

**Transcript of an oral history interview in the collection of the
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Nancy: This in an interview with Oliver Haisten. August 26, 1992. At 217 Orlando Ave, Cocoa
[00:01:00] Beach, Florida. Interviewer Nancy Yasecho. Cameraman, Robert Gilbert. Equipment,
Sony Camera BVP50. Beta SP recorder, Sony BVW35. Audio on channels 2, and 4.
Copyright Brevard County historical commission, 1992.

Oliver Haisten take one.

When were you born, and where?

Oliver: August 21st, 1910, in Cocoa.

Nancy: When did your family first come to the area?

Oliver: They came to Cocoa Beach in 1910. My mother was born in Cocoa, and my father was
born in Georgia. Then he came to Cocoa. Got a job with SF Travis and company, to work
[00:02:00] with them for several years. He was a key number one citrus man. He knew his citrus.
You know how where the old packing house used to sit in cocoa down from the [Baptist
Church 00:02:11] ? He was manager of that packing house. Boy, he knew his business.

He would go into a grove and make an estimate for his company, for the fruit, and every
tree he saw, that brought up the estimate to 100 boxes, he would take a leaf off the
tree, stick it in his pocket, and then when he got through making his survey for the
company, then he would count those leaves, and he could tell you how much fruit was
there in that grove. I thought that was interesting.

Nancy: Yeah, that's quite a good way to do it.

[00:03:00]

Oliver: He was a tremendous citrus man, because he knew his citrus.

Nancy: Were there a lot of groves around?

Oliver: There was quite a few, there was quite a few. You know the Crisafulli boys on Merritt
Island? Their father spent a lot of time with them, in budding citrus stalks, which they
raised themselves, on their own groves. Charlie Crisafulli, Johnny Crisafulli, and all them,
I knew them. They were good friends of mine.

Nancy: Where were the groves?

Oliver: They were north on Merritt Island. You know those two driveways (*he means the two
causeways*) coming across. They took the last driveway and went north on Merritt
Island.

Nancy: What were your impressions of this place when you were a little boy?

[00:04:00]

Oliver: Well, I knew it was a place where you could have a lot of fun. You could go down on the beach there, and get you a seine and catch a good mess of pompano, flounder, anything that you wanted to eat. Like I was mentioning to your friend here, when they built the ... right across the river from that big casino, that the man started from Kansas City.

They came there because they couldn't get fish anywhere else except ... what they wanted, except at Cocoa Beach. Fishing was good, you could catch a mullet, and they loved mullet, and they love killing these ducks over here that they couldn't get back in Kansas city. Is that what you want?

Nancy: Were there a lot of ducks here?

Oliver: A lot of ducks.

[00:05:00]

Nancy: Yeah. Tell us a little bit about the wildlife? There were things besides ducks?

Oliver: There was ducks, there were a few bears drifting around in the marshy places. Then, there was a lot of good fishing here. Men would come over from Orlando fishing. It was a great place to fish.

Nancy: Did you ever see a bear here?

Oliver: Yes, I did.

Nancy: Can you tell us about that?

Oliver: I saw an old mother bear and three cubs, right north of the old Cocoa Beach Casino.

Nancy: What were they doing?

Oliver: They were down on the beach playing in the sand with their mother.

Nancy: Did you run away?

Oliver: No, I didn't run away. No, I didn't run away

Nancy: Where was that casino?

Oliver: It was right almost directly north

[00:06:00]

Rowena:
Haisten
(wife) Where the Cocoanuts Restaurant is now. It's a building, it was clearly a hotel but they called it a casino.

Oliver: She may have to help me a little bit, give you the information you want.

Nancy: That's okay, I know you've got some stories for us.

Oliver: Straight down from The Surf (*another restaurant*).

Nancy: Tell me a little bit about your family life, how did you celebrate the holidays?

Oliver: Well, we had people here at Cocoa Beach. My mother was a good cook, she could really make good cornbread, and that's what these Yankees wanted, cornbread and fish. Mom used to make the cornbread for them, we would have fish fries on the beach, and people would come down with a covered dish, and what have you. Then we ate like kings.

[00:07:00]

Nancy: When did you come here to Cocoa Beach?

Oliver: 1926.

Nancy: There were church parties?

Oliver: We had church parties, from the Methodist church in Cocoa. Oh yeah, old pal. We called him Pal, he was our dog. We liked that dog. We had a slide, out in front of the casino, and always on Sundays, Saturdays, that dog would put on a show for those people from Orlando. He would get up on the top and then slide out into the sand. They were all having a grand time out in that sand.

Nancy: When you first came to Cocoa Beach, it was just starting to be built, what did it look like here?

