

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

Griffin: This is an interview of Frank Sullivan on July 21st, 2016, located at 1705 North Indian River Drive, Cocoa, Florida. Interviewers are Griffin Bixler and Michael Boonstra. Cameraman is Jeff Thompson, copyright Brevard County Historical Commission, 2016.

Alright Frank, could you tell me when and where you were born, and where did you live growing up?

Frank: Well, that is a story. I was not born in Cocoa even though everybody thinks I've been here- I was here before I was born, though. We didn't have any hospitals. This is in 1937. And the mothers that wanted a hospital were getting on a train and going to Jacksonville to deliver babies. I think they were just starting, one or two, going to Orlando, but my mother said she'd been down here in the boonies kind of long enough.  
[00:01:00] She went back to her mother, my grandmother's, on Long Island so I was here before I was born; I was gone for a couple of weeks, and then I came back. So I was not born here. I'll never forgive her for that either.

Anyway, what's the rest of the question? I've been here, really, since '37. My folks came down in 1935 and we have been here ever since. Actually, my mother's father had business here in Brevard County, starting in the '20s. And so some time my grandfather had passed away early in '31, '32, and so my uncle came down to run the businesses. Then when Mom and Dad got married, they came down to help.

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Michael: Can you give us their names?

Frank: Yeah. My uncle was Jack D'Albora. He came down probably in the early '30s after my grandfather passed away. And what my grandfather did, he was a receiver, what they used to call in New York. He was an Italian. He immigrated over here. In fact, we have his immigration papers still, which is interesting.

And he started in the produce business because that's what he knew, in New York, and ended up- In those days, the growers, both in Florida and in California, would send their product to a metropolitan market. They would have an auction every morning with whatever produce was there. This was the days before we had a lot of chain grocery stores, they had a lot of independent grocery stores. And those buyers would come in and it really was interesting to watch because if they had something they really wanted, they would jump up and down and scream and holler, and you'd think they were going to kill each other trying to get what they wanted.  
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But that's what started my grandfather the Association in Florida, because he would make deals with the growers and the packers in Florida to represent them at the market in New York. We always said that Philadelphia, Boston and New York were the big markets for Florida. It was on the East Coast and that's where the population was. That's how they got to Florida.

Then, actually, it got to be a bigger deal in Florida because eventually you started getting chain stores and you'd have a buyer with an 800 number calling suppliers in Florida. They didn't need the auction markets anymore; they would buy direct.

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Griffin: Tell us about this house: 1705 North Indian River Drive. When was it built and how much did it cost? Who were the architect and builder?

Frank: It was built in 1939. We used to live right behind it in a rental house. That's where Mom and Dad lived when they first came down in '35 and my uncle lived next door. Dad actually went to Orlando for an architect. Stevens and Sipple was the architect and Mr. Rummell - who, Michael, you know well - really didn't think that was necessary. He didn't know why they had to go to the big city to get an architect, but Hervey Bower who was a local contractor, did build the house.

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And believe it or not, this house cost ninety two hundred dollars to build in 1939. And I often wondered - that was kind of a different amount ... When you look at the deed restrictions, This is a, Broadview Manor was a subdivision, that first Florida boom back in the '20s, was platted. And you look at the deed restrictions and you couldn't have any chickens or pigs; you had to have indoor plumbing. There were several other things. You couldn't build on the riverside anything that was higher than the crown of the road, and the house had to cost over nine thousand dollars. So that's how they got to ninety two hundred.

Griffin: Okay. So, since you grew up here and since you lived on the Indian River, what kind of activities did that lead to?

Frank: Playing in the river most of the time. You know that was our recreation. We didn't have television; we didn't have Little League. We didn't have things like that, so you did a lot of in-the-river stuff. We did fishing; we did getting oysters. Always had a boat. Most of the time it was a rowboat. It was a long time before we got a boat with a motor on it. But we spent a lot of time outside. Lot of time on your bicycle. You wanted to go someplace, you'd either walk or take your bicycle. If you wanted to go to town, you could start walking. If somebody came by, they'd pick you up because everybody knew everybody else, and if they didn't, you'd just walk all the way, or you could ride your bicycle and you'd get there, too.

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The big, big thing to do on Saturday afternoon was go to the State Theater, which is the Playhouse now. And until you were - I think it was twelve or thirteen - you got in for nine cents to the Saturday afternoon double feature. You'd get two double features, a cartoon, a serial. A serial is like the things on television now. You'd see to a point where the girl was tied down to the railroad tracks and a train's coming. You'd have to come back next Saturday to see who saved her. That was a serial. The news, you always got the world news. That was big entertainment on Saturday afternoon.

Griffin: You talked a little bit about your mother's side of the family. The D'Alboras. Could you give us some information, some interesting details about your father's side, the

Sullivans?

Frank: Yeah. Of course. They came into this country ... Actually, my grandfather was the second generation.. He came into Boston when he immigrated from Ireland. Married and moved, after he married, moved down to Brooklyn. And my grandfather actually ran the cafeteria for one of the New York newspapers - and I can't tell you which one - for the employee cafeteria is what he did. His first wife died in the flu epidemic of the teens - 1915,'16, somewhere in there, '17-

[00:08:00]

Griffin: That was right after World War I.

Frank: Yeah. My father was one of three boys, and so Grandpa Sullivan remarried shortly after, not shortly, but I mean after that, because his youngest brother was just born when my first grandmother died. He remarried, so the only grandmother we knew was Grandma Sullivan and she was three days short of a hundred when she passed away. Everybody was gathered here to have her birthday party and she died, so we had a funeral instead. It was a happy, sad occasion. She was a hundred years old. She was three days short of a hundred when she passed away.

