.

R:

When we came here, when the family moved from Cleveland, Ohio in Spring of '33, we had -- which was in the middle of the Depression -- we had to have some way of earning a living and we found this grocery store for sale and we bought it and opened it up. And of course the beauty part of that is you couldn't sell your produce you took it home and ate it.

I:

[laughs] Where was it located at?

R:

On East Ann Street between Ingalls and Glen.

I:

Okay.


R:

Yeah. But we all worked in the store, my sister and my brother. My brother was in medical school at that time, and we all took our turn. So it was a family business.

I:

I need people who are more knowledgeable in ...

DW:

Well, you need to add, Jim, than when the Briarwood was an  ... that property from Briarwood was annexed, we lost 15 percent ...

R:

Of our tax base, yeah.

DW:

... of our tax base. And that was what stimulated the move towards the township, the charter township.

R:

When ... when was that? That is the story that I did want to remember to ask about. Can you talk about that?

DW:

In 1972?

R:

Sounds about right. Sounds about right.

I:

The township used to go out to ...

DL:

Well, it's six miles each way. It's like by Bemis Road and Clark Road, Maple on the west and Golfside on the east.

DW:

But Arborland used to be in the Township. That's why they called it Pittsfield ...

DL:

Six square miles, the township.

R:

Yeah.

DW:

Pittsfield Township, that's probably how it got its name. And so probably south of Packard at one time would have probably been in the township, because some of it is still in the township, it's south of Packard.

R:

Yeah.

DW:

Still have islands there, and over by the golf course, the student golf course, there's still islands over there that's in the township, so much of that area in the southern part of Ann Arbor was in the township.

I:

Ann Arbor came in and annexed that area for Briarwood.

R:

Yeah.

DW:

That's because we couldn't provide the service.

R:

Couldn't provide the service. Yeah.

DW:

A rural township according to our 1975 land use plan was going to be on the west side, because with your sewer system, you wanted gravity control and then it was higher.

R:

Yeah.

DW:

Well, then when Meijers wanted to come in, on some of the other developers for the residential area over there, it was either them making ... putting together their own sewer and water system or coming with the township. So the township, as much as didn't want to see that developed, decided to let them buy and pay for the sewer and water system and then it would become the property of the township. The township law or state law says that if a township has, for instance, a mobile home park that's out in the area and something goes wrong with the sewer system, the township is responsible either to fix that or provide sewer services.

R:

Correct.

DW:

So it was better for us to have our own public system sort of in that area than it was to have them have their own private area, and then sometime in the future we'd have to pay to have it extended out to ... As it was, they paid 8.2 million dollars to service that west part. But our first land use plan, that was supposed to be the rural area, that and the south of Washtenaw ... Michigan Avenue. But that was never planned to be developed.

R:

But we ... we supplied some of the funds out of the capital fund for that. I know ...

DW:

We paid for the tower.

R:

... the water tower.

DW:

We paid for the pump, too, I'm not sure, but everything in the ground I think they

DL:

The reason that all this got started was because they put US23 right by Oak Park subdivision.

R:

Yeah.

DL:

And when they did, the upper section of the subdivision lost water. The wells went dry.

R:

Right.

DL:

And the state said, "Oh, we didn't do anything," but they were liars. Of course you never could trust them anyway. You know when they're lying because their lips move.

R:

Well ...

DL:

And this is where Louise Schmerburg got involved in Ypsi Township ...

R:

Right.

DL:

...needed water there. And then some other township official wanted the upper part of Ypsi Township for apartments, so that's where they put in the sewer interceptor there

R:

Yeah. The Golfside interceptor.

DL:

I mean, but the state couldn't do it themselves and they needed us when we needed that.

R:
Yeah.

M:
It was kind of a mutual ... mutual agreement.

R:
But we approached the City of Ann Arbor and ... for water and they said, "We won't give you water unless you annex." And we said, "We're not going to annex." So we had to look elsewhere for water. Now as far as sewer is concerned, since they used federal funds to build their sewer plant and extend services, then we as federal taxpayers, federal taxpayers, were entitled to use that system. So they couldn't deny us sewer service, but however they could deny us water.

DW:
So for the western part of the northwest side ...

R:
Right.

DW:
... of the township was on Ann Arbor sewer system.

R:
The federal law says that you must serve all lands that are in that particular drains district, that can flow by gravity. You must serve them. So that's the hold we had on the City of Ann Arbor, that we were part of a drainage district in which they built the sewer.

I:
Other questions? Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much.

R:
Thank you.

BL:
Thank you. We appreciate it. And Margaret Lillie baked some home◆sent I should say, homemade cookies for whoever stays after.

R:
Well, that's very nice.

BL:
Well, I hope everyone will enjoy.

R:
I'm glad I had the opportunity to reminisce.

I:
Oh, it was delightful to hear it.

DW:
Did a good job too.

R:
Thank you.

DW:
Both as treasurer, and as program today.

I:
And thank you everybody for participating in the conversation because I don't ... of all the ...

R:
Yeah.

Side 2:

I: Okay.