[00:08:00]

Oliver: Nothing, but wild country. I say that, wild country. These houses were built at that time, Edwards would give maybe, let me see, how do I want to express that. He had lots that he gave to other people to build on. If they built right now. That's the way these houses got started here in Cocoa Beach.

Nancy: There weren't many houses here then?

Oliver: No, not many.

Rowena: Was that the first one you lived in?

Oliver: That was about the first house over here, Godekes house. They're the ones that run Anne's Variety Store down here.

Rowena: Then they swap out.

Nancy: What were some of the first businesses that were here?

Oliver: Real Estate, and they had a barber shop here at that time. Then they had a grocery store.

[00:09:00]

Rowena: Back then they didn't have a grocery store.

Oliver: They had a grocery store. Yes, that's where we bought our groceries from.

Nancy: Where was the grocery store?

Oliver: Up on this street here, there's a golf store, you know where that is. It was in that building there.

Nancy: It took a lot of time before the people starting coming around here. What were you doing when you came here?

Oliver: We were farming. We planted vegetables over there by the city hall is. Sweet potatoes, we raised an average of 350 bushels of sweet potatoes to the acre, and they were the most delicious. They were some of them about this size, and my mother knew how to make sweet potato pie, oh boy that was something.

[00:10:00]

Nancy: What else would you grow?

Oliver: We would grow tomatoes, we had beans that we raised, fresh beans. Squash, and corn. We had corn there, good fresh corn. We would go down and get a big potato, that would be enough for the whole family. The way we served them at our place, is to pull the potato peeler back, and then go in and get you some potatoes and put them on your plate. Boy, you have never eaten such potatoes.

Nancy: Did you have oranges and grapefruit?

Oliver: Yeah we had oranges and grapefruit. Right there a little north of Cocoa Beach. We had a grove up through there too. I'm trying to think of some other things. Cocoa Isle is up here, that was all grove up there at that time. My father took that fruit, and he shipped that through the American Fruit Growers Packing house in Cocoa, and whenever he shipped out some of that, a carload of that, it always topped the New York Auction in New York. They wanted fruit with quality, and they got it.

[00:11:00]

Nancy: How would you get back and forth to Cocoa?

Oliver: Well, they had the old bridges at that time, had been built.

Nancy: Tell me about that bridge.

Oliver: It was kind of a shaky place. I'll let you ask the questions, what you want.

Nancy: Where was that bridge?

Oliver: Well, as you go out from City Hall, you go right straight, and then when you went right straight, you passed by the school houses, and then from the school houses, you got on the bridge, and that was the old shaky Banana River Bridge, right there. Did that answer your question?
[00:12:00]

Nancy: Did it have railings on the sides or not?

Oliver: Yes it had railings on the side.

Nancy: I've heard different stories, bout that.

Rowena: You had to go to Cocoa to school.

Nancy: I think he's describing right now where the schools are. You had a job over here in Cocoa Beach too, didn't you? Didn't you work for the post office?

Oliver: I finally got my certificate as Post Master here in Cocoa Beach. I had a good time. There's no one that had a better time then I had in Cocoa Beach. I love the kids, and they love me.

[00:13:00] At Christmas time, we would have a Christmas party for the kids, and there are so many funny things that happened then. They would bring all kinds of trinkets and things in for me to put on my bulletin board. This lady came in one day holding it up this way, "Where can I put this, where can I put this?" I said "Oh.." A set of false teeth, a person wanted me to put it on my bulletin board. To call it to their attention that somebody lost a set of false teeth. So I did, I put it on my bulletin board. I said "let me have it". I put it on my bulletin board. That's one of the things that happened there.

Nobody ever claimed it, so I had to drop it in the can, and let it be thrown away.

Nancy: Do you remember when the telephone company first came in?

Oliver: I think that's back in 1925.

[00:14:00]

Rowena: I thought it was the year you were born when your father's telephone company came to Cocoa.

Oliver: My father owned the telephone company in Cocoa, I'll put it this way first. Let me get this thing straight now. He owned the telephone company, then he had everything in perfect order, and then we had this 1910 hurricane that came through, completely destroyed his telephone yard where he had his telephone poles, and extra equipment that he had to use for repairing telephone lines. You know Bill Hendry in Cocoa?

[00:15:00] He is kin to the S.F. Trafford (*should be A.F. Trafford not S.F.*) in the real estate business. They had that real bad storm that came through, that completely destroyed all the equipment that was needed. That was back in about 1910, I believe it was. That was the year I was born.

The men that worked at NASA, they would come in, and they traded at my office, they had post office boxes, and what have you. They would come in with a stack of magazines like that, and put it in a little corner, and their wives would come in about 3:30 or 4:00 in the afternoon, see that stack of magazines, and their husband meant to take it home that afternoon for their wife to have some magazines to read, and the wives, they go over and get the magazines, and take them home to the other wives. You see what I am talking about, I thought you would like to know that.

