

Summary

Childhood years

home, 4 Bennett Place
siblings, 2 brothers, 1 sister
New Street School

Family history

greatgrandfather "in servitude", age 14
grandfather and father were "car men,"
freight transport
maternal grandfather was box maker, barber

Milton's employment & education

hatting (explains early industry)
Baypath business College
1932, John W. Green's, pack and ship, pay
\$12 per wk
Bard Parker Co (makers of surgical knives)
chief accountant
Becton Dickinson/Parker merger, Milton,
director of Operations
Post retirement, Milt was Mr. Parker's
personal assistant

Danbury social life

attending movies (Palace, Empress and
Capitol theaters)
playing pool
Serious illness, embolism, age 14

Marriage

First Congregational Church, becomes
Treasurer Emeritas
married 65 yrs, wife a bookkeeper

World War II years

exempt from service (Family responsibility)
war contract work, novacon (tracer) gun,
won Navy awards

Civic organizations

Danbury Lions Club, 60 yr member

Milton Boyce's children

David, employed by Chase Bank, vice pres
John, employed by Union Savings Bank,
courier
Allan, accountant

Danbury changes

small town to city
downtown shopping, "people watching" to
the Mall
longterm teachers, many single woman,
compared to now

no radio/TV in home till after 1938
adding machine, but No computer
History and politics of Danbury
settled 1685, eight families from Norwalk
First Congregational Church, 1696, central
meeting place
1722, borough formed
hatting begun by Mr. Mallory
consolidation of town /city, A major political
issue for many years
Mayor Bowman, 1949, mentioned and Leroy
Jackson, lawyer
Tom Keating, lawyer, head of the
Democratic Party locally, member of
Common Council.
Milt served on Common Council, 4 years.

Interview with Milton Boyce by Nancy London on October 21, 2003.

NL: Ok, my name is Nancy London, and with me today is Milton Boyce. And today is Tuesday, October, 21st, in the year 2003. And now I'm going to let Milton Boyce introduce himself, tell how old, when he was born, and we are going to start talking about his childhood here in Danbury. So Milt, it's all you.

MB: Well, where do we start?

NL: Where were you born?

MB: I was born in Danbury, November 11, 1910.

NL: 1910.

MB: I spent all my life here and I will be 93 the 11th of next month.

NL: Isn't that something? Oh no, Veterans Day!

MB: Yeah, Veterans Day. My father said in 1918, when the First World War was signed? My father said I will never forget when I was 8 years old, and, I never have. He was good with figures, I was with figures. I made my living in accounting and finance and general management.

NL: All right. So were you born, was there a hospital here when you were born?

MB: Huh?

NL: Was there a hospital here when you were born?

MB: Yes, there was a hospital. That was, went back a little before 1883 or something, I don't know 1889, I should know I was on the board for quite awhile.

NL: Were you born in the hospital?

MB: I don't think so. I think I was born at home, but I'm not sure.

NL: Ok, and how many brothers and sisters did you have?

MB: I had an older brother. I had another brother that I never saw. He died before I was born with whooping cough, and I had a sister who was a couple of years older than I, and myself. There were four of us, but I only knew my sister and she was sickly and she didn't live until about 18 years old.

NL: Oh.

MB: She went to private school. She couldn't go to regular school. So that was it. I went through the Danbury schools.

NL: Do you remember when you were very young, where you lived? What the address was?

MB: Yeah, 4 Bennett Place, Danbury, off Pleasant Street.

NL: 4 Bennett Place off Pleasant Street.

MB: Yeah.

NL: Is the house still there?

MB: Huh?

NL: Is that house still there?

MB: The hospital?

NL: No, no, no, the house where you lived.

MB: Yes.

NL: Is it still there?

MB: As far as I know. I went to New Street School and each generation. My brother went there before me. My mother went there before me. My father went there before me. And, my grandmother went before me.

NL: Wow.

MB: And when my son was born, and we lived on Harmony Street, in 19.....he was born in '40, so about 1946 my grandmother was still alive, there were five living, four living generations, my mother, and myself, my son, and my grandmother. So we had long roots in New St. School.

NL: Ok, now tell me, though, you were born in Danbury, were your parents also born in Danbury and your grandparents?

MB: My mother was born in Danbury, and ah my father was born right over here in New York State, Southeast town. He was, my grandfather and great grandfather were millers.

NL: Ok.

MB: Northeast, that's the same...Brewster.

