Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION 308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922

Wes Houser: My name is Wes Houser. For a long time I have been concerned about trying to get some of the history of Brevard County where it would be a permanent record with BCC or in a library, or if somebody would like to write a book on the early times in Brevard County. [00:00:30] And two of my good friends, Dave Nisbet on my left, and Joe Wickham on my right, have been here a good number of years. Dave Nisbet was born on Merritt Island, and Joe Wickham moved to Brevard County in the early '20s. These two gentlemen, I am sure, as well as other people in this community who have been here a long time, know happenings, things that have happened in the past in Brevard County that are not written anywhere, [00:01:00] and one of these days this information is going to be lost.

Max King have agreed that if we could get the two of these good citizens of Brevard County together, and just sit and discuss, over a series of meetings, some early happenings in Brevard County. I am going to ask Dave Nisbet first to tell about being born [00:01:30] on Merritt Island, our school systems, what hospitals we had, and some of the problems we had on Merritt Island, like mosquitoes. And next will be Joe Wickham, who I don't think there is anybody in the south part of the county, and probably in Brevard County itself, who has been more involved in the development of this community, and contributing toward our standard of life. And these two gentlemen love Brevard County very much. [00:02:00] So, at this time, Dave, just tell some of the early happenings in Brevard County, and then we will get with Joe and maybe discuss some old high school football games, or that sort of thing, back in the '20s.

Dave Nisbet: Okay, Wes. Well, you said tell about when I was born. I don't really remember much about that, but I've been told that Dr. Hughlett came over by launch, motorboat, to deliver me, because there weren't any bridges [00:02:30] or anything like that back when I was born. It went back to kind of an unusual little community that I was born in, called Indianola, about four miles north of 520 on Merritt Island, on the Indian River side, and it was a little community that almost had, you might say, city services, because everybody went together and we had combined ownership of a carbide [00:03:00] plant, which gave us carbide lights in our homes.

We had running water produced by big ... The power that pumped it was run by a big water wheel that an artesian well turned, and that went to 15, at least, houses. Then we also had a community clubhouse, and community school, and a community church right within [00:03:30] quarter of a mile of where I was born. The interesting thing was that we did, you know, have almost like city services and, oh, we had a telephone in our home back in those days. My father and five other-- four other guys that lived in the area owned what was then the Brevard County Telephone Company, and it ran from New Smyrna to Jensen Beach.

[00:04:00] I don't imagine they had over a hundred telephone poles to go that whole distance, because most of the wires were nailed on trees, and they didn't

go right down the edge of the road, of course, there weren't very many straight roads either, but they went down and zig-zagged around from tree to tree, but we did have telephone. Crank the phone a little bit, and central would answer and ask you who you wanted, and you didn't need to, in those days, know the number, [00:04:30] just tell her who you wanted and she would call them.

Wes Houser: What year were you born?

Dave Nisbet: 1912.

Wes Houser: And when did your father move to this area?

Dave Nisbet: Dad moved to Merritt Island from Glasgow, Scotland, in 1885. And before he came over, the Mitchell brothers, some of their heirs are still in the neighborhood. Louis Brady is a [00:05:00] very, very famous bone surgeon in Orlando, he is a grandson of one of the Mitchell brothers, and Mitch Ellington is a grandson of the Mitchell brothers.

Wes Houser: Was your mother from Scotland also?

Dave Nisbet: No. My mother grew up in London, but she was really born in New York City. She--her parents came over to New York City, and lived [00:05:30] about a year or so, and then went back to London and my mother grew up there 'til she was about 16, and then they decided to come back to the United States. And they came across the same year that my father came to Florida. But anyway, the Mitchell brothers had written my dad. They'd come over first to the United States and worked their way, somehow or another, down to Florida and then over to Merritt Island.

And they wrote dad and [00:06:00] told him what a great country it was, and the future they thought it would have, and they thought he ought to come over. So my dad and a Mr. Sam Grant, who was a first cousin of his, decided they'd come over. Dad was 18 and Mr Grant was 19, and they came over directly from Glasgow, destination Merritt Island, and neither one of 'em, I don't think, ever left, I [00:06:30] mean even to go back to Scotland. I don't believe they did. I got lucky and went back and saw where dad was born, but I don't think my father ever went back. But that little community was really quite an area. They also had a community packing house, out on the end of a long dock, and they had what we basically call the Exchange Packing Company now, Florida Exchange, but in [00:07:00] those days it was just the Indianola Exchange, but they all went together, worked--built the packing house, they all went together and shipped their fruit.

Wes Houser: That was on the west side of Merritt Island?

Dave Nisbet: No, it was ... Yes, on the west side, on the Indian River.

Wes Houser: Where from? Where the 520 is now? North or south?

Dave Nisbet: About four miles north of 520. Then the freight boats would pick up the fruit right at the packing house, and take it to Jacksonville, [00:07:30] and in Jacksonville it would be loaded onto a steamer going to New York.

Wes Houser: Explain, say, going to elementary school and through high school. What kind of facilities were here? I'm sure BCC wasn't here then, and ...

Dave Nisbet: No, they hadn't quite gotten here. I started in school, Wes, in a one room building that had all 12 grades in it, if there [00:08:00] happened to be all 12 grades. You know, some years maybe we would only have 10 or 11 kids, and it wasn't always every grade covered, but I think there were about three of us in the first grade when I started school there. And during, or about midway, of my second grade year, the school in [00:08:30] Cocoa was taking all the children from this whole surrounding area into a combined school system.

And they closed the one on Merritt Island, so we rode buses, and I wish you could see the bus that I used to ride on. It was a Model T Ford, with an elongated frame, and it was real narrow, long job [00:09:00] with just a really little pick up chassis is all it was, but extended to carry the bus body. And we kids used to get in the back of the bus and jump up and down and that would raise the wheels of the, the front wheels off the ground, and the driver would have a little difficulty in steering, and he would scream at us and we'd sit down for a little while, and then we'd do it again. We had a lot of fun on the bus, I can remember that.

Wes Houser: [00:09:30] Was there one teacher for all of you?

Dave Nisbet: On teacher for the whole deal and that teacher, in my school, happened to be Mrs. Sweet Smith's sister, and she just died here a couple of years ago. I tried to keep track of her. She moved back up into Georgia and lived all of her life but I didn't ever see her again, I don't think ever, but she was always a very favorite person in my mind.

Wes Houser: Right, now say through [00:10:00] to 12th grade, what organized athletic events did you have, if any?

Dave Nisbet: Well Cocoa was a baseball town back in those days, a very big baseball town and, consequently, the high school team had a good baseball team. When I was in junior high, the Cocoa baseball, high school baseball team, played in the state tournaments on two or three occasions. Didn't [00:10:30] ever win the state championship back in those days, but they were always a contender. They beat people like Orlando, and quite a lot bigger cities. And football was just really in its beginning. My senior year in high school they didn't have a football team because there weren't enough boys to [00:11:00] play. My junior year they did have a team and I got to play a little bit. I was a--I didn't have all of this back in those

days, I weighed about 125 lbs in high school, and I wasn't fast either, so I wasn't a whole lot of help to the football team. But--

Wes Houser: Did you play baseball?

Dave Nisbet: I played baseball all the way [00:11:30] through my time, but football, I had an interesting experience, I think. Didn't have much to do with just old times, but it was something for me to think back on. I put on my first football uniform behind a car, as another guy took it off up in Titusville. One of the boys got hurt, and we only had 11, and I had never been out for practice and never [00:12:00] had on a uniform. So they grabbed me and said, "You're eligible, aren't you?" And I said, "Yeah, I passed," and they said, "Well come here, we need you." They had me putting on a uniform and then on the field.

The first play of the game, Nelson Smith was our field goal kicker, back in those days you drop kicked, and it was fourth and 40, or something like that, yards, and we needed the kick real bad. The fellow [00:12:30] that had gotten hurt was our punter. So I couldn't kick, and they knew that, but they thought maybe Nelson Smith, because he was a good drop kicker, might be able to punt. So they called him back into the back field and rearranged things, and he drop kicked the ball, and in spite of ... as I say I wasn't very fast ... but I was the first one down to the ball, and I dove on it. I thought that is what you are supposed to do.

Back in those days a drop kick, he had drop kicked it, [00:13:00] and back in those days a drop kick ball was free. I could have picked it up and run with it, but I didn't know that. The coach told me afterwards, you know, he wished I'd have know. I said, "I do too." But anyway, we had an interesting school situation back in those days. There were nine in my senior class and the whole school, whole high school wasn't as big as [00:13:30] the senior class at Merritt Island, or Cocoa, either one, will be this year, for the whole high school.

Wes Houser: Okay, well let's give with Joe a minute and we thought on the first session we would be dealing with you two gentlemens' early lives, and what it was like in Brevard County. We are gonna get back to Dave in a minute. Well Joe, tell us what your parents did, and where you came from, and the same sort of things Dave's been telling us about [00:14:00] going to school in Brevard County in the early days.

Joe Wickham: Well, before I do anything else, I often wondered why Dr. Hughlett became a missionary and a doctor in Africa, and it was after tending to David.

Dave Nisbet: No, that was ... It was his uncle that delivered me. The Dr. Hughlett that you knew was a young fellow.

Joe Wickham: Well my father, of course, he was from the Middle West, and his father had migrated out into the central part of the United [00:14:30] States into Iowa in 1843, and he drove an ox team out there, and that is the way that he became

involved in being out in Iowa. And each year ... He came from a large family and they were the original homesteaders in that section of the state, and during his time in college, which was about 1905, he began to invest in land and he had purchased ... Even in those days [00:15:00] here in Florida, 40 acres of land at about $5 down and $5 when they could catch you, you know, and this was quite a good investment for him. And he had three large farms out in Iowa. Right after World War One, the banks begin to fail, and everything else, and he lost all of those, and that is the way he came to Florida, to look about this 40 acres that he had invested in and purchased way back while he was still in college.