[00:16:00]

Nancy: Yeah. When you first went to the post office, that was when they started the post office here, wasn't it?

Oliver: That's right. No, it wasn't when they started it. My mother, she acted as acting post master, because there were quite a few northern people here. They had to mail the mail out, and get their mail. We had a mail carrier that brought our mail in from Cape Canaveral, and then in the morning they would take the mail to Cocoa, where it was sent out by train from Cocoa.

Nancy: Then you became the post master here?

Oliver: I became the post master.

Nancy: You worked all by yourself here?

Oliver: I did some.

Nancy: What was your route like? Did you drive?

Oliver: I didn't have a route. The mail carrier would come in, he had routes south of Cocoa Beach, he would put mail in the mailboxes for those people.

[00:17:00] Nancy: Not too many people then, I guess.

Oliver: Not too many, no.

Nancy: Do you remember about how many people lived here?

Oliver: About 25.

Nancy: Your father was a postman too wasn't he?

Oliver: Well, in Cocoa he was. He was a post master in Cocoa. We had a friend O.K. Key. He was

the only Republican in Cocoa at that time. When, I believe it was Eisenhower. When he became post master, O.K. Key could have had anything he wanted.

Nancy: When Eisenhower was President?

Oliver: When he was President. He had a lot of power there in Washington.

[00:18:00]

Nancy: Did Mr. Key want a job?

Oliver: He got his job as post master in Cocoa. We had a guy down in Rockledge. He was trying to make pressure on us small post masters. O.K. Key called me, he was a good friend of mine, and of my fathers and he said "Oliver, I want to tell you something. That old guy down in Rockledge said he was trying to make it too hard on you little post masters, and we got rid of him."

By having Eisenhower in, that helped kick that old guy out. There was a lot of politics that went around.

Nancy: Can you tell us some more about the politics of that time?

Oliver: Let me think a little bit. O.K. Key was a Republican.

[00:19:00]

Nancy: Everybody else must have been Democrats then.

Oliver: They were, most of them were.

Nancy: O.K. Key had a livery stable didn't he?

Oliver: He had a livery stable where the theater is now. That used to be the old Ford Motor Company in there then, at that time, but O.K. Key had a livery stable there, where if you wanted to go out on Sunday, and get a mule, or a horse and a wagon, you could get your horse and wagon, and ride all over the country side.

Nancy: I guess that's the way most people got around.

Oliver: That's right.

Nancy: They had buggies and wagons?

[00:20:00]

Oliver: There was a horse and buggy, what it was, and Henry W Flagler, he built about 3 or 4 hotels down at Rockledge, and he passed on order that no conductor would take any passengers on the train unless they had a ticket for transportation. Mr. Flagler thought he'd try this conductor so he got on his train, and the conductor told him, "I'm sorry, you don't have a ticket. I'm going to put you off at the next station." Mr. Flagler's own train,

[00:21:00] and Mr. Flagler said, "I'm the owner of this train." The conductor said, "Sir, I can't help that. I have my orders to follow." He put him off of his train, so when he got back to St. Augustine, that was headquarters for the Florida East Coast at that time. He went into Mr. Flagler's office and Mr. Flagler told him, "When that conductor comes in, I want to see him."

When he came into the office, the conductor said, "Hello! There you are!" They had a big laugh over it. Mr. Flagler laughed, he said, "You know what? The day that you put me off of my own train, I decided to fire you that day." And instead of that they built him a \$52,000 home and gave it to him. You don't find many bosses like that, do you?

Nancy: No. Did they put Flagler off the train in Cocoa?

Oliver: It was down south of here. Down near Miami.

Nancy: That's a story that a lot of people told, I guess.

[00:22:00]

Oliver: That's the story. I thought you might like to know that one. He said, "You're one man that follows orders and I'm going to build you a nice home," so he built him a \$52,000 home and gave it to him. He really built some of the most beautiful houses around St. Augustine. He owned the railroad at the time.

Nancy: You can probably tell us a little bit about the time during the Depression after the stock market crashed.

Oliver: I'm trying to let that run through my little brain. That was bad. We came to Cocoa Beach. One reason we came over here was to raise vegetables, raise tomatoes, watermelons, and things like that. We had an outlet for them because people wanted our vegetables, and we raised a superior grade of them. We took them to Cocoa and we sold them in the grocery stores over there.

[00:23:00]

Nancy: So you always had enough to eat.

Oliver: We had enough to eat, and they were good too.

Nancy: I guess you had fish and other things.

Oliver: We had fish, we had all kinds of fish. Pompano and stuff like that. High eating fish, and they were good. Boy, they were really good.

Nancy: Tell me a little bit about the hurricanes that came through here.