NL: Brewster.

MB: Brewster, that's the town over here. They took his land for the reservoir somewheres around the late '90's or something, and my grandmother had come from Danbury. And an interesting thing, he quartered a horse and wagon over Joe's Hill. And they got married and lived over there on a farm with my great grandfather.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB? Ah, he was, ah, we don't know, we haven't been able... my wife did a lot of the genealogy. We can't find out, my great grandfather, he said he was from a large family born over around Poughkeepsie.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: And he was, what we call bound out. What do you call it, servitude? And at 14, the people he was with was rough, didn't like him so he ran away.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: It's amazing. We went to Albany, to the library, and tried to find something. We couldn't find it. So, any way, that was, he would never tell anything. That's as far as we know, because he was born in '89, or died in '89, right over here, or '98, and at the old homestead there. I got a copy of it up here.

NL: Yeah.

MB: And, so my father came here and my grandfather got in what we call trucking today, but he called it a car man because everything come in and out of freight. He went down to the freight office and would get the stuff and deliver it. He had two national accounts, National Biscuits and Wilson Beef. As a kid I used to, on Thursday Wilson Beef he had to go as far as Brewster which is a long way down below Newtown. And so I used to ride on the old truck with him. And so hats were all made in wooden boxes before corrugated. So they went out and he delivered them to the freight office. Everything went out that way. It's interesting because he said, I don't know you probably don't remember we used to go and buy crackers or cookies, they were in a box and they took them out and put them in and weigh them. He said, "Some day they're gonna come individually packaged."

NL: And he was right!

MB: He was right. And, anyway, so he, so it was Danbury, went to school....

NL: What brought the family to Danbury, though?

MB: What?

NL: Why did the family settle in Danbury?

MB: When?

NL: No, why were they here? Was it because of work?

MB: Ah, I guess so. The earliest settled was on my mother's side, my grandmother was a barber. They came to Danbury. They came from down Fairfield way. A matter of fact, both sides of the family came from down Fairfield way. He came here like 1802 or something. And they were there. He was a box maker. These big boxes they made to put stuff in to go into the freight. He lived in Danbury and his brother was here. He was a carpenter. I don't know, I'll get into that later with hatting, but the hatting came at about 1822. The first hat was made by, out in Great Plain, by the Mallorys.

NL: Ok.

MB: The original Mallory.

NL: Ok.

MB: Because when I was a kid, in 1922, they celebrated their 100th anniversary.

NL: Wow.

MB: And I had the booklet, but I moved here from the house to the apartment, I threw away a lot of stuff. I don't know whether I have, still have that 100 years. So they were in business for 100 years. So, what brought hatting here was the beaver fur.

NL: Ok.

MB: The beavers were present here, and that's what Mallory did, but as time went on, it was beaver furs made the best hat was too expensive, so they got rabbit fur. A lot of them came from Australia and other stuff. Like all of Danbury, we all worked in the hat shops in the summer time. They were building up the trade, getting the hats ready for winter. They got boys working. I worked in hatting. It's interesting. I worked a couple of summers in shipping and packing hats. And when I come home, that helped me, in 1931, I got out of Baypath Business College up in Springfield, as an accountant, no accounting jobs there. My first experience was I went to see a CPA firm and they said we just let a, Boyce had just let a man go that had been with us 10 years.

NL: Oh no.

MB: So, I come back to Danbury and things were tough with everybody, nobody making any money. My next year, my brother got me a job laboring with a road building in Long Island. He was an engineer for the state of New York. And so, I come back in 1932. My old trade of packing hats and shipping was down at John W. Green's. There was an opening. I went down there and got a job.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: \$12.50 a week.

NL: Wow.

MB: Then R. A came in, Mr. Green, the owner came in, called me in the office, said, "Boyce, we're raising you to \$14."

NL: Wow.

MB: "And Mr. Porter, the shipping clerk, is an old man. If you want his job you can have it." I said, "Mr. Green, I appreciate that very much, but I studied accounting. I hope to work at it." It was that next summer that Bard Parker come to Danbury that I got a job. I often think, supposing they hadn't come. And Mr. Porter retired and I got the job and maybe got \$25 or \$30 a week. I would have taken it. But I had a nice career with Bard Parker.

NL: You never know.

MB: Never know, uncertainty, and so I went to Bard Parker. They made surgical instruments, the knife. Mr. Parker invented the disposable surgical knife, two pieces. (The mike is knocked over) Oops, I'm sorry.