My mother came, also, from the [00:15:30] central part of Iowa, and her name was Rich, and we lost her just two or three years ago at 96. They had come down here to see what his piece of land was like. It was a section out west of Melbourne and west of Malabar, and it was called Melbourne Farms in those days. And this was the center of what was now known as the Melbourne Tillman Drainage District that everyone has had so many controversial things to talk about in the past [00:16:00] few years. And he, being an engineer, became acquainted with a fellow by the name of Jim Hunter, who also was an engineer, and he went to work with him to lay out the Melbourne Tillman Drainage District, and he stayed here the rest of his entire life.

And little did they realize that, way back in those early days when they were laying that out, that now there would be the city of Palm Bay, and all of these other areas, in part of the city of Melbourne which have become part of this big, controversial [00:16:30] Tillman Drainage District. I think that it just shows you that what people start to do in the beginning, when they were trying to drain the land, and make it ready for agriculture and that sort of thing, suddenly, over a period of many years, that is not the objective of that land anymore.

It's now a residential area, and commercial businesses and that sort of thing, and the very thing for which they drained it in the beginning is gone. And this shows you what progress, and different environment, and different things [00:17:00] that happened in the community, what happens to you under those conditions. So all of this area, even though the district is still intact and they have their own leadership, and so forth, the whole concept for that Melbourne Tillman Drainage District, as the Crane Creek Drainage District which is just to the north of it, have completely changed, because now it is all basically residential.

And that is the way we came here in the beginning, and when I look back and think of our little community and when [00:17:30] the old ... You had a little old, not a little, but an old green wooden school house here in Eau Gallie that was on a piece of property right where the Methodist church is, St. Paul's Methodist church is now. They moved it across the street, way about 1924, 1925, and built the schools that you now know down on Pineapple, where the complex is there for the senior training program today. It is interesting to note that in this adult [00:18:00] education program they have got about five or six times as many students as they had in those early days, and they are doing a tremendous job.

And it just makes you realize how important the things that are happening to the community are.

Wes Houser: Well Joe, were you born in this area?

Joe Wickham: I was born in Ames, Iowa, came here when I was a boy.

Wes Houser: How about your early school days? Was it a one room type?

Joe Wickham: No, the one room school house that they had in this area in the beginning was out at Bovine, [00:18:30] which is up near where Turtle Mound is. Well, right here from where we are sitting, it was about two miles further west, and that was original ... Bovine was a section that when you came down the St John's River by boat, and you landed at Turtle Mound, which you've all heard about, this was on the path of the little road that came back into town here into old Eau Gallie.

And this is where Lansing Gleason, as an example, and the [Nils? 00:18:56], and that group of people went to school, in the little one room school house out there. [00:19:00] In the early days the school system in Brevard County was not as it is today, and David realizes this too and he can remember this, that every community floated the bond issue to pay for their school system, their schools and all. And instead of having a county wide system as we have today, we had districts, school districts, and the people in that area paid for the Ad Valorem, the Ad Valorem tax paid for the schools in that area.

Wes Houser: Would like Eau Gallie have their own system, and-

Joe Wickham: Eau Gallie had their own, Cocoa had their own, they [00:19:30] had their own system to the extent that they paid all the bond issues, and even helped to be responsible for the employment of the school teachers.

Wes Houser: There was no county organization?

Joe Wickham: That started ... really, the county organization started in the early '30s, if I remember correctly, by Mrs. Shelbourne. Do you remember Mrs. Shelbourne?

Dave Nisbet: I sure do. She was Superintendent of Schools when I was in high school.

Joe Wickham: This is the lady that helped get it organized into a county-wide program, as we have.

Dave Nisbet: I think they always had the [00:20:00] school board for the whole county.

Joe Wickham: But they had trustees in every school area that took care of the school operation, quite interesting thing. But now, today, it is entirely different, and it is better this way too because schools are, really the entire county is taken care of under this system now.

Wes Houser: The system you're talking about, people in Titusville would not be taxed for expenditures for Melbourne?

Joe Wickham: That is correct. In other words, if we wanted to build a new school within our area, [00:20:30] you paid for it with the-- by the people in your area.

Wes Houser: Right. Now when you were, say, in the fourth or fifth grade, how many students were in school? How many different classrooms did you have?

Joe Wickham: Well, they all had ... Basically, after they built the new school, which was in 1924, in old Eau Gallie, which is on Pineapple Avenue now as you see it up there, they had usually not over two grades in one classroom. Basically, they had a classroom for each group as you worked up. And the [00:21:00] interesting part about it is you didn't have a thousand people in that program or something else. If you had 100, 150 in the entire school system you were doing well.

Wes Houser: Say, back in like 1925, what was the most populous area in the county? Was it the southern part, or Cocoa?

Joe Wickham: No, I believe, at that time I would say at that time it was in the Cocoa area, but we began to grow in this area in the boom of the '25s, that's when we began to grow. This, as [00:21:30] an example, this is when they begin to open up the beach over at Melbourne Beach. Before that you had to get on a boat over at Melbourne and ride over to Melbourne Beach on a little steamer that let you off at the pier down there, and then there was a little track and you could get on that and ride up, either with horse or mule. They would tow you up to the beach. And that is before there was any Indialantic over there at all. Finally, they decided to build, in the early '20s, to build a nice wooden bridge across to Indialantic. [00:22:00] The first thing it did was burn down, then they had to rebuild it again. And this is when Mr. Schwarzberg and Kouwen-Hoven and that bunch began to develop, which is now known as Indialantic.

Wes Houser: What was the ... The time you were up, say, through the high school ... what was the main economy for this area?

Joe Wickham: The main economy for our community in those early days was fishing [00:22:30] and citrus, and it all, basically, came off of Merritt Island. We had logging though, we had a tremendous saw mill down in Melbourne. It would cut up to 150,000 board feet of lumber a day, and the turpentine stills ... In those early days, all of the wooded area was turpentined, you know, unlike it is today where they ...

Wes Houser: How did they get the lumber to the mill?

Joe Wickham: They would cut it and, I could go into a long discourse over the one in Melbourne, [00:23:00] but I think we ought to talk about that sometime, talk about, because it really is an interesting thing. But they would truck, or by mules, get to here on the mainland, you know, and cut the logs and take them to the mill. We had lots

of small saw mills in this area also, but there was two big saw mills in this country, one here and one at Holopaw. That one at Holopaw, even though this was a big one in Melbourne, cut about 250,000 board feet of lumber a day, and that is a tremendous [00:23:30] amount.

Wes Houser: What year were you born, Joe?

Joe Wickham: I hate to admit this, but I am a year older than David. I was born in 1911.

Wes Houser: You both went to school here about the same time?

Joe Wickham: That is correct.

Wes Houser: Do you remember when the first time you all met each other?

Joe Wickham: I can't remember, but I seem to me like I have known David from the time we were ...

Dave Nisbet: Forever.

Joe Wickham: Forever, and we were all real close together, and I had an opportunity, in the early days, early, right after World [00:24:00] War ... Right after the Depression came on and when the banks closed in 1929, I was working in the area and up in Cocoa and I think that is when I really got to know David on a personal basis.

Wes Houser: So back in your high school days you didn't know each other?

Joe Wickham: Well, only during, you know, from a competition in Eau Gallie, we had quite a track team back in those days, basically. We had—a mile relay team, as an example, that won the state championship. These were [00:24:30] all local boys and we were good in track, fairly good in baseball, and basketball, and, in those early days, we were just beginning to develop football teams.

Dave Nisbet: Joe, I think you left out a couple of things that helped the south end of the county get started in growing about that time you were talking about. Of course, you have to give the Platt family a little credit, they were raising a lot of cows and bringing them into Melbourne, weren't they?

Joe Wickham: [00:25:00] Oh yes. The Platt family and, as I said ... but the biggest product we had to develop was that saw mill. They employed hundreds and hundreds of people, and the community was very different than it is today. As an example, up in Cocoa the railroad ran down through town down here in Eau Gallie, and in the old part of Eau Gallie the road ran down what is now known as Guava, and you went underneath Highland Avenue where the civic center is, under a bridge, and the end of the Florida East Coast Railroad at [00:25:30] the beginning at-- one time was the city dock that is out there, that you see out in the Indian River.

That was before they were able to build the bridges across Crane Creek in Melbourne, and Elbow Creek there in Eau Gallie. And they would unload their freight car down there and put them on barges or boats and take all of their freight on down the river from there, until they were able to build the bridges across these two rivers. And this was quite interesting. And up until just about World War Two that big [00:26:00] gully came down through the city and they did not even tear that wooden bridge up until way in the '30s, because the trains used to run down in underneath there and unload. And we had some tremendous fires down there in those days.

Wes Houser: The train would go underground?

Joe Wickham: It went under ... The bridge was where Highland Avenue is now, that is why they call it Highland Avenue, and the trains run underneath it, big steam trains, you know. And they would park ... And then, right opposite, [00:26:30] right where the Post Office is now, it would turn off at Guava and go out diagonally through there to where First Union Bank is, and the Post Office. That was the main feeder line of the railroad until it got over to where the bridges are.

And I think one of the interesting things about it is when they moved it to where you see it today, Florida East Coast Railroad ... If I remember correctly it was Grandpa Gleason who owned all that property out there, that's Lansing's father, and they wanted the right of way, [00:27:00] and he made sure that if they got the right of way that all passenger trains would stop in Eau Gallie, which they agreed to do. And it was interesting to go out there.

They had a little depot out there, must have been about 12, 15 feet wide by 20-25 feet long, couldn't see anything but palmettos everywhere around, and they would stop out there, the big Pullman trains either going from north or south, so Grandpa Gleason could get on and off, if he wanted to go, which I thought was a great thing. This is the way it began to develop the [00:27:30] area, because all of the crews began to use this as and exchange point where they could go and come But... The area grew and prospered, in spite of all of our problems, and our fishing is still quite a business within our area, but not like it was in those early days.