Oliver: We had about 2 or 3 hurricanes that hit up through here where my shed is, right here. Rowena and me, we hadn't been married too long at that time, had we?

Rowena: Tell her about the one that you and Bob went to down in Miami. The [inaudible]

00:23:50] when you all went down.

Oliver: They had a big hurricane down at St. Augustine.

Rowena: No, Miami.

[00:24:00]

Oliver: In Miami, and we went down to that.

Rowena: Either 26 or [crosstalk 00:24:03]

Oliver: That was a tremendously [inaudible 00:24:05]

Nancy: You went down after it was over?

Oliver: We went down after it was over, yes.

Nancy: A couple came pretty close to here.

Oliver: Right here it knocked our shed off of the foundation, this white shed you see back there.

Rowena: We had to get another shed. 1940 Donna. Tell them about Donna.

Oliver: You tell her, I don't know enough about Donna.

Rowena: Donna came, and somebody came out wanting to know if we was going to leave, and we told them no, we wasn't going to leave.

Oliver: When your same people leave here, they come here, "Aren't you going to leave?" No, we're not going to leave. They jump up and leave, and get down in the interior of the state there and be right in the middle of it, and the thing would hit them. We wouldn't even move, and getting along just fine here at our house.

[00:25:00]

Rowena: What made us leave that time the light line fell down out there on the line and burned the water pipe into two, and the backyard flooded with water. We had to leave.

Oliver: Certain things happened, like the water pipe burning or melting.

Rowena: Tell them you went over to grandma's in Cocoa.

Oliver: We went over to my grandmother's in Cocoa and stayed there until everything was fixed up out here.

Rowena: We came back the next day to see how it was, that's when all the trees were down on the causeway. We was afraid to come back home.

Nancy: Which hurricane was this?

Rowena: Donna 1960.

Oliver: Donna.

Nancy: Donna, Hurricane Donna.

Rowena: Two weeks after that we had Flood [inaudible 00:25:43]. We had a big hard rain, we had big ditches in front of our house. That ditch filled up with water, came up to our doorstep, almost went in the house.

[00:26:00]

Oliver: He was down in Florida City.

Nancy: Tell me who it is.

Oliver: Billy Graham, Dr. Graham's son.

Rowena: No, Billy Ford.

Oliver: Billy Ford. He and his cousin were over in Mindanao when that war happened. They seemed to have a big battle between the Japanese and the Americans. His cousin was killed during that battle.

Nancy: You were saying that he had something to do with that war that was right off the coast here.

Oliver: Billy was decorated for several ships that he had sunk out here, German submarines.

Nancy: What were the submarines doing here?

Oliver: They were trying to sink what oil they could, get the oil, and other supplies that these other ships could be bringing in they had needed. That's where he got his extra decorations, and he was a good flyer. This time when they had the storm, he had been assigned to be the commanding officer in Homestead.

[00:27:00]

Rowena: He may be retired now over at [inaudible 00:27:23].

Oliver: He was a good boy.

Nancy: How did he sink the sub? What did he do to sink the sub?

Oliver: He had bombs on the sub that he dropped right on top of them.

Nancy: In his plane?

Oliver: Yup. This will be of interest to you to know that when in having this trouble over here

with the German submarines and other things, that in Orlando they had a bombing squad that they brought over from the beach here to sink those German submarines.

Nancy: How did they intend to sink them?

[00:28:00]

Oliver: Well, they came over and they dropped their bombs on them, and that was too much for them. We had some good flyers.

Nancy: I guess there was rationing here during the war years.

Oliver: We had some, a little, not too much.

Nancy: You were telling me a little bit about the mosquitoes around here. Were there a couple?

Oliver: We had a few.

Rowena: You sprayed the door before you came in.

Oliver: You sprayed the door before you come inside.

Rowena: Sprayed them after the [inaudible 00:28:42].

Oliver: If you wanted to, get one of these bushes off one of these palmetto trees, split it up, and it acted pretty good as a mosquito bush.

[00:29:00]

Nancy: You told me a story about the mosquitoes laying in wait, I guess.

Oliver: You mean the time 2 men went to Cocoa and they heard the mosquitoes talking. "Shall we kill him here, eat him here, or drag him out to the bushes and eat him?" You like that one?

Nancy: I bet there's a few mosquito stories.

Oliver: There are.

[00:30:00]

Nancy: Now we are out of tape.

This in an interview with Oliver Haisten. August 26, 1992. At 217 Orlando Ave, Cocoa Beach, Florida. Interviewer Nancy Yasecho. Cameraman, Robert Gilbert. Equipment, Sony Camera BVP50. Beta SP recorder, Sony BVW35. Audio on channels 2, and 4. Copyright Brevard County historical commission, 1992.

Oliver Haisten, tape 2.