NL: That's ok.

MB: That's the knife. The blade just slips off. I'm not gonna, it's an old one. I don't wanna cut my hand.

NL: No, don't.

MB: So they made two, they made that and got a patent. (The mike is again jostled) It fit without the third party, in 1913.

SL: Oh, uh hmm.

MB: And, long story about that but when World War I come in, it was great for in the fields, with the surgeons, so that gave it a big boost. And, long, and they were, had the blades ground out in Ohio, while they didn't do all the full manufacturing in Katonah, NY, over here. And, so, 1933 he came to Danbury. The manufacturer came here, and then they started to making their own blades and doing our own work, and that's when I got a job.

NL: What school did you go to when you were young?

MB: What school?

NL: Yeah.

MB: I went to Baypath.

NL: Ok

MB: It's now a, it was a two-year business college. We went 11 months a year which is equivalent to as much as they do now. But in Massachusetts you couldn't give a degree unless you were four years. So I studied accounting there, and finance, and liked it very much, thought the world was just waiting for me. I was going to be a big CPA and that didn't happen. But I got a job, like I told you, in '33 when Bard Parker come here and within two years the chief accountant left to go back to New York, and it gave me an opportunity when I was 25 years old. So I had a good career right, went right up to Treasurer, and then we merged with Becton Dickinson, I finally was the prime manager, or the Director of Operations in Danbury. I took an early retirement to take care of Mr. Parker's personal affairs, so I've been 35 years with Bard Parker Company. I've been 35 years with the Parker family affairs. So this is a very personal matter,

but it's, that's what my career has been. I am just winding down on their estate now.

NL: All right, so...

MB: Is this going in the?

NL: What?

MB: Is this going to be published?

NL: I am not really sure how, what's going to happen.

MB: Well, anyway, I don't want to get too personal, family-wise. We're very close to the family. So I had a good career. As our former mayor, Thayer Bowman said, "Luck is when opportunity meets preparedness." And I was prepared at 25 years old to take over the full accounting.

NL: All right, so now you are in your 20s, what did you do for fun?

MB: What did I do for fun?

NL: Yes.

MB: (Laugh)

NL: Were there movies?

MB: Yeah, I went to movies, went to the movies, at least once a week, and....

NL: Where were the movie theaters?

MB: It was right here where it is, the same one, The Palace and Empress.

NL: The Palace.

MB: And there was one at the corner of Main and Elm there, the Capitol that came in in the 20s. And, I played pool.

NL: Played pool, ok.

MB: We were not supposed to play pool, you know, that was a dirty word. We look around the corner and see nobody going in, and we walked up to the poolroom.

NL: Ok.

MB: But they ran a very good joint, and it was no problem as far as gambling. It was up to you. There wasn't any real push to gamble. That was up to you. And, nobody ever played it. And I notice it's come back in recent years. Pocket billiards is a very interesting game to play. And once you start you will want to play.

NL: Yeah?

MB: Billiards is a little different with the cushions, but the pocket billiards, which is known as pool, so I played a lot of that, and went to the movies. You see in 1925 when I got out of grammar school, one night, my brother was home from Rensselaer, I was taken. I couldn't talk. I could hear everything they said. My brother carried me, we ate in the kitchen, my father had gone dead by then, carried me into the living room on the couch and said "He's having a convulsion." Well I, it only seemed like a long time, but only lasted, and when I come back, I had full use of everything. Our own doctor Brown wasn't in town. They sent the blood up to Hartford and said I had an embolism.

NL: Oh.

MB: My good friend, Dr. Bernie, who went through Yale and the Doctor said "If I had an embolism at 14 I wouldn't have lived until 17." But that's another thing. So I didn't do any sport work all through high school. I used to love to play baseball.

NL: Oh.

MB: And, so, I gave it up and I was excused. The doctor excused me. My mother was worried. My sister had died. My father had died, and she was worried about my health. So I didn't do any athletic work. I have to tell you this. I went up to Springfield there, we went all through July, 11 months a year, and I guess that was the last year I was home. It must have been '31. We went out to a quarry, a swimming hole. I hadn't swam in 4 years. My god, it was hot. I just took off all my clothes, and with all the boys and jumped in. It didn't affect me. So then after that, I went to work for Bard Parker and worked on the soft ball games leagues. So I guess maybe that early resting helped with the heart. So here I am 93.

NL: You're 93. You fooled them all, huh?