Wes Houser: I think on our--this is our first meeting here today, and what I would like to limit it to today would be next to have you all explain the interesting things that happened to you while you were still in high school, [00:28:00] things that you remember and, I think, Dave, you have told me a couple of things when we have gone to football games together about the old Brevard Hotel with the roof, and the cattle drive from Merritt Island but, if you would, why don't you two guys tell about your first twelve years here in school, and the things you did in the summertime, the living conditions, I understood they had some mosquitoes. And then on the next meeting we have, [00:28:30] then we will talk about, maybe, when you all went to school and college, and the early business days, when you all started working for a living and raising families here and how that was. But what are some of the things that you all remember, that are of interest, when you were in high school?

Dave Nisbet: Well, I ...

Wes Houser: I think you had horses?

Dave Nisbet: Yeah, well you said I told you about driving cattle. I think that is probably the most interesting experience in my whole life. [00:29:00] At the time, at least, I thought it was and I will never forget it. But back before World War I there were range cattle on Merritt Island, and after World War I, they opened up North Merritt Island, which is now NASA area, for homesteading, particularly for World War I veterans. And when those young men came and started their homesteads, [00:29:30] and they cleared by hand a small section and planted in garden, the cattle would go in and they'd eat the garden. So they got pretty upset about that, they shot a few of them, and one thing and another.

And then they got petitions up and they finally brought it to an election, and Merritt Island was one of the first places in Florida to go with what is known as a "No Fence" law, which sounds a little backwards, but it means [00:30:00] you don't have to fence your farm, but somebody has to fence their animals, they can't run loose anymore. So when that passed on Merritt Island, the people that had the range cattle did not have land enough to take care of their animals, and they had to get rid of 'em, so they sold them to the Platt family here between in west of Melbourne.

They [00:30:30] went to the Board of County Commissioners who had just finished this nice wooden bridge which happens to have been the first bridge across the Intercoastal Waterway between Daytona Beach and, I believe, Palm Beach. Fort Pierce may have been ahead of us, but no other town was, and I think that it was Palm Beach to Daytona. Anyway, they were so proud of their brand new bridge that when the Platts went to them and asked for permission to drive the cattle across, [00:31:00] they said, "Well you'll have to put up a bond to protect it." Part of this is hearsay to me because I was an awful little kid, but I heard it so many years ago that I believe it to be true. Mr. Platt said, "Well, how much bond would you need?" And they said, "Well, $25,000." That sounds like such a pittance of money today when you're thinking of replacing [00:31:30] a bridge, or a causeway, and yet it would have been enough to have replaced a good share of that bridge, just $25,000. Built out of heart pine lumber, four inch thick planks by 12 inches, beautiful, beautiful stuff.

But they made arrangements to drive the cattle across there, and I had the good fortune of having a Shetland pony, and they allowed me to go behind the main herd [00:32:00] and keep the calves kind of pushed up, you know? When you drive cattle for any distance the calves lag behind, and you will see 800, 900 head of cattle, and maybe 200 calves, and the calves will all be in the back. Well they let me go along behind with my cow whip and my cowboy suit on and, oh boy, if there ever was a kid in hog heaven that was me. But it was a historical [00:32:30] event for our area, and the last group that we drove through Cocoa was a very small herd of cattle, and cattle are peculiar, you can handle a big herd easier than you can a small herd. Small herds split off and break up. And they broke up right

in downtown Cocoa, because that first bridge came into Cocoa at Harrison Street, and Harrison Street led through, had this little [00:33:00] zig to it, and joined, turned into Magnolia, and went back another block and crossed the railroad.

Well, when we got the cattle across the railroad, they were then able to be turned loose, and we didn't have to go any further because just a small group of cattle, and the Platts brought with them, could take them from there and they drove 'em on back. But this last group that we drove through there were just, maybe, 100 [00:33:30] head and they broke up, and they went wild in downtown Cocoa. One went in what used to be the Palms Restaurant, the one Greek Restaurant we had in town, and they had to get a rope on it and drag it out of there.

And one big bull went in the Buick garage, which is where Pots and Pans is now, and walked in and went up to the big plate [00:34:00] glass window and just looked at himself in it, turned around and walked out. Everybody knew he was gonna charge that other bull he probably thought he saw, but he didn't. And it was a very lively about two hours there of getting those corralled back together and getting them across the railroad track. But I think that was one of the most interesting old time things to ever happen to me.

Joe Wickham: I think one of the most interesting things, we haven't even thought about it, was [00:34:30] how Brevard County was formed in the beginning. Originally, it was known as Mosquito County, you know, and it ran from way up where Volusia County is ...

Dave Nisbet: It ran from St Augustine.

Joe Wickham: And all the way down to St Lucie, and it went all the way over to the high grounds where Highway 27 is now. And one of the first County seats was at Enterprise, you know where Enterprise is? Up there the other side of Sanford, and then they moved [00:35:00] it from there down to Basswood, which is now known as Kenansville, and then it was moved to Eau Gallie one time, and then finally, about 1884, or something like that, old man Titus, a gentleman from Titusville who was quite a sport, I understand, give the land where the court house is today. At the same time, that was the very year that the Titusville *Star Advocate*, Mr. Hudson, established [00:35:30] the Titusville paper.[1]

Dave Nisbet: But Brevard County went as far north as Kenansville?

Joe Wickham: No, as far west as Kenansville over there, yes. What happened to it, the first thing they did then, finally, they changed it from Mosquito County to St Lucie for a little while, and they split off the area towards which is the west where Osceola and Orange County is, and that sort of thing, and they split off the lower section, which they called St Lucie. I think one [00:36:00] of the most interesting things

[1] Mr. Wickham is referring to an earlier incarnation of the *Star Advocate* as Mr. Hudson didn't purchase the paper until after he arrived in Florida in 1925. See Robert Hudson's oral history on the Brevard County website for more information on these events.

about it was the first time they floated a bond issue or something, way in the '80s, they had a fire and burned up all the records they had by moving them back and forth.

They floated, they set a millage and, if I remember correct, Mr. Houston was the Chair of the County Commission in those days, and they had one male for the operation and one male for the school system, you know. [00:36:30] And they wanted to build a courthouse and this thing, if I remember correctly, this thing was about 16 by 12 or 16, something like that, and it was gonna be made of logs and it was gonna cost $500. And the most interesting thing about it was they didn't have enough money to pay him, so they paid the fella $200 down, and $300 after the taxes were collected. And I thought this was quite an interesting, and very [00:37:00] small minute way how Brevard County began to grow, and this was way back in the 1880s. And think how far we have come since then. Isn't that fascinating?

Dave Nisbet: I can remember well, Joe, and you can too when the Florida the FEC railroad used to be good Samaritans and pay their taxes early ...

Joe Wickham: That is correct.

Dave Nisbet: ... So schools could open. There wouldn't be ... Nobody would have--Schools would be out of money, the County Commissioners would be out of money, and they couldn't collect any money until after 1st [00:37:30] of October, I mean, the new year didn't start, but FEC railroad was a good Samaritan and they would pay their taxes early so the school could open.

Wes Houser: Back in those days, you couldn't borrow the money from the bank?

Joe Wickham: Heavens no. They had only one bank and that was the old Barnett Bank, do you remember?

Dave Nisbet: Well ...

Joe Wickham: That really complicated things.

Dave Nisbet: Actually, Joe, I'm talking about before the days of the Barnett Bank, I'm talking about going back when it was the [00:38:00] Melbourne State Bank.

Joe Wickham: They all went under in the '20s, and the Cocoa Bank.

Dave Nisbet: Yeah, but they failed during 1928. Cocoa Bank and Trust Company, and the Brevard Bank and Trust Company, in Cocoa, and one or two banks in Titusville that failed. But the only place you could get any money back in the ... This is the time I am talking about, and then I'm talking about FEC paying [00:38:30] their taxes in advance. It was when everybody was broke. The only place in Central Brevard County that you could get a money order cashed, other than at the Post

Office, was the Travis Hardware. You could get a check cashed, you know, an out of state if it was a US Government check, or something that was good, you could go and Mr Travis had money enough to cash it, but nobody else in town did.

Joe Wickham: You know, the railroad in those days, they assessed you on mileage, and they had a double track [00:39:00] so they just about knew where they were going to be all the way through the County, and that is the reason when they begin to raise the taxes and assess them on the mileage basis and everything else, that they ripped out one whole set of tracks in there 'cause they cut down their tax.

Wes Houser: They had two tracks.

Joe Wickham: Yes they did.

Wes Houser: They did.

Joe Wickham: The whole thing was a four, double track system, see, and when they began to get more sophisticated with their controls and everything else, rather than pay that big high price for all of the mileage of track, they just ripped half of it out. Even [00:39:30] though they have got the same old right of way they still only have one set of tracks in the whole county. Quite interesting, but that is exactly [crosstalk 00:39:38], but it was a beautiful double track, wasn't it?

Dave Nisbet: Yes, it was. Yes, it was. That was put in, that is really what helped break the FEC railroad though.

Joe Wickham: That's right.

Dave Nisbet: Flagler was carried away with two things. He wanted to put a railroad all the way to Key West, and that really never paid, and he also wanted to double track [00:40:00] it and that never really paid. And so, the FEC got through that, and the hard times of the Depression.

Joe Wickham: Well he had the desire to have all these big hotels all up and down the thing, you know.

Dave Nisbet: I think they made money.

Joe Wickham: But I am just saying where a lot of his money went that he was [crosstalk 00:40:18] that,

Dave Nisbet: Oh yeah.

Joe Wickham: Because on their land grant railroads, you know, he got the land given to him by the state and all, then you have got these other various land grants of property, and he was going to ... and he did [00:40:30] a great job and that's the reason it

was opened up. And over on the west coast it was this Plant[2], can you remember, that over they where they ...

Dave Nisbet: Did the same thing.