R: When I first ... first took the job, I didn't even ask what my salary was going to be, but I had figured and there I found out it four thousand dollars a year.

I: Wow! [laughs] Hardly made it worth your while, did it?

R: No. But it ...

I: Did you find that you were actually turning it into more of a full time job? I mean ...

R: Yes.

I: ... the concept of coming just once a week is ...

R: Yes. Well, there were so many things left undone.

I: I guess.

R: And when you see something has to be one and if you ... you have any feeling for the job you just go ahead and do it. So long as it ... somebody ... somebody doesn't interfere. And the other members of the board were willing to ... for me to take over, and I did.

I: Uh-hm. Did you work ... did you have basically good working relationships with everybody else ...

R: Oh, yes.

I: ... during all the terms that you were in? You were re-elected what, ten times? Was it two-year terms?

R: Well, they were two-year terms, except the last two. I was ... I served one four-year term, then the second four-year term I resigned.

I: I see.

R: Because of my heart condition.

I: I see. I see, yeah.

R: I had a bypass and I couldn't come back. I was seventy-four.

I: Yeah. Well, that was quite a bit of service. Now party, political party did you run for?

R: Ah, Republican.

I: You were Republican. And most of the township was at that time?

R: Republican. If you wanted to be elected to any township office, you had to run under Republican.

I: Okay.

R: But I can't remember when I voted a straight Republican ticket in my life. I always voted for the man, you know. But primary I always voted Republican because I had ... Many people that are good that are not Republicans. But it's been delightful.

I: Let's get you something to drink. [break]

R: How do you do this? He says, "You do it till somebody challenges you."

I: Oh. Yeah. Yeah.

R: So we proceeded to things.

I: How ... how do you feel you compare to the var ... in development wise?

R: Well, I'll tell ...

I: With the other townships in the state? Was everybody going through the same thing at the same time?

R: The thing about it ... the thing about it was that we ... for some reason rather Pittsfield got the reputation: If you don't know how to do anything, call Pittsfield.

I: Really? So you became the experts. Hm. Interesting.

R: Because we participated in everything that came along. Like, for example, the SEMCOG [South East Michigan Council of Governments]. There was a tendency of county government rather than individual municipalities. And Bob came to us, he says, "Well, we better join," he says, "so we can find out what they're going to do to us."

I: Oh!

R: And that was the attitude.

I: Uh-hm.

R: So we joined the SEMCOG, and we attended the meetings. And Doug Woolley, he was ... he chaired that SEMCOG. So did Bob Lillie. So we became part of it.

I: Uh-hm. Uh-hm. And that was very progressive for a township to do that.

R: That's right, that's right.

I:

I see.

R: That's right. [pause] And when we buy gasoline for our trucks, nobody would bother getting state tax back. I started filing to the state to get rebate on that.

I: Uh-hm.

R: And it's a sizeable sum of money we would lose, but nobody had ever thought about it.

I: Why ... I guess that's what ... was it because you were a business person that you felt like you were going to professionalize this function in the sense that you were going to get as much money as you could for your "investors" which the taxpayers in the township are.

R: Yeah. Yeah. I was going to earn my money. But I'm glad to see that we made a lot of good decisions. It's paying off now.

I: Uh-hm. Yeah, I'm sure you're very proud of the work that you did during your ...

R: Well, not only I, but the ... the whole board. We're very supportive. And, you know, there's nothing more demeaning to an individual to have dissension, you know, and challenge everything you do, you know.

I: Was the board fairly similar through the whole ... through your tenure, or ... yes. Okay, so there wasn't a lot of in-and-out and electing real ... did ...?

R: No.

I: Un-electing, yeah.

R: No. Forgotten how many terms Don served. But he ...

I: Is this Don LeClair?

R: Yeah. And one fellow that was a great asset was Bill Pearlman. And I went through a period where the old guard there, they still had exerted a lot influence in the township board and came along a rezoning on the Meijers property, for the mobile home park. And there was two ... three of us voted against it. The next thing we knew, they were in court suing us.

I: Oh!

R: So we were in court about two years. And the township board wouldn't support, pay our attorney fees. We had to hire our own attorney. So finally when Meijers came along and they want to build the store, because there was a litigation against that property, they wouldn't buy it till the lawsuit was cleared. So they developed ... the owner of the property came to us and wanted to settle. And he paid the balance of our attorney fees and we rezoned the property back to agricultural, and also what they had done, they had gone to the City of Ann Arbor and dealt directly with them to connect down to the sewer of Ann Arbor, bypassing the township entirely. But, see, you can't do that. And we were quarreling about that. And what I was going to

do is going have them, since we had a sewer to the east of it, and the Clubview subdivision to have them on hook, the City of Ann Arbor, and hook onto our system and pay all the pertinent fees, and they fought it, and that was three or four hundred thousand dollars. And they agreed.

I:

Well ... no.

R:

I had another piece of property on the south side of Packard, they did the same thing. It was called Bethany Apartments, and he just couldn't get him to pay. And finally he ... he sold the property, and I had filed for a restraining order on that property. And he settled.

I:

Uh-hm. Uh-hm. Uh-hm.