MB: So, now I went to BayPath and couldn't wait a couple of years, worked on road construction, worked in a hat shop, or anything you can do. Money was tight. I had a good career with Bard Parker, and the Parker family and

NL: What about the girls? Did you date a lot, did you go date a lot of girls?

MB: No.

NL: No.

MB: My wife was the first one I ever went thru steady.

NL: Really?

MB: Yeah.

NL: How long have you been married?

MB: 65 years, tomorrow.

NL: Oh my, sixty-five tomorrow?

MB: Yeah, we celebrated Saturday night up at the Ridgewood Country Club.

NL: Oh how nice.

MB: I took the family up.

NL: How did you meet?

MB: What?

NL: How did you meet her? How did the two of you...?

MB: She came to work for me.

NL: She worked for you?

MB: A bookkeeper.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: I took in, I had a set of books home every weekend, on the side. And she was a bookkeeper so she helped me. So she worked as much at it as I did.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: A great help. She got it right down to the last detail.

NL: You took her to the movies?

MB: What?

NL: Did you take her to the movies?

MB: Oh, yeah. That's how we used to go to the movies, and go out in the summer time and have a little drink, go home. Her folks had a place up to the lake in the summer time. And I had my mother, grandmother, and great aunt, so I couldn't get married too young. I was pretty near 28 when I got married.

NL: Where did you get married?

MB: Danbury.

NL: Yeah. Which church?

MB: Uh, the Universalists.

NL: Oh, ok.

MB: She belonged to the, well I won't mention this, but we got married in a smaller church. We just couldn't afford, she was a member of the First Congregational Church, and we both have since married, served...I am Treasurer Emeritus, right there, Treasurer Emeritus. (Milton points to items.)

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: These are all the things I got for six years in the Lions.

NL: Oh.

MB: So, I got into the company and my immediate boss was the General Manager, Mr. White, Harry, J. Harry White. He was a great joiner and civic man. So everything he got into, I got into.

NL: Um, hmm.

MB: So I got into Lions. I'm in 60 years. They gave me a big party and I took the attitude after, I took early retirement, cause I had to take care of Mr. Parker's personal papers. I am probably repeating some of this, but I never felt that I didn't want to continue on. A lot of people quit their job and they want nothing to do.

NL: Right.

MB: That television never goes on, only a special event in the daytime. And, it's not much good at night, anymore, only the ball games. (Laughs)

NL: Yeah.

MB: So my life, I did a lot of bookkeeping.

NL: Ok. And then what happened when World War II started? How old were you during the war, the Second World War?

MB: World War, I was married and had a family. I was supporting my mother, aunt, then. I was exempt. We had a very high priority of war work, so I got exempt, so I didn't have to go to war. I tell you, we did a contract with a contractor down in Providence. We were getting started on it, it was, a patent was smuggled in from Switzerland that makes a, what you call, a Novacon gun. Every other one was a tracer.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: And a British person come in, before we got into war, we had a commitment, a contract with them. It's like a training hose. Every one's a tracer. It was designed at the 5,000 feet for the dive bombers, and they put them on every ship, a high priority. So we had a high priority and did a good job. One of the early ones got a Navy award and all this and surgical. So uh....

NL: Tell me about your family. When did you have children? Tell me about your children.

MB: My children? Well, I had three boys. When we got married, (Laughs) my wife said, "I'd like to have two boys and two girls." Well, I said, "I gave you three boys. Three of a kind beat two pair."

NL: (Laughs at the joke.) That's true.

MB: So David's the oldest one. He followed, I told you down on New Street, and he had been three years in high school, Danbury High, and he wasn't breaking any scholastic section. I didn't either, outside of math. My brother was an honor student all through high school, grammar school. "You're not Richard Boyce's brother," they'd say to me. But it didn't hurt me, I was proud of him. So David went to there. And uh, about the third year, the doctor, Sunderland said his son was going to up to Kimball Union Academy in New Hampshire, for post graduate out of high school. You oughta go. So he come home, and so we thought about it and we said yes. So, I talked to the principal of the high school. He gave me a letter to the head master up at Kimball Union in New Hampshire. We stopped at another school in Vermont, academy. David said, "They don't like my marks. They don't want any part of me."

NL: Really?