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She eventually moved to Florida. Both my parents and everybody else went through the Depression and Grandma never did trust a bank after she lost what little bit of money she had. I think she had called it a dime bank, where they used to have ... It closed and she lost her money, so she never trusted a bank again.

Of course, she was younger than my grandfather and when he passed away, they had moved to Long Island. She took in boarders, and did laundry, and did what she had to do to survive, and she did. Worked hard and eventually moved to Florida. She had a sister who had moved to Ormond Beach and so Grandma moved to Ormond Beach, too, and they had houses that the back yards met - little house.

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To show how tough she was, she was about ninety two before she'd move back down here to Cocoa. She had to add a new roof on her little house and she sent me ... She'd gotten three bids to get a roof on it and she asked me which one I liked but, true to form, she said, "This is the one I like." Not true to form, it wasn't the cheapest one. It was the one in the middle. I said, "Well, Grandma, why'd you pick this one?" She said, "They're the only ones that'd give me a twenty year warranty." She was ninety two years old, worried about a twenty year roof. She was a character.

Michael: So, how did the Sullivans get involved with the citrus then, and the D'Alboras?

Frank: Well, when Dad married my mother- Of course, his other-

Michael: They met here?

Frank: No, they met in New York. They met on Long Island because they both lived in the same community there. Actually, Dad liked to sing and I think he was in some little performance of some sort, either community, or at the church or whatever and that's

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where they met and they eventually got married.

Dad worked during the Depression. He worked on Wall Street, actually. He said he was glad to have a job, even though he only got paid ... He'd work two weeks; get paid for one week. But at least he had a job that he was getting paid for, working on Wall Street. He wasn't high up in any financial institution, but he was working on the floor. He made some good friends while he was there that he kept over his lifetime.

[00:12:00] They got married in '35, my uncle needed some help down here, so that's what got them to Florida. My uncle, of course, came down. His father, my grandfather, had already gotten into the citrus business down here because that was part of his business for up there, too. He ended up with three packinghouses that he was interested in and during the Depression - of course money was tight there, too - so that's when they came down. They closed two of the packinghouses and kept the one here in Cocoa. That's what got them to Cocoa.

Griffin: I understand your family is Catholic. Can you tell us about the Catholic community in the area, where you attended church, and how and why they were considered a minority?

Frank: Yes. In fact, my uncle, when they first came down here - two of the packinghouses, one was in Cocoa, one was in Titusville, actually, I think it was in Mims - and so he was living in, his first house was in Indian River City, which is not even there anymore. That's the south end of Titusville. Catholics, they didn't know really what to do with a Catholic down here. In fact, one night the Klan even made a visit to him to tell him they didn't like Catholics. But anyway, eventually, he moved back to Cocoa and it was a lot quieter here than it was up there.

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[00:14:00] The Catholic church, the little church I grew up in is there on Barton Boulevard. The city of Rockledge owns it now, I think they use it for weddings and things like that. And of course, St. Mary's is across the street now. It was always a small congregation. I have a picture somewhere from, I think it was 1932, where they had the whole congregation on the steps, taking a picture. My mother's there. Kind of young. You could see her there. So it has grown a lot since then, needless to say. It's got a school. Our girls all went to St. Mary's and now we have one teaching there.

The Catholic community has grown like everything else around here. When I was growing up - you're talking about what we did - there were only twenty thousand people in the whole county. We've got five hundred fifty thousand now and a lot of them wonder what happened to the river. The Lagoon, it's now known as.

[00:15:00] In fact, somebody was talking to me the other day, a couple of weeks ago, about the Lagoon and how terrible it was and all the septic tanks we have now, and agricultural fertilizer. I said, "I'll tell you what's wrong with the Lagoon," and he said, "Well, what?" I said, "Well, when'd you come here?" He said, "1986." I said, "Well, there's number one. So we can go from there." We had a clean river; we didn't have any problems. We had septic tanks, we had agriculture, and we still had a clean river.

We didn't have any manatees, either. If you saw a manatee, it was a big to-do. I mean, you drew a crowd. We never had manatees here because we were too far north. And now, they put the power plants in, that's when we got manatees. I don't know whether I should preach or not, but Florida Power and Light tore down that fuel power plant to get natural gas plant and they had to spend millions of dollars. First, the only way they could get the permit was if they put heaters in the water so that when it got to a certain degree temperature, the manatees would have a place to go and they'd have to heat the water. It's just ridiculous, but don't get me started on manatees. I do hear they taste like chicken.

Jeff: So maybe if you could just talk a little bit about the war years and that.

[00:16:00]

Frank: Okay. Of course, the war years, especially along the river here, the backside of the streetlights were all painted black so that you didn't put a glow out. Our headlights were half-painted black for blackout. Dad was not able to go to war because he had some medical problems, but he was part of the Citizen's Patrol on the beach. They would patrol the beach at night and there were some interesting things.

[00:17:00] I can remember as a kid finding shells, cartridges from machine guns, on the beach that would wash up. I can remember one ship was sunk by a German U-boat that you could see it from the shore. I mean its bow was sticking up out of the water. So we did have some activity here. They had watch towers along the beach and the citizens would patrol it at night. And so we had rationing; you could only get so many shoes. I was always being fussed at because I wore out shoes too much. Everything was rationed and you worked hard to conserve. I'm not sure this country would ever be ready to get on a war footing again because I don't think the people are strong enough to do what we went through in World War II.

Jeff: You were a kid then-

Frank: I was a kid, yeah.

Jeff: So from your perspective, was it all, you had a good time, I'm thinking?