Joe Wickham: They... did the same thing. They would give you just miles and miles of right away, and acres and acres of land, but that was an incentive for the people with money to come and open up the area in which we live. And that's exactly how this East Coastland got developed, because of people like Henry Flagler who invested his money, and they gave him all these nice pieces of land, and he was gonna [00:41:00] put hotels in them. He opened it up for land development. An example in the early days when we had Pineapple Orchards growing between where Indialantic is now and back up this way, 'til the blight got them, and this was the way they began to develop and ship by rail, you know.

Dave Nisbet: Actually, Flagler is basically what killed the pineapple business in Florida. Used to be a big pineapple area between Vero Beach and Fort [00:41:30] Pierce, all in that section was solid pineapples when I was a little boy. When Flagler put his railroad to Key West, in order to try to make that pay he started hauling Cuban pineapples from Key West to Jacksonville, cheaper than he would haul Florida pineapples from Fort Pierce to Jacksonville. It was just a, "Please come on and give me some business," you know, so he gave them a cheap [00:42:00] price. But what it did, it knocked the price off the Florida pineapples to the point that they couldn't really make money, so they all went out of business over a period of time.

Joe Wickham: But you know that that railroad was a very fascinating thing. When you and I were young, and when 29, and when the train came in from 29, which is a passenger train, everybody in town that wasn't working came out to see the train come through town, and if they had ... If someone was out there selling peanuts, and sandwiches, and everything else.

Dave Nisbet: Oranges.

Joe Wickham: [00:42:30] Oranges, and the tourists would come down, and it was fascinating when they looked out the windows and they had these people going up and down the outside of the train hawking the things they had to sell. Same thing when 29 and 30 came up from the south, but I think one of the most interesting things about this whole thing is, now when you mail a letter from Cocoa to Melbourne, or from Melbourne to Cocoa, it ends up going over to Orlando and gets lost, and comes back and takes three or four [00:43:00] days to get here. Back in those early days, 18 minutes from the time that it was put on in Melbourne it would be in Cocoa, and that shows you how much progress has been made over the last 50, 60 years.

[2] Mr. Wickham is referring to Henry B. Plant, the man who developed the railway system on the west coast of Florida. He is also famous for his luxury Tampa Bay Hotel, which he built in part to compete with his counterpart Henry Flagler, who developed the railway and hotels on Florida's east coast.

Wes Houser: The stamps weren't 22 cents either.

Joe Wickham: In Sanford they were 3 cents. But I'm just saying, in those early days they had the old speed arm, you know, that they hung out there for the mail, and if they went there with that thing doing 60 miles an hour, what would happen is that the man on [00:43:30] the train who was in the mail department he would sort all the mail between when he took it on, between there and the next stop, and he would have it ready to go on. Even though the train didn't stop, he would have it hooked so that they would take it. And this is the way they used to deliver the mail. It was quite a unique thing, and it was very progressive. And then as nowadays they do it entirely differently. It is all scientifically logged in and ...

Wes Houser: I remember when the trains used [00:44:00] to go by and they had this thing up there and the thing went by with the hook, would put the bag up, and it never slowed down ...

Joe Wickham: That is exactly what they had here. And I think, when you look back, it was a very unique thing. Those fellas would work so fast that if something was loaded in Melbourne or Eau Gallie, going north, or from Cocoa and Rockledge going south, and to be taken off either at Melbourne or Eau Gallie, they would have that bag ready and hooked on the side of that train if they weren't going to stop by going ...

Wes Houser: How many trains would you have [00:44:30] in a day?

Joe Wickham: Well we had two, basically. One was 29, it came down from the north in the morning, and 30 would come back in the afternoon. Do you remember that?

Dave Nisbet: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joe Wickham: But everybody in the community that wasn't working always came down to the depot to see them come and go. It was quite a ... It was an outing, you know.

Wes Houser: Well, I was born and raised at West Palm Beach and I remember, when I was seven or eight years old, which would be about the middle '35, my uncle had a hotel [00:45:00] up in New England, and my daddy would take us up there in the summer time for a vacation. And the thing that stood out in my mind most was, when we got to Fort Pierce, he would stop and gas the car up and we would all get a Coca Cola, or eat breakfast, and go to the bathroom, and all that. And he would not stop again until he got to St. Augustine because he did not want to stop in Brevard County because the way the water tasted, and because of the way the mosquitoes were. That sat on my mind, [00:45:30] when I was a very young person, that Brevard County had to be the worst place in the state of Florida because of the impression my dad left.

Joe Wickham: We had one thing, yeah ..

Wes Houser: After I moved her in '56, and I wished that I had been born, had been born and raised in Brevard County. I think it is one of the most interesting places. I would like, and I think we're gonna get into our maybe next session, mosquito control, what you fellas did [00:46:00] when you were back on the County Commission a long time ago, but you had mentioned something about fishing, and if you would like you all to explain were our waters polluted then? And could you swim in the Indian River? And were there trout in the river, and what caused the trout to leave? Why don't you all discuss some of those early times?

Dave Nisbet: Well I have got a particular philosophy about what helped get rid of a lot of the trout. We still have a lot of trout, but we don't have [00:46:30] as many as we used to. Difference is we have a lot more fishermen, for one thing. But another thing is, I always believe in supply and demand sort of handles a lot of things and the food cycle is one of the biggest things. Back years and years ago, we had mosquitoes, and we really had mosquitoes bad. We had every mosquito [00:47:00] came out of larva, and so forth, out of water on the salt marshes mostly.

But anyway, those mosquito larva were food for the little Gambusia minnows, which are a little minnow about one inch long. They are a little higher class minnow now called guppy people have in their living room in little glass containers. But the guppy [00:47:30] is just nothing but a higher class Gambusia, and the Gambusia minnow lived on mosquito larva. And Joe can verify this. We ran some tests back in our early days of fighting them and found that one little minnow can eat 100 mosquito larva an hour. That is 2400 mosquito larva a day, one little fish.

So that [00:48:00] was one of our means of helping get rid of mosquitoes. But when we did that, we cut down on the amount of larva there was, and we cut down on the amount of food for the little Gambusia minnows. And when we cut down on them, in a little bit of time, there weren't nearly as many little minnows, and the little minnows is what the trout lived on. So when we didn't have any larva for the little minnows to eat, we didn't have any little minnows [00:48:30] for the trout to eat. The trout starved off too. And I think that getting rid of mosquitoes had an awful lot to do with the less trout in the river today, but I don't think anybody wants to trade back.

Joe Wickham: Well not only that. I think that one of the things we have got to face is the fact that we are beginning to, for many, many years now, beginning to lose all of our grass beds in the river, for the simple reason that we have had so much fast run off from all [00:49:00] of this development and everything else, that covering all of these grass beds out in the Indian River now is silt and that sort of thing. If you fly over in an airplane, you can see it coming out into the river and it is covering up and killing these grass beds, which were the breeding areas for all of these trout, and everything else.

And we've got to begin to reclaim that so that we can, in the future, get them back where they are, where they used to be. I am talking about places for them

to breed, and to feed and that sort of thing. And unless we do [00:49:30] this, and begin to reclaim the bottom, we are gonna slowly but surely lose more and more. I agree that one of the things that they fed on was what David was talking about, is mosquito larva. By the same token, they now do not have the kind of places to hatch and to have their beds, and everything else, that they used to have. And if we control the input of the water that is coming off out of all these tributaries so that we don't get all that silt and everything out in there, and begin to reclaim those grass beds, we will have trout as we used to have them. I think [00:50:00] there is still places, you take the old time fisherman, he knows where to go look for them, but we still got a golden opportunity to salvage this whole Indian River program, and make it work.

Dave Nisbet: I agree with you, Joe. I think the run off from subdivisions is our biggest pollutant. I don't think some of the things that get talked about the very most amount to nearly as much as the run off from the various subdivisions.

Joe Wickham: That is what I am saying. We have got to [00:50:30] control that run off so that we don't have all that [crosstalk 00:50:32]

Dave Nisbet: Right.

Wes Houser: Back in those days, could you swim in the river?

Joe Wickham: [crosstalk 00:50:36] I didn't know there was any other ... There and the ocean was the only place you did go swimming.

Wes Houser: Did you ever have mullet in your home?

Joe Wickham: Well we used to take mullet and we used to catch all the mullet we needed, yes. We used to, when we were young fellow in the '20s, for instance we'd go out on the drawbridge, which was out in the middle of the river, and one person would take care of the clothes and we would all dive overboard and swim all the way to shore. We did that every night to cool off, you [00:51:00] know. I think these are interesting things.

Wes Houser: Was the river ... Could you see the bottom then?

Joe Wickham: In those days, and then they would talk about phosphorous, and everything else, and there is too much phosphorous ... Dave, you remember back in the '20s it just looked like a great sparkler. The whole river was just a mass of sparkles, and you could see every fish that swam, every crab, could you not? Without even a light. Called phosphorescence.

Dave Nisbet: That's the biggest change in the river to me is what became of the phosphorous? You used to be able to go out at night, and walk down the dock with a spear, and you could [00:51:30] see the fish. After you had fished a little bit you could tell what kind they were by their movement, by the length of the phosphorous and

so forth. And you also learned about how far ahead of that light they were. And I have speared a lot of fish at night, not having anything to throw at except seeing that light in the water. I don't know what became of ...

Joe Wickham: But it would light the entire river. It was just like a great [00:52:00] sparkler, wasn't it?

Dave Nisbet: Right, but, you know, one of things that I think is interesting, when we talk so much about the pollutants in the river, when I was a kid, there wasn't a clam in the Indian River, in my area within ... There may have been some down around Sebastian, I am not sure on that, I know there were some down around Fort Pierce, but the area between Cocoa and Merritt Island, up in there, there wasn't [00:52:30] a single clam. Now it is an industry. I don't know if maybe clams like pollutants, but we didn't used to have 'em and now we have lots of 'em. The river isn't dead as you hear sometimes reference of. It needs some correcting, but I don't think we have got a dead river.