MB: My son, well you could tell. So we got up to Kimball Union, and we liked it. We went to some other places. We spent a whole weekend. I took three days off, looking for schools. I am telling you all the personal history here. We got home and I called Mr., oh gosh, the head master, oh gosh I know it so well. I don't want you to think that if you took my son that was carte blanche to get into college. I want to find out if he is college material.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: He said, "On that basis, I'll take him."

NL: Oh.

MB: You see, we were competing with a lot of rich boys up there that the family, just got through prep school and get into college.

NL: Right.

MB: And so that worked out. After he was there, they said, I kind of want him for two years. So he went down to Boston to, uh, oh gosh, well known business college. Uh, oh, it'll come to me in a minute.

NL: Ok.

MB: So Mr. Carver, the principal said, "If you want your other son to come up here, I'll take him."

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: Allen was a little more... So he went there, and down to Boston, to follow in the same class, about four years later. David came back to Danbury and we worked in a local factory with a man I knew. But it was a product he didn't care about. He said "Did, I am not interested in product. I don't want to think about it after work. I want to go to New York, to a bank." So he went down there on his own, got with Chase.

NL: Oh, good.

MB: He started down below and worked up, and he made full Vice President by 31.

NL: Wow.

MB: It was something he was interested in.

NL: Yeah.

MB: And Allan come along. He was an accountant. He's been working in local factories and worked at a CPA firm in Bridgeport. He didn't seem to get with a firm that lasted too long always. So he hadn't had as good a luck but he's and he's got a three children. David had two. And uh, John, he's the middle one. He had problems with his eyes, going like that. (Milton gestures.) My wife took him to a specialist out of Yale, was over here to the Heritage Village, I think he was or somewheres but, and he said, "He will outgrow it, his vibration, his eyes." And he wasn't much for schooling. (Milt laughs) But, he went down to another private school for a while and went in the army. He was over in Viet Nam, I guess. And he's worked at several jobs. He's been working the last 20 years at Union Savings Bank, who I was on the Board with for a number of years. And he's a driver, courier, you know.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: So that's one thing I am proud of, I never had a question of having rapport with my sons.

NL: Yeah.

MB: Being able to talk to them.

NL: So, how has Danbury changed since you were little? Like, tell me what Main Street looked like when you were little.

MB: Well, Main Street, you walked down it, and you didn't know everyone, but you knowed about every third one at least.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: And people used to park in the front of the stores on a Saturday afternoon, and just watch the people go up and down the street. We had all the streets before the, uh, what do you call it over here?

NL: The Mall?

MB: The Mall.

NL: Yes.

MB: And uh, it was uh, very personal, very personal. And, things have grown in Danbury well that's one of the things that helped my company, Bard Parker. There was a pretty good labor force in Danbury because hatting was going out. And the hatters, you know the famous lockout, you've probably had that in

history. The hatters were no longer that strong a union. When they come to work for you, they worked for you, and so we had a good labor market. So it grew and got to be known as a little, uh, what's on, up in Boston, what we call electronic row.

NL: Ok.

MB: Electronic, some thing or another. That's electronic row. Danbury was considered a small one. So we had a lot of new industries here. It's grown and it got from what I knew as a personal thing to an impersonal thing. And uh, it's something like Bethel now.

NL: Yeah. Ok, all right.

MB: Beth and I go down to the chiropractor, go down once in awhile or something. I think of that like Danbury used to be.

NL: Like it used to be. Yeah.

MB: And you knew people, you went to school with the people, the teachers. I said to my brother, I was five years later, had the same teachers I did. They didn't change, no body was changing, everybody there. There were a lot of maiden ladies as teachers, and we had wonderful teachers at New Street. Every one of them was single, no Miss Read, well she had been married, but... So it was a very personal thing. To me it's lost that.

NL: Yeah. What about the Danbury Fair? Did you go every year?

MB: I went to the Fair. My wife, she went every year. Well, one of the biggest things that ever happened to me, the World Series now, in 1921, my father had to take a piece of machinery from a hatting company down in Brooklyn. School was closed on Friday, Fair Week, to go to the Fair. So he says, "Well we can go to down to the World's Series." My older brother, he was Yankee fan, I was a Giant one. My father and a couple of other boys in the neighborhood, we drove in this open GMC down there, and he went over to Brooklyn. We got the cheapest seats we could out in the bleachers. My father got back to the truck, he couldn't get in. So he had to wait out to get into the Polo Grounds.

NL: Oh, oh.

MB: The Polo Grounds. This is the old Polo Grounds. Do you know about that?

NL: I've never been, but yeah, I have heard. Yes.