R:

But I had the same thing with the City of Ann Arbor when they were billing me the water to the community college. They didn't bother coming and asking, getting permits.

I:

Ann Arbor didn't get permits for ...

R:

No.

I:

... Pittsfield Township to do ...

R:

No.

I:

... that?

R:

So I took an injunction against them. They stopped the project, and they said, "What do you want?" I says, "Well, I want ... I want the ability to ... for any one of our residents that want to hook onto that water line that's going through our township to be able to do it without annexation." And I got it. At a tremendous cost, but then I ... Then when I put the ... the line down on Hogback Road then we disconnected the old connections, and hooked onto our system. We constantly battled the city, you know, because the city has the attitude that township exists for their pleasure.

I:

To feed them without ... without the City of Ann Arbor the townships wouldn't even be here, so they serve us. Is that kind of ...?

R:

That's ... and besides that, they thought we were a bunch a country bumpkins. We didn't know what we were doing. Then when we surprised them by having a revenue-supported system, both garbage collection, and they said, well. And another thing we introduced was with all this development that was going on, you ... you have a lot of storm water. Every time you cover a piece of land, you've got water.

I:

Right.

R:

And if we let that go that means we have to build a tremendous pipe to carry this storm water away. So we came up with an ordinance to impound the water on a site and not to have any greater run-off than it its undeveloped state.

I:

And the developers fought you tooth and nail on that, I bet.

R:
But we got it.

I:
Uh-hm.

R:
And the City of Ann Arbor followed, the best, same ordinance.

I:
[laughs] So ... so they were actually taking your lead on a lot of this.

R:
That's right. So we're not the country bumpkins that you thought we were.

I:
No, no. No, no, no. No.

R:
Well, good fortune is you ... we had dedicated people like Bob Lillie, Bill Pearlman, Don LeClair. And they would ... none of us were in for the money or the glory. We were out to preserve the integrity of the township. And you talk about being political, this township was never political. Only lately it's become political.

I:
What do you think about that?

R:
Well, it's good. It's good. But the thing ... the thing I don't like about is with the radical attitude that say all development has to stop. You can't stop it. let's be logical. The need is there, you have to supply it, you know.

I:
I think your point about our location is very valid and something that people forget. I mean, we're at the crossroads of ...

R:
I had people new in the township buy property in the Clubview subdivision, and the first thing they do is fill their ditches up and extend their lawn almost to the middle of the road. Then they complain about flooding.

I:
Uh-hm [laughs].

R:
Why do you think those ditches were put there?

I:
Right.

R:
You know?

I:
Uh-hm. Excuse me two seconds.

GW:
Okay.

I:
Is somebody taking a nice head-on shot of Mr. Reader so that we have it for the archives?

GW:
Yes, and you too. We want ...

I:

I: No, I don't want to be in it. This is our ...

GW: You really don't? Okay.

I: This is our record, shot of record.

GW: And I want to take one more.

I: Okay.

GW: Now I've got one of him. So now I want a nice one of you.

I: Okay.

GW: Smile. Oh, that was really nice.

I: Thank you very much, Geri.

R: No. You can't bury your head in the sand.

I: Well, what ... you know, my other ... here we go onto the tape, but anyway, is property ... somebody who owns the property who wants to sell it for whatever reason, there may be financial retirement concerns with this person or whatever. It seems odd to me that you can limit to whom they can sell that, and ... and for what purpose, and ...

R: Oh, you mean, as far as your zoning is concerned?

I: Yeah. I ... well, not necessarily zoning but if you have a piece of farmland and there's a developer who wants it for a subdivision ...

R: Yeah.

I: ... and it's in the plan and then ...

R: So long as it's in the plan, why, it's fine.

I: Yeah. And then you have people protesting at your site that ...

R: Right. But the thing ... the thing about it is, is it fair for a family to pay taxes over a period of years on a piece of property and not reap its benefits? Is it fair to wait till they die and then someone else takes over and they reap the benefits, no. I don't think it's right.

I: Uh-hm. No. I don't either, I think ...

R: No. The attitude of course of a lot of people in this country is, some of our newcomers is, "I'm in, you stay out, you know. I want a rural atmosphere around my house." What gives you that right to say that I can't come in?

I:

Uh-hm. And then Bill McAuley used to tell the story about people complaining in the subdivisions around him about his pigs, the smell of the pigs. Well, you know ...

R:

The pigs were there ...

I:

... the pigs were there first [laughs].

R:

The pigs were there first. I developed a mobile home park in Scottsdale, Arizona, and I went out there with this friend of mine and bought 30 acres in Scottsdale, they're going to make him a mobile home park. And when I bought that piece of property, in one of the attorney's office, and I looked at it you know, and you couldn't grow anything but tumbleweeds on that thing. And I says ... I say, "You sure were doing the right thing spending three thousand dollars an acre for this desert?" And he said to me, he says, "It takes guys like you to come from the outside to recognize a good value."

I:

[laughs]

R:

And I said, "How about all of these ... this vacant land with horses on it?" He said, "The horses were there before people."

I:

Uh-hm [laughs]. I've got to turn this off before it gets too interesting.

The End