Oliver: I had a friend that when I was in service we had this special kind ... just a minute. Let me sit up straight and try to get this correlated.

Nancy: Can you sit back when you talk to us?

[00:31:00]

Oliver: Yes, yes. I'm just trying to think about how I want to say this. I told you I was in a medical unit during the war.

The idea by taking these big mosquitoes and freezing them. Filling them full of blood and freezing them. If I had to use one of them during the war, I could take one of them, take their bill, and stick it right up my vein here, take the wings and pump the blood up in there, and that would give me pressure enough so we could treat those wounded boys.

[00:32:00] This friend of mine, he was an ex-FBI man, I told him what my thought was so he knows that behind it, the man you know of the Today newspaper told you what I thought of, and they wanted that to put in the newspaper. Do you recall seeing it? I gave him the information I had and we wrote that up, and they liked it real well.

Nancy: Do you think the mosquitoes were pretty big then?

Oliver: On the mosquitoes were big, but you can take them, stick a vein up in here, take the wings and pump the blood up in there. They thought that was pretty good, so I let it go at that.

Nancy: You were telling us other natural life, there were a lot of turtles up here. Tell us about the turtles.

[00:33:00] Oliver: The turtles weighed at least 250 pounds. On this particular night, this is one experience my brother and I had with the turtles. These men had been on the beach, and then driving up and down the beach there, and they found this 250 pound turtle, threw the turtle in the back of the car, and came up to the casino where my brother and I were working that night. My mother and father had to go to Cocoa on business, and we were running the casino. They came in there we saw the turtle, and we told them, "Sir, if you're caught with that turtle, it will cost you \$250 if you don't get rid of it." Then they were quite excited by getting rid of that turtle. Somebody told us that they had dumped that turtle out between Cocoa and Titusville, somewhere. They didn't know where it was.

Nancy: What kind of turtle was that? Was that one of the loggerheads?

Oliver: A loggerhead turtle. We just didn't push that anymore. We thought that was pretty funny.

Nancy: Can you tell me something about the casino? What kind of place was that?

[00:34:00]

Oliver: It was a nice place to go and get you a nice room. You could rent you a room there for about \$6 or \$8 a night. They were clean rooms. My mother, she would supervise the cleaning of the hotel and we just used that as hotel rooms and people from Orlando would come over and stay at our hotel. My mother was a wonderful cook, so they came over and got some of that good grub, good food, she was cooking. We just had a real good time that way.

Nancy: It was always called a casino. Were there gaming tables?

Rowena: No, we didn't have any gaming tables. Just a hotel.

Rowena: Just a hotel with a boardwalk out front.

Oliver: I'm just trying to think of something else that we can say.

[00:35:00]

Rowena: [crosstalk 00:35:00] The piece of furniture that came out of that building.

Nancy: Also along the beach there I guess occasionally there would be shipwrecks.

Oliver: There would be some shipwrecks.

Nancy: Early on you mentioned one in particular.

Oliver: Out in the ocean there, the Mohegan, that was the name of it, the Mohegan if you want to put that down on your book form there.

Nancy: What happened when that ship wrecked?

Oliver: They went on down to Miami.

Nancy: There was one particular ship wreck where there were a bunch of baby buggies or something, wasn't there?

Oliver: There was but I stayed in back.

Nancy: Tell me about that one, the early, early one.

Oliver: That was a time, she said there was enough baby buggies on that one ship to give every girl in Cocoa a baby buggy, and so that what they did.

[00:36:00]

Nancy: People would salvage things that came off the shore.

Oliver: That's right.

Nancy: What kind of things do you know about that washed up?

Oliver: Mostly beer or whiskey. Look at him grinning back there.

Nancy: Now that must have been during prohibition times.

Oliver: That was. You see the source of whiskey, they would get it up in north Florida where they raised it, where they actually went into it for the business. Then they transferred some of that down here to Cocoa Beach where they could give some of that stuff to the bootleggers where they could go ahead, get that whiskey, and sell that out as bootleg whiskey.

Nancy: You mean to say that there was bootleg whiskey coming in through ...

Oliver: Yeah, from the islands.

[00:37:00]

Nancy: They bring it from the islands over to here and then what would happen.

Oliver: They'd try to sell as much of it as they could. You could picture them selling all that whiskey over here.

Camera man: What about at the casino?

Rowena: Wouldn't they meet him down at the surf?

Oliver: Down at the surf, more than one time my brother and I would come in from Cocoa on the school bus and see a revenue boat, a revenue car right at the old casino. They were waiting for that special boat to come in that had 2 big liberty motors in it. When they caught that thing they put it out of business completely.

Nancy: So they got caught sometimes?

Oliver: So they got caught, yup.

Nancy: Could you get a drink at the casino?