MB: Well, it's been out of business. And so I went that year, and the next year, '22, it was down there. But that first thing, to go to the World's Series, cause

baseball I loved. A neighbor had a radio. We didn't have one. Went over there, he was an electrician, he went to Pratts. He never worked at it, but he made his own radios. He had a big speaker, we went, Connie Mack, not Connie Mack... Was it Connie Mack? That, I guess he was the announcer.

NL: I don't know.

MB: Yeah. Oh it was wonderful to hear that, but to go and sit at the games.

NL: Yeah, yeah, it was great. Do you remember any of the radio shows you listened to?

MB: What?

NL: What radio shows did you listen to?

MB: Well, I didn't have a radio. I went over there for special ones.

NL: Oh.

MB: KED, KED Pittsburgh was a big, strong station. I, we didn't have a radio tube.

NL: What about TV? When did you get a TV?

MB: When did I get a TV? Ah, I don't know what year. It was after we married. We were married in '38.

NL: Do you remember anything you watched on TV when you were younger?

MB: I wasn't exactly a gung ho audience for things, ball games.

NL: Ball games, yeah.

MB: Sports, yeah.

NL: What about a computer? Do you have a computer now?

MB: No. I got an adding machine.

NL: You don't have a computer?

MB: No.

NL: You don't care?

MB: I should have got one.

NL: I don't know?

MB: I mean I should have, probably. I just a... So, now, I come down to now, to 93 and I had a couple of jobs and took care of Mrs. Parker's affairs and her husband. And I took an early retirement, as I told you to take care...so I've been 35 years with the family and that's winding down. I was doing a set of books for my son, and they've wound that down as kids been. So uh, I've, probably after the end of this year, I will be pretty well retired. But I want to have a little interest in something.

NL: So.

MB: So I like to, now I'd like to you about Danbury.

NL: Ok.

MB: Danbury was settled in 1685 by eight families from Norwalk. I understand the year before, an advanced section come up to visit Danbury, and some of them stayed here. So we had this, became a city, uh, in 1689 it became the Town of Danbury, but that, I haven't found where that did much. The first big thing as far as community was the First Congregational Church in 1860, uh, 1696 because we just celebrated, I remember that church, celebrated our anniversary three years ago in '96.

NL: Right.

MB: Three hundred years. So that was where they met and the rules and regulations in running the community, so that's getting up toward 1700, 18th century. I don't know, not too much happened. Danbury was like all of New England and the United States, it was an agricultural country before we had the revolution, the Industrial Revolution. So the next big thing that happened in 1722, the borough of Danbury was formed.

NL: Ok.

MB: I want to tell you, we had two governments. The borough was born in 1822, and that's the same year Mallory started his hatting company. So hatting started with the city, with the Borough of Danbury. That went on for 67 years, and Danbury was incorporated, the City of Danbury, was in 1889 first. That's what we, when my job a couple of years ago, we put the Town and City together from uh, well we had to have city and town clerk to make voters.

NL: Ok.

MB: So that became in 18, 1722, 1822, hatting started in this Borough of Danbury, forerunner of the city started, 89 years, 69 to 89 years we had that and so... The analogy of the city and town was that the Town of Danbury is the saucer, and the city, and the cup is the city. But before the city, we had the borough for 40. 67 years. And twice within that period that enlarged its boundaries. And, as early as the city was formed in '89, in 90 there was committees formed to consolidate it.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: And consolidation got to be a dirty word because the people beyond the city limits, all of them people was the town and we were the city, but we were full part of the town. They only paid the town tax. We paid the city and town.

NL: Hmm.

MB: And they had the benefits of whatever went on in the nerve center, in the City Hall and everything else. So it got to be uh, no, money tells the story what ever people want.

So they had two or three tries. As early as 1907 I know they put a bill in referendum up in Hartford, but they said that's not our business that's your business and sent it back to us. And of course it just died in committee. Nobody ever did anything about it. It's a lot of work.

NL: Hmm.

MB: So we went on 1934 down in City Hall, where the library is now, you had two offices. You had the town, town collector, and a town assessor right in the same office. You went to one and paid the one bill.

NL: Yeah.

MB: So they put a special bill through that they be consolidated, and 60% of the cost would be underwritten by the town and 40% by the city. Well when you figure it out, half of the people in the town are in the city.

NL: Are in the city, yeah.

MB: So probably say 30%, say 70%, this is the kind of mathematics you get into and this is, of course, what I like.