[00:18:00] Frank: I didn't have a good time. I mean, had the same time you always had. The thing is, you did have to think about ... You didn't have as much because it was rationed. Gasoline. I remember my folks had a Buick when the war started. They got rid of it right away. We had a Chevrolet because you couldn't get gas. Things like shoes, and meat, and things like that were rationed. A lot of vegetables were grown. You had Victory Gardens. Of course, it was easy for us because of the groves. We did have some land that we could plant some things on, so that was good, but-

Michael: Is that where the Victory name came from, though, from the war years? From the Sullivan Victory Groves [00:18:19]?

Frank: No, no. Actually, Victory Groves was started back in the late 1800s by the Whaley family.

Marion Whaley came down here from - I think they were from Macon, around the Macon, Georgia. It was kind of after the Civil War. A lot of them lost a lot of what they ever had in Georgia and they came down here and really homesteaded on Merritt Island. In fact, I have a letter from Mr. Whaley to Mr. Turnbull. You probably know the Turnbull Hammock up there at Mims. And Mr. Turnbull was going to ...

[00:19:00] The contract. It was a hand-written contract; this was dated 1906. He was going to clear five acres of land for Mr. Whaley up on the island, and after he got finished clearing it, he would either trade him his launch that he used to take the fruit out to the river in the middle of the riverboat would come in and take the fruit and take it north to Jacksonville and there they'd put it on steamers to take to metropolitan markets. But he'd trade him his launch. He named it - I don't remember the name - but he named his launch. Or, if he didn't want the launch, he'd pay him seventy five dollars.

In fact in 1906 - I know that five acres - you wouldn't have walked across it for seventy five dollars. Mosquitoes would carry you. The mosquitoes were horrible. That was another thing. People don't realize, you worry about mosquitoes now. We used to have mosquitoes, even when I was growing up, you could put your hand on a screen and take it away and you'd have an outline of your hand from the mosquitoes.

[00:20:00] You see screen porches here and we used to have one in the back door; it's been incorporated into the house now, but you'd never open a door right into the house. You'd always come into the screen door. You'd wipe off ... they call them Mosquito-Beaters now, the old-timers that get together once a year. You'd have like a palm frond that would be wrapped up and you'd brush the mosquitoes off the screen before you'd open the door. Then you'd come into the screen porch and get whatever came in before you came into the house.

[00:21:00] And so mosquitoes were terrible. I can remember you'd set somebody up on a tractor up on north Merritt Island. It'd be ninety degrees, ninety five degrees out. You'd have long sleeves, long pants, and sometimes they'd even put, in the gearshift box of the tractor, they put a little smudge pot there, a little something to make smoke just to be able to stay on the tractor. They were terrible. It wasn't until World War II when what's Patrick Air Force Base now was Banana River Naval Air Station that, when the military got here, we started getting some spray.

And even I can remember, as a kid, we got - used to have a push lawn mower - we finally got a power mower. It wasn't self-propelled; you still had to push it. There was a guy in town, he was really in the outboard motor business, but he figured out how you could put a tank, mounted on the handlebars, and drop it into the manifold of the power mower and you'd spray out mosquito stuff. You'd get the DDT from the county, they'd give it to you, and you could spray around your house. I made a little bit of money spraying some of the other houses in the neighborhood even when I was a kid. They were that bad.

[00:22:00] Griffin: You had talked about how sparsely populated Brevard County was back in the day.

What did the locals think when the space boom hit the area? Your wife came during that time, right?

Frank: Yes, well she came down in '64. 1964. It was boom town in those days. Actually, it started back in the late '50s, maybe in '55,'56. Because we were kind of watching it closer than anybody because when they took over the North Merritt Island property, when NASA took over ... That was the second thing. The first, they took over they called it the eastern missile test range, something like that, down at Patrick, and that's when they reactivated that post. They were firing they called it... it was like a V-2 rocket. That's all it was was a rocket,

[00:23:00] Triggered something else, because there was nothing here but oranges, just about, and cattle out west, every year we had what was called the Orange Jubilee. It was a big celebration for the town. They had a big parade - big as you can think when you don't have many people here - but it was something that all the citrus growers were involved in. They'd have contests for fruit and other things that would go along with the festivities.

[00:24:00] And I'll never forget ... They started, as we got more people in town and fewer orange people, or citrus people, that didn't really have the impact that it did early on. I can remember one of the last ones that they had, to have something completely different, the people at Patrick came in at Provost - it's Provost Park, now, it was a ball stadium in those days - and they had a V-2 rocket mounted on a trailer, big semi-trailer. They set it off; they lit the engine. That was the biggest thing and loudest thing we'd ever seen. We've watched people go to the moon now, but that was really the beginning of it.

Then when they did buy up all that land in North Merritt Island, that was kind of hard things to see because we didn't realize the impact it was going to have on the industry. There was nine thousand acres of the best citrus land in the country up there and when they bought out all the original owners, they let them lease it back for I think it was three years or five years. Then what they did was combined up to about two hundred fifty acre blocks and then leased them out to anybody.

[00:25:00] So toward the end of what was going on up there, we had about eight hundred and fifty acres leased, but the Department of Interior took over the grounds and they told us that they only wanted native plants on government property. Citrus only came over in the 1400s, so they told us "We're going to get rid of this, we don't want this non-native plant up there." And it took about fifty years, but there's not a tree up there.

I hope they're happy, because there are a lot of dead trees up there and the birds have been sitting in them, dropping the Brazilian pepper seeds, so they got Brazilian peppers everywhere. That's a long way from a native plant. Serves them right. It was kind of sad. There was good employment, it was good for the environment, there was a lot of labor, there was hundreds of people working up there. It didn't matter. They were going to get rid of it.