Joe Wickham: I think one of the greatest things about the whole river now is that people are being alerted to the fact and they are now beginning to get involved and trying to figure [00:53:00] out the way to salvage this river for the future and I think this is wonderful because that is what is going to happen. We've got people interested all the way from Daytona south to Palm Beach interested in the Indian River Lagoon Program. Isn't that interesting?

Wes Houser: Well I think one of the nicest things we have in Brevard County is what Mother Nature put here. I think we have more natural beauty here than any other county in the state of Florida. And we're about out of time today, but we're going to, maybe at our next meeting, get into some early history [00:53:30] of you guys in government and let it go from there on where you also direct. We thank you.

Dave Nisbet: Very good Wes, thank you.

Joe Wickham: Very pleasant this afternoon.

Wes Houser: All right. This is Wes Houser again. [00:54:00] With me is Dave Nisbet and Joe Wickham and we are trying to get from these two guys, some of the early history and the important developments that have happened in Brevard County. Our first meeting that we had last week, we discussed their childhood and what happened in the county then up through like high school. Today, Joe and Dave are going to talk about some important events that occurred in Brevard [00:54:30] County back in the 20s and the establishment of our government. And I don't think there is anybody more familiar with our local government than Joe Wickham, who is a past county commissioner, and also Dave Nisbet, who is a past county commissioner. Dave also served on the Port Authority. Joe, how long were you a county commissioner?

Joe Wickham: Six--six terms.

Wes Houser: So, that is 24 years.

Joe Wickham: Twenty-four years, yes.

Wes Houser: Dave, you were county commissioner how long?

Dave Nisbet: Just two terms.

Wes Houser: All right, so you were eight years. Did you have any other elected [00:55:00] offices Joe, while you were doing all that?

Joe Wickham: Oh, I was on the city council of the city of Eau Gallie before I became a county commissioner.

Wes Houser: How long were you on that?

Joe Wickham: Oh, four or five years. Something like that.

Wes Houser: So you got like 30 years as an elected office holder in Brevard County.

Joe Wickham: That is correct.

Wes Houser: And Dave, you know you were on port authority.

Dave Nisbet: I was on the port authority, altogether, about 12 or [00:55:30] ... Yeah, I think 12 years.

Wes Houser: Okay, and county commissioner for eight years, so you've got 20 years.

Dave Nisbet: Right.

Wes Houser: Between the two of these gentlemen, we have 50 years of service to Brevard County as an elected official. Joe, why don't you lead off today and explain some of the notes you have there?

Joe Wickham: I think this would be most interesting to the general public because this is the past history of Brevard County and how it was formed in the first place. [00:56:00] I have here, as in my notes, that on November the 23rd, 1828, there was seven counties formed in the entire state of Florida. And this one was the boundaries were Lake Monroe on the north to Lake Okeechobee and Hillsborough Inlet on the south and to the high sand hills on the west, which is now Orange, Lake Polk, Osceola, Okeechobee counties and to the Atlantic Ocean on the east. Now, this is now our Brevard County in the early days.

[00:56:30] The first county seat with was Enterprise on Lake Monroe, north of Sanford in 1844. They then changed the name to St. Lucie county. Then, in 1854, the name was changed to Brevard in honor of Theodore Washington Brevard with

the county seat at St. Lucie. Later, they moved the county seat to Basswood, which Basswood is now Kenansville, and then to Eau Gallie and then to Lakeview on [00:57:00] Lake Marian. You know where Lake Marian is, way out down by Kenansville.

Then in 1871, all the records were destroyed by fire. Then John Houston of Eau Gallie, who was the chairman of the county commissions at the time, established the first tax district with five mills for county operation and one mill for the schools. At the same meeting, they authorized a new courthouse. Its size was 12 feet by 16 feet and made of logs. [00:57:30] Then, in 1877, Oscecola County was formed from Brevard County. And then in 1879, Henry Titus gave the land in Titusville for the courthouse.

Then, in 1880, a new jail was built with the cost of $565 with a $200 down payment and the rest were when taxes were collected. Also, the local newspaper, The Titusville *Star Advocate* was formed at the same [00:58:00] year with Mr. Hudson as its owner and editor.[3] Then we have, in 1905, St. Lucie County was born from Brevard with the north boundary at the Sebastian Inlet. From this humble beginning, we have grown and flourished. And in the early days, about that same time is when the Union Cypress Lumber Company began to getting to be the important part of the economy here in south Brevard. I just thought those were interesting pieces of information [00:58:30] as far as the historical value of the area.

Wes Houser: Was most of lumber there used in Brevard County or was it distributed throughout the state?

Joe Wickham: Oh, the lumber was distributed throughout the state and they had a tremendous sawmill, which was down in the Hopkins area, which is on the south side of the creek, of Crane Creek, in the city of Melbourne and they had their own railroad going out to the Deer Park area where Hopkins, as this map shows, had 110 thousand acres [00:59:00] of land that was owned by the Hopkins Land Company and Union Cypress sawmill. In those days, that was a great cypress area and they had trees up to five and six feet in diameter out there.

Just one tree would fill an entire flat car instead of having loads of logs like you see today. And I think one of the interesting things was the names of the little communities that they served headed west. First of all, from Hopkins, [00:59:30] you would go to a little place called Gagner, G-A-G-N-E-R, then you would come to Patterson. Then, as you would hit the swamp area, you had Alpha, which is the beginning. Then you had Omega, which was the end of the marsh areas, and then you got to Deer Park. This was in the days when this was one of the thriving sawmills in the entire state of Florida.

And they operated all the way up through the '20s and into the '30s before they had a tremendous fire there that wiped out the sawmill as [01:00:00] we know in

[3] Please see footnote #1 on page 11 for clarification of this date concerning the *Star Advocate.*

south Brevard. I just thought those were interesting pieces of information. And the areas which they controlled, those of you who go up 192 at the present time, realize that they owned 8 or 10 miles straight north of there and about five or six miles south of the 192 as you see it today. Isn't that interesting? They owned all of that land in the early days.

Wes Houser: Be nice to have all of that today, wouldn't it?

Joe Wickham: Wouldn't it be nice to have all of that today? But this is what has happened to us in the past and [01:00:30] when you ride out there. This sawmill was out there long before there were any paved roads at all to get across the river and you had to get on a flat car with your car to ride over to Deer Park because there was no bridges across the St. Johns. From there, you could get onto an eight foot wide brick road and drive from there all the way to St. Cloud. Of course, you went through Wewahootee, Holopaw, Illahaw, [Nipta 01:00:56], all of those lovely Indian names.

Wes Houser: They were all dirt roads?

Joe Wickham: They [01:01:00] were all dirt roads except this one road headed to St. Cloud, which was eight feet ride and made of bricks. And if you happened to drive a long there and had a flat tire ... No one ever had a jack like they have today, they'd get a fence post or something, take the bricks out of the middle of the road and use it for a fulcrum and a brace and they would pry their car up in the air and then after they changed the tire, they would forget the put the brick back in the holes, you know, and they would just drive away. It is quite an interesting trip when rode across it.

Wes Houser: But the highway was brick?

Joe Wickham: The highway was brick.

Wes Houser: [01:01:30] I remember some of the streets in St. Augustine were brick.

Joe Wickham: Well these bricks out here were not laid in mortar or anything else, they were just laid on the sand so they were very easy to dig out and to use as part of your jack system. Quite interesting.

Dave Nisbet: They rode from Daytona Beach to Jacksonville. Was a nine foot wide brick road for years and that's what turned into US-1.

Wes Houser: The original US-1 used to be the river road, didn't it?

Dave Nisbet: Going through Cocoa [crosstalk 01:02:00] Yes, I'm talking about--

Wes Houser: [01:02:00] ... Rockledge and Cocoa, yes.

Dave Nisbet: It was shell through Brevard County, as I first remember it, and you got quite a few of those flat tires Joe was talking about because you would run over a conch shell. Those tires, back in those days, didn't stand quite the abuse that our tires today do. They weren't steel banded you know.

Wes Houser: It took you about all day to get from Grant up to Titusville, you know, when you drove it.

Dave Nisbet: It was quite a trip, [01:02:30] but there was one thing, I think, always stands out in my mind when I was talking about those flat tires, that I wish we were more like we used to be. You used to stop on the side of road and get out, get your jack working and pry it up, as Joe said. And if there was any traffic going by, they all stopped to see if they could help. And that, I think, is one of the characteristics [01:03:00] that's gone and forgotten by nearly everyone.

Joe Wickham: I think another thing is, speaking of those flat tires, in those days you got out your patch [crosstalk 01:03:10] and you fixed it right there [crosstalk 01:03:14] you had a couple of ... For tire irons, you had a couple of the leaves out of some old springs, you know, to pry out those clincher tires. When you got through, you could pump that thing up. And I will tell you one thing, it was a tremendous [01:03:30] exercise and when you pumped that up, because those were high pressure tires we had in those days, but it was quite an experience. And when you think that our community had grown and prospered from those days in the last 75 years, it's unbelievable.

Dave Nisbet: Joe, I think one thing that comes to my mind about those old days, the narrow roads and the brick roads and one thing or another, we really think that the toll road is something that's real modern. [01:04:00] But between our area and Jacksonville, when I first used to go up with my dad, there were two tollgates. And actually, what they were, you were going across private property and they'd have their son or their daughter or somebody out there by that gate the minute they heard a car show up and you paid at least a quarter to go through the gate. And of course, a quarter was a little more in those days than it is now, [01:04:30] but tollgates and toll highways aren't completely new.

Joe Wickham: You know, speaking to that, when you wanted to go to St. Cloud from Melbourne, you'd put it on a flat car and you would have to pay for hauling your car to Deer Park and then you could unload it over at Deer Park at the ramp. And if you couldn't afford to have it hauled all the way over there, you just kept driving up [crosstalk 01:04:54]

Wes Houser: What would it cost you to haul it over there?

Joe Wickham: I think it was about two dollars, something like that. And it was very important [01:05:00] because you would save miles and miles when you wanted to go over to the Kissimmee, St. Cloud and Orlando in those days. And to those cattlemen,

that section over there in Kissimmee and St. Cloud in those days was tremendous area because everybody was in the cattle business in the South.