[00:38:00]

Oliver: No, I never did try. I couldn't take it very good.

Nancy: You were young'un then.

Oliver: I got drunk one time in service and that was enough. I had my tent fixed up with nice mahogany furniture, and what have you. This officer came along, "Strip your tents! We're going home." That tickled us dead, so we stripped our tents, got everything straight, what have you, then after we got them all stripped he said, "Don't do a thing. We don't know when we're going." We said that's the last straw so then we began to

drink whiskey, then sure enough I went over and got a big quart of whiskey, 190 proof alcohol, then we started drinking that up, and when we got a lot of that drunk up, we didn't feel like doing anything hardly.

[00:39:00]

Nancy: Excuse me, let me just have this lie here for you because it sometimes makes a little bit of noise.

Oliver: Do you want me to run that under my belt then?

Nancy: I was thinking we can talk a little bit about some of the early transportation. What about the steamboats that used to come?

Oliver: Back in the steamboat days, I told you my father was a steamboat agent in Cocoa, on Saturday night he would go over to the steamboat dock, get everything lined up, getting freights to be taken to Jacksonville, or it could be taken further up the highway, further up the coast, and that's what he did. Going south to Mather's Bridge, you know where Mather's bridge is, getting a nice stock of fresh vegetables, mangoes, oranges, and all that to be shipped north to the northern markets, up there in the northern ports. That's where they got their fruits and vegetables from.

[00:40:00]

Nancy: Did the steamboat take passengers too?

Oliver: They would take passengers, yes.

Nancy: Did you ever ride on the steamboat?

Oliver: Yes, I did.

Nancy: Where did you go?

Oliver: We went to Fort Pierce.

Nancy: Would you do that as a regular thing?

Oliver: I think I would, yeah, it was fun.

Nancy: What would you find in Fort Pierce?

Oliver: Nothing, just good food.

Rowena: Didn't the steamboat bring people down from north of [Hotel Rockledge00:40:36]?

Oliver: They brought people down from those northern ports, down to Rockledge where they could get a hotel room from Flagler.

Rowena: They had four hotels there.

Oliver: Yeah, there was about 4 hotels there. I don't know whether this is true, or not, but they
[00:41:00] said Flagler would come in with a steamboat down to the prairie country out here. I don't know and I can't prove that.

Nancy: What did the steamboat look like, can you describe it to us?

Oliver: A steamboat would have big rudders on it for turning and running the ship. They would fish out there, maybe somebody on there and hook them an alligator and have an alligator barbecue. To me that didn't sound very appetizing.

Nancy: Would the steamboat be low in the water?

Oliver: It was a flat bottom boat.

Nancy: It had 1 or 2 decks?

Oliver: It had about 2 or 3 decks, and that came in back of the yacht club in Cocoa. You know
[00:42:00] where I'm talking about over in [Rockledge 00:42:00].

Nancy: How would they power it?

Oliver: They had big engines, gas engines on that boat.

Camera man: When was this Nancy, the steamboat ride?

Nancy: When did you take your steamboat ride? How old were you?

Oliver: I was around 10 years old when I took my first steamboat ride. I think that would do it pretty well.

Nancy: Do you remember the name of any of the boats?

Oliver: No, I don't.

Nancy: There were a few I guess. Okay, can we cut?

[00:43:00]

Oliver: When the road first opened up to Cocoa Beach, they had 2 committees, you know, to work on that. One of the committees was, in the back of his car, he had a lot of tacks that shook out along the road there. They were headed for Cocoa Beach and somebody hollered, "Somebody has been scattering our tacks up and down the road here. We've got to get things fixed up." So as it worked out, they found that this was just a mistake made because a salesman who had them in his car, he didn't do it on purpose which I was glad of. And so they got all that straightened out.

Nancy: Is that when they first opened the road?

Oliver: That's when they first opened the road down this way, down 520, just before you got on the bridge to go down to Cocoa.

Nancy: What happened when the cars started hitting those tacks?

[00:44:00]

Oliver: Well they didn't do anything about it, just come straight on over to Cocoa Beach and get the tacks out of the car. They had them in their tires that time, get that straightened out.

Nancy: Didn't they get some flat tires?

Oliver: I'm quite sure they did.

Rowena: There was one route and the other route. The [inaudible 00:44:15] route and something else. In one [inaudible 00:44:18] to fill the tacks.

Nancy: Tell us about what it was like trying to drive around here.

Oliver: It was no problem. Good roads. Yes you could get down on the beach and drive the hard beach. I'll show you a picture I have in there of the early days at Cocoa Beach.

Nancy: I understand that the palmettos were pretty close to the edge of the road.

Oliver: They are.