Michael: Did the families feel like they were treated fairly or was there some bitterness-

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Frank: There was some bitterness, there was some bitterness. Especially when some of the smaller growers got put into a bigger two hundred fifty acre block and they just couldn't compete, really, ... They were bitter. Yeah, there was some bitterness. In fact, I know one of them sued my father when he ended up with one of their pieces that had their acreage in it. They said just because we had a packinghouse, we could afford to do it and we were going to gyp them, and all those good things. Had to go to Atlanta and defend ourselves, but it wasn't proven that we'd do anything different than anybody else was. There was some bitterness, yeah.

Michael: That was the whole area where the famous Dummett Grove, the original groves-

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Frank: The original Dummett Grove. Well, actually it went all the way up to the old E. Day Estate which is where it comes out to the US 1 at Oak Hill. It went all the way up that far. A lot of it north of Haulover Canal. Now, when the freezes of the '80s came along, a lot of that was frozen out up there and that's when the government really decided, "We're not going to let you replant," and they put pine trees in.

That was really the beginning of the end, when those freezes of the '80s hit. They were able to start grabbing acreage back then because it was frozen out. We had seventeen degrees a couple of times on Merritt Island in those days. Can't grow anything in seventeen degrees.

Michael: Is that the biggest freezes that you remember-

Frank: Biggest one I remember was '89. Yeah, yeah. Florida always had freezes. Actually, in 1895, there was a big freeze in Florida. In those days, most of the citrus was along the transportation routes, which is the St. Johns and the Indian River, along this coast and up the St. Johns all the way to Jacksonville. A lot of it was in Ocala. In '95, that freeze did wipe out the industry. The story goes that the Dummett Grove survived because in those days, the warm water protected Merritt Island and so they got bud wood out of the Dummett Grove to really bring the industry back. It was, golly, probably ten, twelve, years before Florida got back to where they were in '95.

[00:29:00] We always had freezes, but Merritt Island, as the other plus for Merritt Island, it was warmer than the rest of ... You'd get a freeze, it'd kind of go down, you'd call it, the Florida Ridge. Orange County all the way down through Polk County. We were pretty protected over here. Lot of times, we made a little money during a freeze. Until you got to seventeen degrees and then everybody got frozen.

Griffin: What were some of your earliest careers?

Frank: My careers? Well, I guess starting about fifteen working in the packinghouse. Maybe a little earlier than that. Yeah, that was our career; everybody worked.

Jeff: Did you work for the one here in Cocoa?

Frank: Yeah, the one here in Cocoa. My father actually worked with D'Albora Company until 1952, and they decided to get out of the packing business and just be growers. And so that's when they closed their packinghouse and that's when Dad bought the packinghouse that was actually down past the Baptist Church is and the turnaround on the south end of Brevard Avenue. There's an engineering firm on that property now. There was a lumber company right on the corner where Baptist Church parks now, and then our packinghouse was next, went all the way down to Sweet [00:30:21] Street. It was a big wooden building.

[00:31:00] The railroad, there were four packinghouses along that rail line that came in behind where the Cocoa Water Tower is now, and the school, Cocoa High school and elementary school was all two buildings, but all on the same campus. It came in just south of there in Nevins had a, [00:30:47] which is the Parrish family, had a packinghouse there, and then it went down into D'Albora's packinghouse. It's where Forrest Avenue kinda comes into 520; there's that right at the corner, there's a Mexican or Indian gift shop, I think he's just closing.

That was the Greyhound Bus Station, and a Texaco gas station. Then the D'Albora packinghouse was east of that, where there's a vacant land. Then you went down the freight house, where all the freight came in and out of, was right there in the Cocoa parking lot about where Crest Cleaners is now, a little bit north of there, that piece of property which is parking lot.

[00:32:00] Then the rail line went down through where the Cocoa City Hall is now, and that road that goes just east of where the Post Office is, that was rail line that went all the way down to- There was a packinghouse where the telephone company is now, there was a packinghouse ... the Porchers had a packinghouse out over the river, because they used to bring, before there was a bridge to Merritt Island, they used to bring their fruit over on a boat to their packinghouse. Back it right up to the packinghouse.

Then you go south down to our packinghouse, and there was a cold storage plant on the other side where the Mexican restaurant is now [El Charro]. And in '59, well, just before '59, the city of Cocoa, D'Albora had closed their packinghouse, Nevins had move their packinghouse to Titusville. The other one, Porcher was out, and the other packinghouse had moved to Mims and consolidated.

[00:33:00] Also we were the only one left that Florida East Coast had to service, and they had to service us, but the area was growing, and the railroad came right down Forrest Avenue, and all cars would have to stop. There wasn't a US 1; I mean, that was US 1. So everybody had to stop for the train coming through, and it was slow, and changing cars around. You know how that goes.

The city made a deal with my father if he would move, they'd pay him a hundred and twenty thousand dollars to move so that they could get the rail out, and that was more money than we'd ever seen in one place in our lives. But in the summer of '59, we had

one more season to run the packinghouse. Well, we were making plans to move. So in the summer of '59 though, we started to have a fire bug in town. The old city hall, they'd already moved the city hall, but it used to right across from, Travis Hardware, the parking lot was the old city hall. They tried to burn that.

[00:34:00] What on Poinsett, that was a church, it's now a woman's club. They tried to burn that; of course, those were all block, and they didn't burn very well. They burned down the cold storage plant, and about a month or so later, they burned down our packinghouse.