Wes Houser: Back in the early days that you are talking about, Dave, assuming you were going from Miami to Jacksonville, what kind of facilities would you have for spending the night and restaurants and ...

Dave Nisbet: Well, there used to be [crosstalk 01:05:29] [01:05:30] restaurants along the way, boarding house type restaurants and then there were boarding houses. And I never remember when it took more than a day to go to Jacksonville or Miami. I remember very, very well the first time that we made it to Miami and back in the same day. That was a real, real experience for my father, because it was just something real new.

Joe Wickham: [01:06:00] I think this is an interesting picture, that is the picture of the hotel here in old Eau Gallie before there were the Oleanders or any of the others. That is the way you used to come down here and stay overnight in this. Of course, they had wonderful sulfur water baths in there and all that smelled up the neighborhood, but they were great. This is the kind of facilities you had basically, until after Henry Flagler got through making his very fine hotels all the way up and down the coast.

Wes Houser: I don't see any air conditioners sticking out of any of those windows Joe.

Joe Wickham: Do you notice how big those windows are [01:06:30] and they always left you with a fan so you could fan yourself.

Wes Houser: Okay. Dave, back in, say, when you ran for county commissioner the first time, explain some of the things that were of interest to the people back then.

Dave Nisbet: Do you mean the election part of it? Or?

Wes Houser: Or that or citrus or rivers.

Dave Nisbet: Actually, what I think what brought about my getting into [01:07:00] politics, and I think maybe we have already mentioned, I got in as a write-in candidate. The fact that predecessor had ... Well, both on the port and the county commission because, in those days, the county commissioner from district number two was automatically on the port authority, which I helped get separated because I felt like you couldn't very well work for two bosses.

[01:07:30] But back in those days, when they cut the barge canal across Merritt Island, they cut the only road going the length of Merritt Island in two. And people who had orange groves on the north side of that canal wondered how they were going to get their fruit to market by the time it got ripe. And the effort was to put a barge in there and make a little ramp on each end of it and drive down on the barge and across [01:08:00] and up the other side up another ramp. With the idea

that the barge could be taken loose and turned sideways in case a boat wanted to go through the barge canal.

It was strictly a business canal right from the beginning. It was to let boat traffic and barges and so forth to go through. But the fact that they overlooked making [01:08:30] an alternate route of getting back and forth with the fruit from north Merritt Island into Cocoa and back. So some of the people got real exercised and they started my write-in campaign. And we eventually did get another bridge, but in the meantime, the people on the north part of Merritt Island lived for about a year with that floating barge and I used to get phone calls in the middle of the night. Somebody has lost a bumper [01:09:00] going up the ramp. I don't mean a bumper, I mean a muffler.

School buses had to maneuver this quite interesting and dangerous ramp deal, but they made the children get off the bus most of the time and walk across and then get back on the bus after the bus made that trip. The interesting part of all of that was that Brevard County ... [01:09:30] This was not real far back, this was in 1950, and Brevard County had 21,000 people in the whole county in those day. Then Cocoa Beach, for instance, I always remember I bragged for years that I got all the votes but nine in Cocoa Beach. And it is still a good brag if I don't tell you how many registered voters there were over there. There were only about 110 or something like that, and [01:10:00] registered voters in the whole community of Cocoa Beach.

Wes Houser: What year was that?

Dave Nisbet: '50, 1950.

Joe Wickham: In those days, they had one of the most terrible bridges in the world. Instead of going across where you are now you know, you had to go across and run down through Angel City and then cross on a little wooden bridge over there and that brought him out just about where the surf is over there at the present time. And that was quite an experience to go over there in the middle of summer. I tell you [01:10:30] if you had a flat tire over there after dark the mosquitoes would eat you lock, stock and barrel.

Dave Nisbet: That bridge got done away with before '50 Joe.

Joe Wickham: Yeah, a long time ago.

Dave Nisbet: Yeah, that was done along in 1941, if I remember right, when the government put Banana River Naval Airbase in where Patrick is now. They were very helpful in helping get the new bridges across from the beach area to the mainland. [01:11:00] Both in the Cocoa area and the Melbourne area.

Wes Houser: Well back in those days, Dave, how would you get a doctor to your house or where did the women go to have their babies if they were going to a hospital?

Dave Nisbet: Well, of course, in those days there was no hospital in Cocoa. Well, in '50, you did have ...

Wes Houser: Dr. Kenaston started one up there about then.

Dave Nisbet: Well, he started in 1940, '41, [01:11:30] and you had one in Melbourne.

Joe Wickham: Well, you had one that was started by Dr. Hay way back in the '30s, which [crosstalk 01:11:37] hotel and, from then on, the hospital we had on the highway down there, that many of you know where it is at the present time, is now full of office buildings, was a WPA building built by WPA Labor from one end to the other and that was the early '30s. And that was the first hospital we had. Everybody had midwives and the doctors would go and deliver them in the [01:12:00] home and all that sort of thing. And I imagine most of the old timers, they were born in their own house with the assistance of a doctor or midwife.

Wes Houser: What would you do if you had an operation? Did Melbourne have a hospital?

Joe Wickham: They had the only surgeon in the area at that time, was Dr. Hay. We had a couple of the older fellows up in the Cocoa area that had done a tremendous job. Bobby Schlernitzauer father was an outstanding doctor, if I remember correctly.

Wes Houser: He wasn't [01:12:30] a surgeon though [crosstalk 01:12:31]

Joe Wickham: The only real surgeon... and we were able to obtain Dr. Hay from the St. Augustine hospital up there at the railroad. The East Coast hospital at St. Augustine. He came down here, he and his wife, established this hospital and he did all of the ... After they established a hospital in Cocoa and Rockledge area and all. He was their main surgeon for all of these little areas. He did a tremendous job and his lovely wife still [01:13:00] lives down here, retired, in the city of Melbourne.

Wes Houser: Medicare pay most of the bills back then?

Joe Wickham: There was no such thing as Medicare, you mark it paid by the Lord, and those doctors did a tremendous job. And speaking of that, it was very interesting. I can remember many of those fellows, like Dr. [Creel 01:13:18] and some of them telling how the people would leave chickens on their porch or groceries or vegetables they had raised, or something like that, in pay because they had no other way [01:13:30] to pay them. And I think that is quite interesting. That is what happened in our entire community when those doctors who came here in the beginning. Because there was no money, but they did a tremendous job for the community.

Dave Nisbet: Well, costs in medical care have gone up so tremendously in the last very few years, they've gone up. Of course, medical care has improved so tremendously that I guess justifies the increase in costs. [01:14:00] But back in ... My daughters were all born in Orlando and the first one that was born was long in the early '40s.

I had saved up money to pay the doctor and hospital bill and I think it amounted to about $300 for the doctor, who [01:14:30] was a really top ranked OBGYN specialist and the hospital altogether wasn't over $300. Nowadays, it costs about that much to get you registered. But it also ... We also have so much more to offer in a hospital than we did in those days.

Wes Houser: Back--Joe, you became a county commissioner in what year? [01:15:00] The first time?

Dave Nisbet: '52.

Wes Houser: All right. Dave, you went in about '50?

Joe Wickham: '50, that is right.

Wes Houser: All right, so I have heard a lot of tales about mosquitoes, about the mosquito control, which started out originally with diking and dredges and then it went to a truck with an airplane engine on the back with a prop to disseminate the smoke and airplanes. We were one the first ones in the whole United States to try to control that problem, and [01:15:30] you all have a very interesting story about how that got started and about where the dredge worked the first time. Who wants to lead off on that conversation?

Joe Wickham: I think the both of us were involved and, luckily, we were the people who helped make it work in those early days, as David will tell you, and we just had to have a little more imagination than some of the others.

Wes Houser: Mosquitoes much of a problem back then?

Joe Wickham: Those days, a person could hardly stay outdoors after dark [01:16:00] in the summertime, especially on Merritt Island and the area south of it.

Wes Houser: Cocoa Beach?

Joe Wickham: Cocoa Beach and the areas on the beaches. And after we decided we were going to do a permanent control ... Before that, they had just sprayed, you know, and they thought that, by spraying, they could wipe out the mosquitoes but, after a while, the DDT would make them immune and they ... It wouldn't even kill the mosquitoes, all it did was just agitate them. And we decided that, in the early days, what was [01:16:30] necessary with permanent control and that was impounding. Dave had come up with a concept of using the minnows and it worked beautifully. From that time on, we began to control the mosquitoes, as you see we are doing today. Remember David, the first couple of years, what we had was funding from the state, but no one was interested. They thought we had lost our mind over here. Do you remember that?

Dave Nisbet: That is real true, we lobbied and got [01:17:00] the state legislature to pass a law, or a bill, appropriating a million dollars for mosquito and fly control. They couldn't get the west Florida boys to go along with voting for the mosquito control unless we tied into it fly control. And we got that million dollars set up and hardly anybody was drawing on it except for Brevard, maybe St. Lucie [01:17:30] County, but Brevard was doing very, very well getting ...

Wes Houser: First two or three years no one [crosstalk 01:17:36]

Dave Nisbet: That is right, then, all of a sudden, the west Florida boys found out that, because they had gotten that bill in there about being able to get help with flies, they were getting supplies and everything paid for out of that million dollar deal to spray all of their garbage dumps and that sort of thing with to keep down flies. First thing [01:18:00] you know, the million dollars was practically ... We were not going to get very much money out of it. And Lee Wenner came over to my place of business one day and said, "Dave, this is the last day of the Florida legislature appropriations committee meetings in Tallahassee. If we don't get some more money appropriated into the mosquito control bill, we're going to be lost [01:18:30] for this coming two years."