Rowena: The trees met [crosstalk 00:44:50]

[00:45:00]

Oliver: I had a friend that was, this might be something of interest to you, his father was a lighthouse tender at Cape Canaveral. He lived on this peninsula for 33 years without going anywhere. When he graduated from high school in Cocoa, he got him a job with the Florida Power and Light Company, Clinton [Honeywell 00:45:29] and he died eventually. He got some of the most gorgeous butterflies from around that old Canaveral light. The most gorgeous flowers you've ever seen.

Nancy: Were they flowers or butterflies?

Oliver: They were flowers and he got them all and put them in his collection.

Rowena: Butterflies, you told me.

Oliver: Butterflies. I got a few of them to go in my collection.

Nancy: Did you ever go up the lighthouse?

[00:46:00]

Oliver: Yes.

Nancy: What did it look like from up there?

Oliver: It's quite tall and slanting. Did you ever go up in it?

Nancy: Could you see Cocoa Beach?

Oliver: Sure, you could see Cocoa Beach from up in there.

Nancy: Could you see your house? Could you figure out where it was?

Oliver: I guess you could. I won't say you could, I won't say you couldn't.

Nancy: Do you remember the first airplanes that came around this area?

Oliver: Yep, there were 2 boys came down from up north. They came down to build a certain type of airplane in Cocoa Beach. They rented a room where they could go in and work on their equipment so they started building. During the war, I happened to run up against one of these boys that was building an aircraft down here at Cocoa Beach.

[00:47:00]

Nancy: Who are the early professionals that you recall, doctors? Were there a couple of doctors around here, or no doctors around here?

Oliver: We had some doctors here. We needed a doctor, you had to go to the doctor. You had to go from here to Cape Canaveral Hospital.

Rowena: No, Cocoa.

Oliver: To Cocoa? The Wuesthoff Hospital.

Nancy: The Wuesthoff Hospital. That's a long way to go if you're feeling bad.

Oliver: Yes, it is, and old man Wuesthoff who built the hospital over there was tremendous individual.

Rowena: Tell them where you had to go have your tonsils taken out.

Nancy: Where did you have your tonsils taken out? Did you have to go to another hospital?

Oliver: No, I didn't have to go.

[00:48:00]

Rowena: West Palm Beach.

Oliver: Oh, yeah we had to go to West Palm Beach when I had my tonsils taken out.

Nancy: Was there a dentist around here?

Oliver: There was a good doctor in Palm Beach, they knew what they were doing.

Rowena: That wasn't your dentist.

Oliver: No, it wasn't the dentist.

Nancy: You had a dentist in Cocoa?

Oliver: We had a dentist, yes. I felt like hanging him more than one time because I'd go into his office and come out, they could hear me all over Cocoa screaming and hollering.

Nancy: Was his office upstairs?

Oliver: Upstairs. Doctor Daniels was the name. You probably remember him. You don't. Boy, I knew he could be rough.

Nancy: He was a rough one, huh?

Oliver: Yes, he was.

Nancy: No painless dentist he.

Oliver: Well, I won't say that. If I had to make so much noise, he could figure that the pain was pretty severe.

[00:49:00]

Rowena: Doctor Von Thron was the first doctor here.

Oliver: Yes, Doctor Von Thron was my doctor.

Nancy: First one who came to Cocoa Beach?

Rowena: He was one of his first patients [inaudible 00:49:09]

Oliver: He was a good doctor. He told me one time, "Oliver, anytime you need me at night, I'll be at your house." You don't find many that way.

Nancy: Do you remember your early school days, what it was like going to school over there in Cocoa?

Oliver: Not too much.

Rowena: Tell her how you had to go. You didn't go just straight across the river.

Oliver: No. We went across this highway here, down to Angel City, and made a jog. From there we went on over to ...

[00:50:00]

Rowena: You went out this road by the hospital then you went to Angel City ...

Oliver: You went across the bridge, then Angel City, and from there to Cocoa.

Rowena: Then you had to go north, north of 520 again, [inaudible 00:50:13].

Oliver: Well I guess you're right.

Rowena: What's the name of the place up there?

Nancy: Did you ever get left behind by the bus?

Oliver: I did, once or twice. I had to walk. That way getting back in the afternoon I get the bus at the right time coming back to Cocoa Beach, but going over once or twice, he left me flat.

Nancy: You walked the whole way to Cocoa?

Oliver: I walked all the way to Cocoa.

Nancy: That must have taken you most of the day.

Oliver: It did, and you felt it when you got to Cocoa.

[00:51:00]

Nancy: Were they strict in school?

Oliver: No, we had to have a note from our parents stating that we were left and had to walk in. That wasn't like going through the professor's office though.

Nancy: Were there a lot of kids in your class?

Oliver: We had about 15. I guess we had about 20, 25 in our class.

Nancy: Did you wear shoes to school?