It was old Merritt Island mahogany, the thing burned ... Fourth of July of '49, [meant 59?] we had the biggest fireworks we'd had for a long time, and then the city backed out of the contract with dad, said that, "We're not going to give you a permit to rebuild." So that was the end of that. We did sue and get some money, but nothing like what we had originally, supposedly had gotten.

[00:35:00] That's when dad, right away, he needed something for that season so we packed down in Fort Pierce, at a friend's packinghouse, we did that season. But that was the same time the Whaley family who, all their groves were inside the cape. They decided that they really didn't want to be in the packing business anymore.

So that was when we got Victory Groves, so it was about 61 that we started packing at Victory Groves ... That was their name. Victory Groves. We still get letters, Victory Gardens, but even back at the turn of the century, they were Victory Groves. He probably put it on because it was a victory just to survive on North Merritt Island. But that was their name, so ...

Michael: Could you spell that Frank?

Frank: E was the first initial, D-A-Y was the last name. I never knew Mr. Day, but everybody called it the E. Day Estate, because if it was in the family, what they got from whoever the original Mr. Day was. They had trees up there, they kept ladders up there because everything was picked by hand. Going up a ladder. They needed such long ladders that nobody had them, and they had set they kept just for picking their trees.

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They called it the Florida Common Orange, and it was what came from a seedling. They were forty foot trees, just like oak trees; had to be real gutsy to get a picking crew to go up there and pick it.

Griffin: Could you tell us a little bit about your political career? You know, how it started and what motivated you?

Frank: How it started, oh well. Dad was never in politics; one time I know somebody tried to get him to run for mayor, but he didn't. Small community, everybody was involved in the community and volunteering, everybody worked hard that's the only way you make things grow. Dad never got into politics, he was always on the fringes of it. They tell the story about when there was a county commissioner that they were trying to get rid of and they decided they would get a write-in candidate.

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So dad was part of a group that got together on Merritt Island where they had the meeting, where they were deciding what to do, and the seated commissioner had the sheriff go up and write everybody's tag numbers down, so he could see who was going to be running against him, and how they were going to run against him.

[00:38:00] Anyway, it was small town politics in those days. We always had the five county commissioners. Dad, actually his real energy went toward ... He was one of the founding directors of Wuesthoff Hospital. We never had a hospital. This is in 1941; Mr. Wuesthoff, who is a winter resident from Wisconsin, the family had donated because we didn't have a hospital here, they donated twelve thousand, five hundred dollars, if the city would raise the other twelve five.

Dad was very instrumental in that, and they did start Wuesthoff Hospital. Ten bed hospital with twenty five thousand dollars. Rockledge gave him the land, and that was the beginning of Wuesthoff Hospital. Dad served on that from '41 when they opened, till he died in '76. I was selected to take his seat. I was on the board for thirty years at Wuesthoff, saw it grow to a two hundred and seventy bed community hospital.

[00:39:00] They later decided, I was off the board, but they later decided that they had to join a larger group, and it was not what I consider a community hospital anymore, it was a big for-profit chain that bought it and still own it. Which was kind of sad, because community, every room had somebody's name on it that had donated the money for it, and it was really a community effort as the hospital grew to keep it going. Had some fine doctors who came there too because of that.

Griffin: Could you tell us about your serving as the port commissioner?

Frank: Oh, that's politics, yeah. Well, that was something I always ... The port was actually something that was worked on from before the second World War. They were trying to get a port there, and then the war came along, and everything was on hold. So after the war, late forties, there was a couple county commissioners decided that it would really be a good place for a port.

[00:40:00] It was never a port there, it was always kind of a protected area, like used to be a little two story stucco hotel up there, and two sisters, the Whidden sisters. Used to keep-

Michael: What was the name?

Frank: Whidden.

Michael: Whidden?

Frank: Yeah. They would keep me and my sister if the folks would go out of town, and it was great fun because there was a pier there. Shrimping was always a big industry, commercial shrimping was always a big industry, and the shrimpers all had small boats in those days, and the pier went out, and they'd unload the shrimp at the end, but if it

was a rough day, they had a way of hoisting the boat up out of the water so they could get the shrimp off of it, instead of it rocking around.

[00:41:00] It was great fun when we were kids to go up there, because we got to eat in the kitchen, and play on the beach all day. The beach, there was hardly any beach. In fact, when a storm would come along, they'd just pull the boats up and put them in the dunes to keep them-

Michael: Shrimp boats?

Frank: Yeah, the shrimp boats. Where the cape goes out, the currents would come around the cape and sweep around that curve if you looked at it on an aerial map. The beach was soft sand, until you got to the water's edge, and then you'd go out six or eight feet, and it would drop off because it was just cut that sand out, and deposit it down in Cocoa Beach, where we would drive on the sand. It was like Daytona Beach.

[00:42:00] And I hate to say this, but when the port was put in and the Jetties were put out, it interrupted that flow, and that's why you don't see Cocoa Beach with this wide, hard sand anymore, but you see, if you go into Jetty Park and go down into Canaveral, good hard beach again, because that comes around the jetties and is deposited right back in there, even though there is a sand trap out there, because it would come back in and get in the channel. So there's a sand trap out there that gets emptied every so many years, and that sand is deposited further down, so there is a replenishment for the beaches further south now.

[00:43:00] But it's just not like it used to be sixty years ago, or seventy years ago. But anyway, watched that port grow. It was always interesting, and I always had a friend who was..., there are five districts. When they tried to sell the port to the county, there was some mayors and county commissioners that went to the public and said, "We want to put a port in, we think it's going to be good for the area, it's going to be good for the commercial fishing industry." Thing is, we're going to have to tax you, and we're going to have to collect taxes to get this port put in, and I don't remember the amount that they needed to raise.