NL: Yeah, right.

MB: So people didn't want that, so they fought it. And so uh, we went along in the city and then by 1889, in the 80s, hatting was born. We were known as the hatting, hatting center of the world. Back then you didn't have neon signs, but

they had lit bulbs, light bulbs, shape of a hat, a derby. Danbury crowns them all, a hat city. You see when you got on the train. So Danbury was go-hung for hatting. And they had union problems, they had strike and the lock out. They even taxed union workers' homes. So it was a very serious thing. So uh, but they were strong people. They worked in the shop. And I know a hatter said to me, "Get your education, you don't want to work in a hat shop." Wasn't I lucky hatting went out with the war.

NL: Yeah, yeah.

MB: Nobody wears a hat with a, they said one thing is checking it and even in the summer if you go out for lunch, you got to check it in and pay the checker, and wearing a hat was all so, hatting, it went out in Danbury. Our company was one of the ones to ever survive without having a real depression. It's remarkable.

NL: Hmm.

MB: And it wasn't true of a lot of industry. So we had uh, that, I told you in '34 they did a bit of consolidation and uh, so uh we had several communities, never amounted to, so Thayer Bowman I think, was elected mayor in 1949. He's an old friend of mine. He's a couple of year younger, around the corner born from where I lived. And so he said, he talked, he had an office with a certain gentleman who was Leroy Jackson, a lawyer. A brilliant man, a brilliant man, but he didn't know how to get along with people.

NL: Oh.

MB: It had to be his way.

NL: Um, hmm.

MB: So he had his office with Thayer and they talked about this consolidation. He said would I take chairmanship. He thought my boss, Mr. Parker, who was in zoning and planning over in Katonah, over in New York State, so I said, "I'm for it." I keep going back a little bit. But one time we were meeting up the Ridgewood Country Club, the Lion's Club, we didn't have a speaker. What does Danbury need? Everybody said consolidation was what we needed.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: It was the best thing. So another friend of mine was on the Lion, he was going to be a, he was going to run for Alderman. In the next word, he said, "I understand they're gonna ask you to run for Alderman for the First Ward. I think it'd be nice if you take it. Maybe we could get consolidation."

NL: Yeah.

MB: Well I was in the Council for four years, he was there for two years, and nothing ever came up. So this was, that was the early '50s. So later, Thayer Bowman got married so he asked me. Now I have to tell you this, this, well it's all right, it's public information. The head of the Democratic Party was Mr, it was a lawyer, Tom Keating. And Henry, he was the head of the Republicans. And uh, Mr. Keating was a very civic-minded man. He did a lot of favors for people. He did a lot of law work.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: He never even sent out a bill. I had a friend that worked for him, this lawyer, sent out a bill for \$35 and he gave him hell and he had to send it back.

NL: Wow.

MB: But he knew more people in the state and the country. And when I, we got elected, another lawyer who knew him said, "Mr. Keating is a very honorable man. He runs the city but he's an honorable man." And so we got, and so we formed, and Mr. Bowman, the mayor, wanted him for Common Council, and so we got him. And I want to tell you it's very fortunate that we did, because he practically spent his full time...

NL: Um, hmm...

MB: ...doing this work which would, otherwise you'd had to get a big firm and have several men.

NL: Right.

MB: You can see what he did, what he can build. And I know he had a lot of stuff of his. We met every Monday night, the whole, and bring in the committee. We divided down committees. I remember my doctor said, "I never solve, anything solved in committee." I made up my mind and so did, and the lawyer had the same idea. He brought everybody in a 2, 2 1/2 inch notebook, and we run it like a class, just like it was college or high school. And they, you appointed a committee and then they bring in and sort of research in a different sections of the city. So uh, we uh, that and uh, my biggest job was (pause, microphone jostled) keep law and order.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: I'm talking very personal here now.

NL: Well you, knowing

MB: We had a lady in the town, Mrs. Rothkopf(?), who would voice herself in town meetings. One of the problems was her husband had a liquor store on White Street. The '55 flood, she got flooded out, and I guess it's like the liquor laws are like the, (pause) you can't have one within a thousand feet...

NL: Ok.

MB: ...and it burnt below half, and when it burns below half you can't, you gotta go by the zoning.

NL: Ok.

MB: So they were stuck with the new zoning. And there was another liquor store, if they couldn't get another liquor store. She was fighting for her husband.

NL: Oh.