And I said, "What will it take, Lee, to accomplish that?" He said, "I think we have got enough ... Between the two of us, I think we could tell them enough reasons to put in more money if we could get there. I have got a plane that is available right now. If we could get in there, I think we could do some good." So I picked up the phone and, fortunately, Governor Collins' right hand man had [01:19:00] been a fraternity brother of mine at the University of Florida and I called Bob [Folks 01:19:04] and asked him if there was some way he could help us get into that appropriations committee that afternoon at two o'clock.

And he said, "Dave if you could get yourself up here by two o'clock, I'll take you by the hand and lead you in there." I said, "Well, just start about a half and a half before that looking for us in the hall because we'll be there." Lee cranked that airplane up and we took off. [01:19:30] Got there, we stayed in the appropriations committee a total of 15 minutes and got them to add another million dollars.

Wes Houser: Lee was not a county commissioner at that time, though Lee was, he was the head of mosquito control.

Dave Nisbet: That is right, Lee was working for the county commissioners at that time and in full charge of the mosquito operation.

Wes Houser: Did Brevard County have the worst mosquito control problem in Florida?

Joe Wickham: We thought so didn't we?

Dave Nisbet: We thought so, and I think we were way at the top of the list. [01:20:00] St. Lucie County, Indian River County, all the way along the coast here had plenty of them,

but we thought we were the worst and I think our board of county commissioners were the most determined to do something about it.

Wes Houser: [crosstalk 01:20:15] excuse me, go ahead.

Joe Wickham: I was going to say that we decided we had to have some dredging done so, unlike everybody else, we set down and do our own specifications. Do you remember for the dredge, for the bids, we bought the first dredges and [01:20:30] we picked the spot that we felt could show us more of what we had to do and that was right south of where Patrick Air Force base is.

Wes Houser: Explain, before you tell about that and all, why you needed to dredge, the diking [crosstalk 01:20:40]

Joe Wickham: For the diking and the flooding and this sort of thing. We decided on that spot and when we got through that, we were going to move up into to the Thousand Island area back up there in Merritt Island. But in the first dredging program we had over there, which is now where you hear about the great canal and everything else, where Tortoise Island is, that we learned there [01:21:00] that we were headed in the right direction. Do remember, David, because for the first time it made an impression even over on this side of the mainland because we wiped out so many saltwater mosquitoes from that. And that told us we were headed in the right direction. From there, we began to acquire drag lines, and another dredge and we began to do all of this impounding and we spent years doing this and it paid off many, many times.

Wes Houser: I think somebody who is not familiar with mosquito problem doesn't understand the diking. Why did you do that?

Joe Wickham: [01:21:30] We diked it so we could control the water level and there and this was the area in which we impounded with water and then put all of the mosquitoes ... The minnows in there would eat up the mosquito larva and they did a tremendous job.

Wes Houser: How big would the average dike cover? Would it be a football field or [crosstalk 01:21:47]

Joe Wickham: ... usually had it up ... Sometimes you could get it up to 100 acres, do you remember David?

Dave Nisbet: Yeah, from 20 acres up. We diked some [crosstalk 01:21:54]

Wes Houser: ... put minnows in there?

Dave Nisbet: Actually, we didn't have to put minnows in Wes, because, [01:22:00] in almost any diked in area, there were some deep ponds and they had some minnows in 'em.

Joe Wickham: We used to stock them too though remember, when we would go to the state and get all the minnows. And they were tremendous.

Wes Houser: How would you flood it?

Dave Nisbet: Well, we flooded it with ... Two ways, we had some artesian wells that we had driven out there and flooded the impounded areas with that. We also had a big, maybe more than one, pretty good size [01:22:30] portable pumps that we could move around and pump an impounded area and then move it to another impounded area and pump from outside, pump from the ditches that were outside of the impounded area, that had deep water in 'em.

Wes Houser: It is my understanding ... We talked about the mosquito control problem in Florida, but we were probably one of the first county governments in the United States to start a problem like this?

Dave Nisbet: Well, I think, perhaps, Florida [01:23:00] as a whole [crosstalk 01:23:01]

Joe Wickham: We were the pioneers, people used to come here from ...

Wes Houser: From the whole United States.

Joe Wickham: To see how were getting the job done and I think one of greatest assets we had was the fact that we were so poor. In the beginning, we couldn't afford all of these luxuries, so we had to work out a solution that paid dividends. And from that time on, when the ... Instead of all of the new people from up north leaving here in May like they used to, now they begin-- started to stay part of the summer. This is when [01:23:30] things started to turn around here in Brevard County, as far as our economy and life as we see it today.

Wes Houser: Okay, I remember I came here in '56 and the year I came here was just the starting of the expansion program with the construction of Kennedy Space Center and I think we went from like 50,000 people in the county to 300,000 people in a four or five year period. [01:24:00] But I also remember that you could not get an FHA mortgage on a home unless it was served by some county or city facility, such was running water, sewage. So, the water system really opened up the development on Merritt Island as far as residential units were concerned. I hear this, I don't know if this is true, but why don't you all discuss the early [01:24:30] homework that you two did on the county commission with our water system, which, right now, is a model, I think, throughout the state of Florida still. How you all got it done and some of the interesting developments in that.

Dave Nisbet: Well, Cocoa was very, very bad in need of a water system, they had a very small one, pumped a about a million gallons of water a day and Clear Lake would go dry. And--

Wes Houser: The water came out of Clear Lake?

Dave Nisbet: The water [01:25:00] came out of Clear Lake, which is the small lake right behind BCC college there in Cocoa. And they just had to do something and about that same time, Patrick Air Force Base had come to the conclusion that they had to have water that wasn't as salty as the water ... They were using water out of wells out there at Patrick and it was about 22, 24 hundred parts per million. [01:25:30] I heard a colonel once say that it was the only place that he had ever been that you had to put scotch in the water to be able to drink it. And I think that was pretty nearly true.

But anyway, because the civilian/military relations counsel that Brevard County has had for so long, through that, we had gotten to know quite a few of the military people on a first name basis, we knew how bad they were [01:26:00] concerned about getting water and we knew how bad Cocoa was. The city manager of Cocoa was Claude Dyal, who had grown up about 100 yards from me on Merritt Island and we thought an awful lot alike so he asked me if would help from a county standpoint on the water deal. And Joe and all the rest of the guys said, "Go to it."

So we started working with the military and trying to find some way [01:26:30] that they could help finance a water system. And we found a million ways, it seemed like, why they couldn't, but we were having an awful time finding anything they could do that was legal for them to do. But we finally came up with one thing. They couldn't give us a long term contract and they couldn't loan us money, they couldn't do this and they couldn't do that, but when they browsed through all [01:27:00] of their rules and records, they found nothing that said that they couldn't put up a connecting charge.

So, Patrick worked out a deal with Cocoa that they put up a four million dollar connecting charge. Cocoa didn't have a whole lot of credit back in those days, but when they had four million dollars in this hand, it wasn't too hard to go to the bond companies and say, "We need four more million on bonds." Cocoa [01:27:30] was able to raise eight million dollars. For eight million dollars, they put in a well field in Orange County, a water plant in Cocoa, piping system from the well field all the way into Cocoa of 36 inch size.

Then across the Indian River, and across the Banana River, is a 24 inch size all the way to Patrick and all the way to [01:28:00] the Canaveral Air Force station. Then they later added it all over Merritt Island. They went quite a little bit over Merritt Island at the very beginning, but they have since, they have gone all the way up to Kennedy Space Center and things like that with their water system. All like you say, the big motivating thing from the county standpoint, and the city standpoint, [01:28:30] was that you could not get FHA or VA to build a house on a lot that had its own water system and its own sewer system on that same lot.

You had to have one or the other so when we got city water, it was still allowable to have a septic tank, as long as they weren't having to drink water out of the well from the same land. Wes, it's hard to believe, [01:29:00] but there were people living on 50 foot lots back before this situation got straightened up. There were

people living on 50 foot lots with two and three house trailers parked in their backyard, all using the same septic tank, all using the same shallow well from right next to the septic tank. And that's the truth.

Joe Wickham: I think one of the most interesting things was, to get [01:29:30] this agreement with them, that you had to ... That the water districts had to pledge so many million gallons a day. You remember that? I thought that was interesting and I think, Dave, you ought to tell the people of why the Air Force was able to help with this thing was because the water system ... They pledged so many million gallons a day to them and this was the reason that they were able to get that money borrowed and get this construction program, because they had a billion customers.

Wes Houser: Wasn't the main purpose for the water [01:30:00] for cooling for the missiles when they went off, or the rockets?

Dave Nisbet: Up at Kennedy Space Center, yes. [crosstalk 01:30:05]

Wes Houser: That was the main reason the Air Force needed it wasn't it?

Joe Wickham: Yeah, but that was before those days, I mean, what they were--[crosstalk 01:30:10]

Dave Nisbet: That was a later thing that came along.

Wes Houser: So primary was drinking water-- [crosstalk 01:30:13]

Dave Nisbet: The primary thing was water to Patrick, going to Kennedy Space Center was another step a little later on. But as Joe said, I think they not only ... Cocoa had to pledge a [01:30:30] certain amount of water, they also, of course, had to pay back this $4 million connecting charge. They paid it back with a reduced water rate, which made it very livable for Cocoa and very beneficial for Patrick--[crosstalk 01:30:45] It was one of those things that had to work because it helped everybody.

Wes Houser: Well, what would have happened to our development in Brevard County had we not had that system.

Dave Nisbet: We would not have had any in Central [01:31:00] County, I don't think, because we had no way of overcoming that fact. We just would have never had FHA.

Wes Houser: I've seen Clearlake and it doesn't look that big to give the existing population back at that time enough water, it was very marginal then.

Dave Nisbet: It was very marginal. As I said, they pumped about a million gallons a day but lots of days, by the time they had done that, the lake was almost dry.

Joe Wickham: Yeah, I was going to say. One of the interesting things is that all we [01:31:30] could find in those early days were some shallow aquifers around that did not have the reserve and potential for expansion in growth. With the concept that they for the Cocoa water system is the thing that laid the groundwork for all the future development of Brevard County as you know it today. And now, we are in the same process of trying to reach out and find a total new source for the fast growing area here in south Brevard. And we're going to find it. In fact we've got to find it.