About Pineda Causeway is the end of the port district, because Melbourne said, "That's too far away, it'll never do us any good." So the first commission of the commissioners were the mayors of Titusville, Cocoa, Rockledge, and two county commissioners I think it was. There wasn't a mayor in Cocoa Beach. The guy in Titusville they say, hardly ever came to the meetings because it was just too far to come to the meetings. He couldn't drive that far.

[00:44:00] So anyway, it was something we watched. Tropicana had a plant there, and I can remember we would deliver fruit there. Mr. Rossi was the one who started Tropicana, and of course it's come a long way since then, but I can remember dad sending me over there waiting on checks to be issued. So anyway it was always something I watched and admired, and watched different friends of mine being commissioners, and finally got to a point that I had the time to do some other things, and the opportunity came along to

run, so I did. That's when I ran, served a term.

There was a special interest group that decided they had somebody else they'd rather put in, so I only served one term, but I didn't owe anybody anything.

Michael: Did you know Noah Butt growing up? [00:44:42] He was really instrumental right? Pretty involved. [00:44:44]

Frank: Yeah, he was. Dave Nesbitt was another one. In fact, Dave Nesbitt was the county commissioner they were trying to write in. The meeting was over at Bobby Hill's house up at Indianola. Which was his brother.

So anyway, Dave was very instrumental. He was one of the commissioners. He was one of the county commissioners, and one of the first commissioners on the port too. Now of course, the port, it hasn't been on the tax rolls since, I don't know, something like twenty years, because they're generating their own revenue.

Griffin: Could you tell us about your other local involvements, such as the Rotary Club?

Frank: Yeah. The Rotary Club, I joined that in 1961. I came back from the army after college. Of course in those days, everybody had to go into the military, some sort [inaudible [00:46:00] 00:45:54] the draft. After I came back from the army, the Rotary Club was formed by having some one person from each industry, so you couldn't have two citrus growers in there, but you could have a citrus packer, and a citrus grower, and a citrus caretaker.

You had different categories. That's all changed of course. When I first went in, I was additional active to my father who had been in the Rotary Club, probably since he came here in the '30s. Yeah, I've been in since 1961. Again, I'm senior there, too. It's a good club, very active still, we now have female members.

[00:47:00] And actually, I was president sometime back in the '70s. They were just getting away from that category of having one from each category, and I'll never forget it, because you went off for training, how to be president, and one of the questions was about a problem making the clubs grow, so the example was that at this one Rotary Club, the Cadillac dealer was holding down the new car sales category.

He was old, and didn't really do much anymore, and the Volkswagen dealer came into town. He was young, and in the Chamber of Commerce, and energetic, and pushing the area. Not in Cocoa now, this was someplace else. And they finally decided that they'd have a new big car dealer and a new little car dealer, and that's how they got around having two car dealers.

From then on, it got a lot easier to get in, but if you were the only lawyer, you could keep the other lawyers out if you wanted to in those days.

[00:48:00] Michael: Tell us a little bit about when women came into the group.

Frank: Oh, that really changed things around. As you and I both know, Cathy Schweinsberg in those days- Yeah, when she was head of the library system for the county. She was one of the first females that came in. We had a friend of mine who was a fast food dealer, or franchise holder. I won't say his name here in town, and he just knew that it was going to ruin the club. "If you start bringing women into the club, it's just going to be terrible."

He made it known that he wasn't too happy about that, and Cathy just came in and said, "Well, if you want to worry about us, we're going to be the new pit bulls of the club." So several years later, Cathy was inducted as the president of the club. We're having the induction, the installation dinner out at the country club, and Cathy came in and Cathy's an attractive woman, you all know her.

[00:49:00] She had a flowing red dress on, taffeta or whatever it is that these women wear, a big red scarf around her neck. They swore her in as president, and she tore the scarf off her neck, and she had a collar on, with spikes. You know those dog collars that have spikes? "The pit bulls have taken over," she said. My friend had to swallow a few things. She was great.

Griffin: Could you give us the name of your wife and your children for the record, please?

Frank: Jeanette is my wife. She came down from Paris, Tennessee. In fact, we just got back. I tell my friends we were going to Paris, then I have to tell them it's Tennessee. It's a small town, Tennessee. We just came back from a family reunion up there about a week ago.

[00:50:00] She came down because of the space industry, these young families were all coming in. Young engineers, they all had kids, they were building schools faster than gas stations around here, and so they were recruiting teachers. She'd just graduated from Memphis State in those days - I think it's Memphis University now - as a teacher. She tells a funny story, there were two of them; she and a friend of hers, they were both recruited here and hired as teachers.

She was at Tropical Elementary on Merritt Island. She was hired for not the first year, it was the second year they were open. So they were coming down on US 1, there weren't any interstates, and they got up there at Oak Hill where State Road 3 goes off and says Merritt Island. They said, "Well, that's where we're going!"

[00:51:00] They went down State Road 3. Of course, there's nothing there except orange groves until they got to where the VAB Building is now, and all this construction was going on. And they thought that was kind of interesting, and they kept coming. Keep in mind, they're from a small town, it's got the court house in the middle of the square, everybody knows where the school is, everybody knows where downtown is. They get down to Merritt Island, and they couldn't find the town.

So they went to Cocoa Beach, and turned around and went to Cocoa. She says they went back and forth a couple of times. Finally, they stopped and asked somebody and said, "Where's the town? Where's Merritt Island?" The guy looked at them and said,

"Well, J.M. Fields just built a store up there." It's where Home Depot is now. He said, "That might be downtown." They were kind of confused and said, "Well, where's the school?"