MB: And she wanted to, so (pauses) she's at a meeting, and uh, she liked to get into a controversy. I said to her, "Mrs. Rothkopf(?), you can say whatever you want, everybody that's been sitting here, we can throw you out and do it in a very democratic way."

NL: Uh hmm.

MB: And I got to tell you another very personal thing, Mr. Jackson, we had a teacher from WestConn....

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: uh, gee the names, she went out of Pittsburgh and became President of the college. So he got on semantics with her. Arguing one night, and grammar, that's my weakest subject. I got up and said "It stops right here." Doris Koshur (?) have you ever heard that name?

NL: No.

MB: Well she went out, and I don't remember the name of the college, she went out and became president. She had been over to Cambodia, She spoke to Lions, all the thing about the girls at a young age are prostitute, and said it in such a way, it was just history. Oh, she was a wonderful girl. I lost her in the middle of the year. And, so I got a hold of the mayor. I don't like big committees, everybody trying to say something. I got hold of the Mayor and then Mr. Jackson. I said, "Roy, you have such pride of offices. You don't want anybody else's to put in any input. You gotta let these people, we're well along in this and if you don't want to break it up, you better let them talk." And that, that's what I said. I was putting out the fires.

NL: I see.

MB: I only had a couple like that. It was rough committee. They pulled an even number from the city and outside the city in the same ward. We had sixteen people, two inside the four wards, two outside it, and even divided with Republicans and Democrats.

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: Never was any politics ever mentioned in any of our meetings, never came up.

NL: That's good.

MB: They're all workers, and some of them were just everyday people, they weren't any PhDs or anything like that.

NL: Right, right, right.

(The microphone is again jostled)

MB: Doris Koshur was very smart and three of them others were smart. But they had good common sense, and they were all proud to work on this committee.

NL: Yeah, so, are you happy having lived in Danbury? I guess you are cause you're still here.

MB: Oh, yes, I chose now not to go to Florida or anywhere. I don't want to go to Florida. This is my home.

NL: Did some of your friends go to Florida?

MB: Some of them. That's my acquaintances, all my contacts are here. I was on the bank board at Union Savings for a number of years, and the hospital board.

NL: Yeah.

MB: Did you see the chair they gave me?

NL: What chair? No.

MB: It's out in the living room. I'll show you. The hospital was giving it out. I didn't realize it.

(Milton shows Nancy the chair in the living room.)

NL: Oh Milt, that's nice!

MB: Yeah, just got it.

NL: That's great. Are there any other thoughts you want to leave?

MB: Did I cover everything in Danbury?

NL: Well, just in the changes over time, you said that it was much more personal years ago, it's impersonal now, you don't know everybody now.

MB: Well, I know quite a few people.

NL: You do?

MB: Still hanging over.

NL: Yeah, yeah.

MB: Ah, another board I was interested in the city was the town Board of Finance. The City Board of Estimate and Taxation, and the town had a Board of Finance. This is, I told you that they consolidated the Tax Collector and the Tax Assessor's court. So we used to meet with the Town Board and they pay us, agreed to pay us for two firemen because the fire come into the city and the fireman go out. You know the firemen are wonderful, and they never stopped for the town line.

NL: Right, right, right.

MB: They went out when and it got too bad and did some other paying and paid part of it. And it got to be, way back there, where I told you the people thought, the people from outside the city limits were the town people and we were the city people was two groups. This is a, I'm not going to mention any names. We had a man got on the town Board of Finance. (Long pause) We used to have the Danbury Club. Do you know where that is, down on West Street?

NL: I think so.

MB: The Lebanese have it now. That was a men's club. And they solved all the problems sometimes, end up at the bar. So this man's on the Board of Estimates and he said, "You fellas, what are you worrying about? You're not paying any school tax." That's the biggest item in town. He's on the board and doesn't even know it. Sounds silly, don't it?

NL: Uh, huh.

MB: That's because he come to Danbury. He married a Danbury girl, had a successful business in Danbury, and had no civic interest in Danbury, and he got on the board and knew that there's two things. He thought there was probably the two and the school budget is the biggest budget in the city.

NL: Right, right.

MB: And he's made that statement. It sounds very foolish, but that's how bad it got, how, that's not the right word, how accepted it got. We were the town and the city.

NL: Right. Wow. Well, since you have been here your whole life, and you've traveled because you said that you, you know,

Side A ends abruptly here. Nothing recorded on Side B.