Dave Nisbet: Well, I think you got it found in fact I think ... Really, [01:32:00] I don't mean to be critical of anybody who made the decision, but I think Melbourne made a bad decision to go into Lake Washington in the first place. I think they maybe should have joined with Cocoa and come right across on that same pipeline and spread out from there.

Wes Houser: Back in those days they could have done it very easily.

Dave Nisbet: Very easily could have done it, but that is second guessing and Monday morning quarterbacking is real easy. But the thing that I wanted to say, I [01:32:30] kept telling you about those ... All those trailers in the backyards. I think this is another thing that made us realize that we had to do something about zoning, and that is another big step that is so much bigger. When it got accomplished, then anybody that tells about it or goes back and says, "Oh, you put in zoning." Well sure we did, but we sweat blood and tears doing it. And I sat one day [01:33:00] running the meeting, Joe was sitting there for a public hearing on whether or not we should have zoning and I had women, I started to say ladies, but I won't give them credit for that because they actually came up to the other side of the table and spat at me.

Joe Wickham: You know, people, what they didn't understand is that was to put some controls in for the future development of this county and we were the people that had to make that decision and I will say this, that the county [01:33:30] commission in those days was very strong and they had to make the necessary decisions because we not only had [plat 01:33:36] laws, but we had zoning, we had subdivision laws, we had building codes. We did all of this in our early days and it was most critical from a lot of the people in the area, but this is the reason we were able to develop as we have, because we were strong in those days.

Wes Houser: Well I moved here in September of '56 and we moved in a house and it was up in Cocoa Hills, [01:34:00] one of Mr. Anderson's homes, it was right close to the railroad track. That is when the expansion was just starting. And I went up to him in about June and looked at the house. And when I was looking at it and a train went by. I said, "Mr. Anderson, this house is awful close to the railroad tracks." He said that there was no damn way he would live in it, but that was the only place I had because there wasn't any places in Cocoa to live.

So, anyhow, I bought it and there were about 13 houses there then, there was no [inaudible 01:34:30] and they had a run a quarter inch water pipe up there to mix

cement with and stuff. Well, these 13 homes are now occupied, you still got a quarter inch pipe, you could not flush the toilet or take a shower after about 5:30 in the morning, you had to get on odd hours to use it. But the reason I brought it up, where you were talking about water, is my in-laws and my parents lived in West Palm Beach. And when my mother in-law would come up, she would bring one of those little five gallon water jugs and when the water was gone, she went home. If we got mad at her, we would dump the [01:35:00] water out and she would go on back to West Palm Beach.

But I do think one of the main things that developed central Brevard, and our space center, is the water system and the way you all finagled and got the thing done, I didn't know whether even to bring it up, Dave, but one of the funny stories you told me is how that little plot of ground out at Patrick, where they hit these little white balls got started. [01:35:30] You got over that pretty good and didn't mention it. But as far as scratching somebody's back and they scratch yours?

Dave Nisbet: Well I think it would probably be safe to say now, it's been so long that anybody that was in the service has long since been out of the service and gone, but there was sort of an understood arrangement that if we started the dredging on the south end of Patrick, that we were not only getting [01:36:00] the biggest spot of mosquito breeding in the county, but what we would end up leaving would be some kind of uneven land and a little creeks and water areas in it. And if they could find a use for it, they probably would.

Anyway, they encouraged us to do this to such an extent that [01:36:30] the Air Force furnished Brevard County a lot of extra spray that year and, in fact, for the next couple of years Brevard County was having a very difficult time buying benzene hexachloride. It was a limited product and we didn't rate very high on the governmental priority list. But Patrick, of course, did and they were able to get some when we couldn't and they asked us to use [01:37:00] it in spraying and if we sprayed their based first, if we had a little left over every morning, it would be all right to spray around the edges. Well, Mims and Sebastian turned out to be edges, but we did, I think, get rid of a lot of mosquitoes that way. And it turned out that land wasn't totally wasted, that is where Patrick Air Force Base golf club is now and it made a very nice place for [01:37:30] a golf course.

Joe Wickham: I think one of the interesting things about that whole thing, and we furnished them with marl [01:37:35] and everything else, because the cost of that mosquito dope, as we called it in those days, was real expensive. I think the most interesting thing is that when NASA came into the Cape Canaveral area and decided that they were going to develop the whole area, that they were going to take over their own mosquito control and the Air Force insisted that the county be [01:38:00] in charge of the mosquito control out there because they had done such an outstanding job. And today, the county still is in charge of mosquito control up there in all of those impounded areas and they work closely with NASA. It's one of the greatest things that ever happened because we had learned, over many, many years of hard work, the things that it would take to make that area function and how to control the mosquitoes. It has paid off many, many times in the past.

Wes Houser: There are two things that are [01:38:30] clear in my mind on what you all said. One them is, back in those early days, is that you weren't city slickers and knew everything, you went to the government and you helped each other in the spirit of cooperation and you mentioned the civilian/military group, which is still going on now today, but I think any time you can work with somebody and not try to find out why it won't work, but to be friends and go forward with it. Which, I think, [01:39:00] we've always have enough country boys in Brevard County to get along with everybody that we done pretty well.

Dave Nisbet: Wes, that has certainly always been my philosophy and I know it has Joe's. When I first went on the Board of County Commission, it was the first year or two that Brevard County had gone countywide on the election. Brevard County had operated, as we are about to undertake a new [01:39:30] cycle of, running as a independent. Each district was independent, if you were running for county commissioner on Merritt Island, you only had to run on Merritt Island in district number two. You didn't have to have your name on the ballot in Melbourne or Eau Gallie.

But that has just ended because somebody had proven in the Florida Supreme Court that it was done illegally. And so when [01:40:00] I went on the board, we were operating as a countywide organization. When I went on the board, district number two had their own equipment. It was a one awful big junk pile and it wouldn't have done for an attic sale. I sold most of it off to the junk man and started over buying one truck at a time. I remember really resenting having to put a $10,000 [01:40:30] stoplight out on the intersection of A1A and 520 because that stoplight would have bought two dump trucks back in those days. And I valued ... I mean I saw the need where I could do more good for more people in more parts of the district with a couple of dump trucks, but also we had to put up a stoplight or that light would have wiped out half the population. I think people were having accidents there like you wouldn't [01:41:00] believe.

Joe Wickham: You know, when I look back and I think about the things that happened to us in those days, our community as an example. When I started in this district, number five, which is this area we are in at the present time, not much has changed, we asked, at that time, the legislature whether we could have single member districts and they told us it was illegal to have single member districts because you were making the rules and regulations [01:41:30] and in charge of the entire county, therefore you had to answer to all the people. But now times have changed and, today all of a sudden, it's single member districts again and I think they have many disadvantages because when you try to get things done on a countywide basis, you have a very difficult time, sometimes, getting everybody to agree enough to get the project done, whatever it may be. And I think, before it is over with, we are going to have some very interesting discussions over [01:42:00] that.

Wes Houser: I like the idea of a county commissioner being a county commissioner instead of a district commissioner.

Joe Wickham: I do too.

Dave Nisbet: I do too. I think it is the only way it can really operate. I think we will go back to it in due course and time. People who have never experienced this single member district will have to go through it and see how it doesn't work. But I started to say, back with the equipment deal, Sweet Smith had some pretty decent equipment in district four in the Cocoa district [01:42:30] and Max Rodes and his district for the south end had some nice equipment. So those were my two closest allies on the commission when I first went on. And things used to be [choose up sides 01:42:48] quite a bit as a result of having been single member districts for so many years.

But anyway, I made friends, to the point, [01:43:00] with Max and Sweet, that they would feel sorry for me and loan me some of their equipment. And we did get a few roads graded once in a while, and some things like that, with borrowed equipment. Now, under the system that Brevard County has operated under up until this year, everything went into one pool and it was county equipment, it wasn't district equipment. I think you are going to see it go back to being district [01:43:30] equipment and then if my district has a machine, I don't necessarily have to let the other district use it at all. That is some more stuff that I think everybody has got to find it out.

Wes Houser: Joe, we've talked a lot about central Brevard with Patrick and our water system. Do you have anything on the tail end of this program today that you would like to talk about in South Brevard that was important?

Joe Wickham: Well I think [01:44:00] one of the things that we learned in the beginning, when they established the civilian/military council, was that here in the south end of the county, we were beginning to have trouble with the military and the policing of the area. And we suddenly realized we were all getting into trouble because the little municipalities were taking the bull by the horns and making it very difficult for the military, so we met with the leadership of [01:44:30] Patrick in those early days and decided that there had to be some way that we could get together and make things work.

In doing that is when we began to form the civilian military council as you see it today. It was done by the county commission. We agreed that the military would take care of their problems and their personnel and when they came to town that we would tend to our own business. And I'll say this, the military was a great more severe with their personnel than we would have been. [01:45:00] And from that day on, we had a perfect harmony program in the entire county and it has been wonderful because we probably had the finest relationship in the entire United States between the civilians and the military because there is no line drawn there. They are all part of a family today.

And when we began to establish the mosquito control program as we see it today and all, this was a time when South Brevard began to flourish and grow because we had opened up the area, putting drainage where it needs to be so all of these various areas you see today [01:45:30] that were underwater are now beautiful places for development. And then we began to grow and prosper and, from that

day on up until now, we have really been able to do many things and it looks like the future is very bright for us.

Wes Houser: I don't think ... I am sure everybody loves the area they are from, but I have yet to see a place that I would rather live then Brevard County and I am sorry I was born in Palm Beach County. I wish I had been from Brevard, but you will never get me back where I came from-- [crosstalk 01:45:57]

Joe Wickham: I am the same way, they will never get me off of this good old Indian River, I will [01:46:00] tell you that.

Wes Houser: That about concludes our program for today and we will be back same time, same day next week. Thank you very much.