[00:52:00] "I don't know, they built one over there, and I think there's another one going up over there." They didn't know where anything was, so it was quite a cultural shock for them to come to this booming area. But it was booming, it was a lot of fun, it was a good time to be young here, a lot of things going on at the beach. They were just picking astronauts, and the astronauts were everywhere. You'd see em in stores and restaurants, and in their corvettes going up and down the beach. There were a lot of parties. They used to say, "You see a bunch of cars, you just stop because there'll be a party going on, and you just join in."

[00:53:00] Where Pumpkin Center was, or just burned down, it was the Wuesthoff house, really. It was a log cabin, winter house, for the Wuesthoff family, but they had leased it out. They rented in out. In those days, housing was real scarce, so they had rented that. There were always a couple of engineers there from Georgia Tech or someplace, not married, trying to learn. They were here in-between- They take a semester here, working for a aerospace company. So there was always a party there every Sunday.

Every Labor Day weekend, they'd have the New School Teacher Party, because there were always new school teachers coming. That is where I met Jeanette first time, at the New School Teacher Party. Pelican Dunes is what it was known as in those days. Cocoa Beach was booming. We got married in '66, two years later.

[00:54:00] We had three children. We lost our youngest child, but our middle child is Mary Pat Altman, who is married to Thad Altman, our state senator now who, plug for him, he's going to run for the house because he's termed out at the Senate. She teaches at St. Mary's. And our oldest daughter is in Raleigh, North Carolina, and she actually teaches school also. She had three boys, Mary Pat has a girl and two boys.

We've got family here, we've got six grandchildren. Got a grandchild living with us right now, he's an intern working at an accounting firm in Orlando, and about to enter UCF as a graduate student and still working there too. Mary Pat has one at Auburn, she has one just starting at Ole Miss, and one still in school at Holy Trinity. So they're all growing up. Her middle child is called Hunter. I said, "They should've named him Doctor or Lawyer because he wants to be in the woods all the time hunting."

[00:55:00] I said, "Why'd you go to Ole Miss?" He said, "Pa," they call me Pa, "Don't you know that's on the Mississippi Southern [00:55:00] fly way for the ducks?" I said, "No, I didn't know that." But he's a good kid. I have a follow up to that. I have a friend who's - both husband and wife are doctors - it was a while before I met their child. They have a son. He came in, and his name's Hunter.

I said, "Aaron, what are you doing with a Hunter?" I told him about my grandson. I said, "You should've named him Doctor or Lawyer." He said, "No, should've named him Electrician or Plumber." That's coming from a doctor.

Griffin: What do you think is the defining trait of Cocoa? What do you think that sets it apart from any other city?

Frank: Still the small attitude of Cocoa Village. Even though we've grown tremendously around it, it's still got a small town feel to it. We used to have to go to Orlando to go shopping, because there just wasn't anything much here to shop from. We had a men's store, and a women's store, but if you really wanted to go the big town, you went to Orlando.

[00:56:00]

But now we've got Macy's, we've got all the big names here too, but Cocoa Village is still the village. I think it's all around the Playhouse. The City of Cocoa salvaged that, somebody was trying to tear it down and put an office building up. I don't know how it happened, but the city ended up with the Playhouse, and we were able to preserve it. Turned it over to the college to bring back, and I was privileged to be on the first board there, and bringing it up, the first time we remodeled it, I'd say the best day's work we did was hiring Stacy that's running the show now. She's done a great job.

[00:57:00]

So it's grown, and that was I think the nucleus for everything else that's happened downtown. Plus, city officials had enough sense that there was another. A colonel Frank Zamboni was his name, and at the same time he put a little store, he was retired military, came to downtown Cocoa, put a little store up, a little General Store.

And that, the Playhouse, all happened at about the same time. Then they started putting in the pavers and the trees; that's what turned Cocoa Village around to what it is today. It's really a great place to live. I'm not looking to move.

Griffin: Anything else you would like to mention or talk about? Anything you think is interesting?

Michael: Can you think of anything you wanted to mention, or think we might find interesting, or ...

[00:58:00]

Frank: Well, the growth is really the big change that I've seen. Of course, City of Cocoa water came from Clearlake, where the college is now. To get there, you'd have to go down to Peachtree Street, and go up Clearlake Road now. The old water plant, it's about halfway up. From there to Clearlake was all dirt road, and dirt ruts [00:58:22].

That's what we'd do on a Saturday if we weren't going to the movie, because it'd take all day. You'd pack a lunch and we'd go out and swim in Clearlake, even though it was the water supply for Cocoa. It was where the planetarium is now. There was a big hill there, and you could ride your bike down into the lake, crazy things like that.

[00:59:00]

But it was a day trip to just to go to Clearlake. You can get there in five minutes now. So you know, the big, big changes like that. And you knew everybody, everybody knew you, better behave yourself, because if you didn't, everybody knew you were in the doghouse. That's the big change. The big change was it was a small community where

everybody knew each other, it's still a small community but everybody doesn't know each other anymore.

You know you could talk on forever about the changes. Everybody walks around with a little telephone in their pocket now, because of what we did when ... we were always out away from telephones, and when the first contractor started out here with NASA, AT&T put a mobile telephone line in. It was a single line, and these were for your car. The box in your trunk was like this. Big aerial on the roof.

[01:00:00] My father had one. I think it was '57, or '58. I'm trying to remember which car it was, but '57, '58. He had a phone in his car, it was an open line. Sometimes it was better to listen to your radio because of these contractors; there was one contractor. Even though you could turn the volume on, because if you were out of your car, you could hear it. Well it would [01:00:21] blow the horn if the phone rang, but you could drive down the road and listen to everybody.

He had a superintendent, this guy, and he'd send the superintendent out of town to do something. Next thing he'd do is call the guy's wife. It was all on this open line, so there was a lot going on on the single phone line. It was kind of neat, but that's a big change. When you look at the first car phone that I was aware of, and what we've got now, it's just unbelievable, the changes.

[01:01:00] When I got out of college, I think there were six million people in the whole state, and we're pushing twenty something million, twenty two million now. It's a big change, everything that didn't have a house on it was an orange grove, just about. All up and down, both coasts.

Michael: West of 95 where Viera is today was ...

Frank: It was a cattle ranch, Duda's cattle ranch. My cousin John D'Albora who's ninety one now and retired, lives down in a retirement community. He says he lives in a cow pasture with a bunch of old people. That's what it was. That kind of change, you can't stop it, and you don't want to stop it, but you would like it controlled a little bit.

[01:02:00] The barge canal. That's a story. A lot of people think it's called the barge canal because you can bring a barge through it. No, it's really called a barge canal because when they cut it through, the only road going up the island was Tropical Trail. When they cut it, they didn't have a bridge built yet, so they put a barge in, so you went down a ramp, across a barge, and up a ramp by the other side.

The school buses would come across, the kids they'd have to walk across because it was dangerous. Our fruit trucks that have to go to Titusville, because you couldn't bring it across, and bring it around until they got a bridge in. So you know, things like that.

The building of the port when it was first built, of course it was all dredged out, it wasn't natural, and there was a guy in my class, Roger Fowler. He lived on Merritt Island, and he had a buddy whose father was running the dredge. They were about to break

through to the ocean.

[01:03:00] Roger and his buddy wanted to go out there and ride the dredge. His father told him, "Go on, go to school." He said, "We're not going to get there before you get out of school." He got out of school, they went right up to the port, and he'd already broken through, because he'd gotten soft sand and he was making time.

He said, "We went out on the barge after the dredge." I said, "Well Roger, how did you get out there?" He said, "Well, we just walked along the pipe." Where they were piping the sand out. You couldn't do that today. There were things like that got done, just because you did it, and you could do it. Today, I don't know. We're too restricted now.

[01:04:00] The fish in the river was great. Mullet. You leave your boat in the water overnight, you'd have ten or twelve dead mullet in the bottom of the boat the next morning, because they would jump, they were that plentiful. Used to have the mullet fishermen would have flat bottom boats because they would come into the shallows here, and they put this big net out, and then draw it in, and they'd draw it as they brought this big seine net in, you'd bring in the fish. Of course, they're illegal now, but they'd be out here, you could buy the mullet from them for a quarter a piece. They'd take the heads off.

Jeff: Fry it up?

Frank: Yeah. Yeah.

Jeff: Talk about fresh.

Frank: We're trying to preserve some of that at the Field Manor. I know you know something about that, Michael. This is a piece of property up on North Merritt Island before the barge canal on the old Tropical Trail, and the Field family came down after the Civil War also. It's quite a story. I had to interview the last Field that was living here about the family, because we gave them an award at the Farm Bureau. I am a member of the Brevard County Farm Bureau, and we give these awards, for the Farm Family and the Farm Individual every year.

[01:05:00]

We realize that a lot of the people that came to this area that made the industry that we're taking advantage of now weren't around when we were giving awards out, so we have a posthumous award. I got to interview, and learn something about the Fields, and they came down after the Civil War from Georgia in a covered wagon. They came into Titusville and went across and settled in this property that's there now.

[01:06:00] It was a family, they had three or four children. In those days, they were giving out land grants. Well, you had to grow to keep the land grant, I think it was 160 acres was each land grant. And at one time, when the family expanded, they owned property from the Indian River all the way to Sykes Creek. They had to grow something within three years, so they had to live off the land but they started growing.

Sugar cane was one of the things that they grew, because that grew in a hurry. But

anyway, the family prospered, and built a house in the late 1800s, which is there now, and the last Field passed away put everything - there's about forty some acres that's left in the main part of that property - she wanted it kept for the community to be able to see how the settlers settled, and how they lived, and the original house is there with a lot of the original furnishings. There's a trustee that's taking care of that, and there's a board that's working it in there. They're trying to make that something for the community, they are making that something for the community. A lot of functions.

[01:07:00] In fact, we're going to have a fish fry, because that's one of the things they did for the community back then. Then they'd gather, they'd just get fish and oysters out of the river, and that's what they would eat. We're going to have fish fry and oyster roast in November. Hopefully we'll get a crowd to come out and see how those things used to be. Of course, there'll be a tent there now, they didn't have a tent.

They did live in that covered wagon, and in a tent, and finally the original Fields, the senior Fields, went back, they'd lost a child here because of the hard living, and one of their children was married, so he stayed, and he was the Field family that grew here. They stayed while everybody else went back to Georgia.

Michael: Were they related to the Field that had the store on Merritt Island that you mentioned earlier? The J.M. Field store was-

[01:08:00] Frank: No, no. J.M. Fields was a chain store, the first chain store we had. Somebody bought them out now, they're not around, but that was our department store. No, actually he ran Travis Hardware, the last Fields did. Plus they had groves, too.

So I can't ...

Griffin: All right. Well thank you for talking with us.

Frank: Okay. I hope I told you something that was of interest, didn't ramble on too much.

Griffin: It was very interesting. We're thankful that you could participate in this interview.

Frank: Well, I like to talk about the area, so I hope I don't bore anybody.

Michael: Thank you Frank.

Frank: Okay.

Michael: It was a pleasure.

Griffin: Thank you.

Michael: It was great.

Frank:        Okay.