Oliver: Oh, yes. I had to. My mother made us wear shoes to school, and when we came home in the afternoon, there'd be over our shoulders. You know what I mean, don't you?

Nancy: I saw some pictures of some boys in school up in Titusville and they didn't have any shoes on.

Oliver: They didn't.

Rowena: Tell them about Dave [Nesbit's 00:51:54] haircut when you were kids.

[00:52:00]

Oliver: Did you know Dave [Nesbit 00:51:58] in Cocoa? I remember one time they had a pair of these little kindergarten scissors. Dave took those and gave himself a good little haircut with those scissors. He was such a ridiculous looking sight, the school teacher saw him, she took him upstairs, took him all over the school house, showing him off. Ole Dave. He was a humdinger.

Nancy: Did you have dramatic productions, plays, and things like that?

Oliver: No, we didn't have. Right downtown at my father's old post office they had a place upstairs where you could go up there and put on skits, and things like that, and invite people to come and see them.

Nancy: Did bands or orchestras ever come to this area?

Oliver: We had Chautauquas.

Nancy: Chautauquas?

[00:53:00]

Oliver: Yes ma'am.

Nancy: Where would those be held?

Oliver: Right over the old post office.

Nancy: It must have been very interesting.

Oliver: It was. Very.

Camera man: What's a Chautauqua?

Nancy: Can you describe to us what the Chautauqua was all about?

Oliver: It was mostly music. It was musical productions. That's about the best I could remember of it now.

Nancy: Were there ever parades, or anything like that?

Oliver: Yes, we had parades when World War I was over. We had a big parade down in Cocoa.

Nancy: What happened in the parade. What did you see?

Oliver: Just excitement. People clapping their hands, joyous, happy that all the war was over with, what have you.

Nancy: I understand they used to have May day picnics. Something on May day.

[00:54:00]

Oliver: They had May day picnics up by the old schoolhouse. Had picnics and a lot of good food, what have you.

Nancy: What did you do for the Fourth of July?

Oliver: Not too much of anything because we were home here on the beach.

Rowena: Tell them when your daddy went to the barbecue thing and brought food for you all. Tell them about that.

Oliver: That's great. That's wonderful. I'll tell you one. They were having a big barbecue down in Melbourne, and the cow puncher had come over and made the Brunswick stew, what have you and so forth. My father liked to do things for his family so he went over and got two containers, one of Brunswick stew, [I don't know 00:54:59], and some barbecue. He got back, he was in the line, they pushed him like that, and he came back over, "I just played it." What's wrong dad? He said, "I was over there and I got in that pushing and pulling," and he said, "I dropped your Brunswick stew over on the seat of that man's pants." Oh, that tickled us, "You going back dad?" "No", he said, "Those people will kill me."

[00:55:00]

Sometimes I'd wake up during the night thinking about what he got into, and boy it tickled us to death.

Rowena: You might have had a [inaudible 00:55:39].

Oliver: You understand how hot that'd be.

Nancy: I understand there used to be some baseball teams.

Oliver: They used to have some baseball teams here at Cocoa Beach, and I'll tell you something else that'd be interesting to you. They had a circus over here at Cocoa Beach. Had some old, beat up looking elephants, and an old worn out tent. They got over there one afternoon, and I don't know how many they had from Cocoa Beach under that tent, and something happened. The elephants started misbehaving, and what have you, and the first thing I knew that tent had fallen down and covered up most of those people in Cocoa Beach.

[00:56:00]

We had a big laugh over that.

Rowena: What about that donkey at the ball game we went to one night?

Nancy: Donkey ball game?

Rowena: Donkey baseball game.

Oliver: I don't remember too much about that.

Rowena: I think you had to be up on it.

Oliver: I remember the elephants better.

Nancy: Did circuses come through on a regular basis?

[00:57:00]

Oliver: Not too much.

Nancy: Different kinds of tent shows?

Oliver: Tent shows. The Shriners would put on a big show every now and then. We had a good time there. I'm a Shriner. I enjoyed my work very much. They liked a good time too. If you see a Shriner, they're going to have a good time before they leave.

Nancy: I guess they used to have movies in Cocoa.

Oliver: Oh, yes, they had movies. Fred Bryan, he's the one that built our city theater house there in Cocoa. They had a nice theater there and he built it. He's the one that owned the ice plant in Cocoa. Made ice for the people in town.

Nancy: Were there silent movies there too?

[00:58:00]

Oliver: Yeah, both kinds.

Nancy: Did you ever see the silent movies there?

Oliver: Some, once in a while.

Nancy: Did it really cost a nickel to get in?

Oliver: I don't recall how much it cost.

Rowena: Didn't Bob run the theater?

Oliver: It was Pop Bryan.

Rowena: Oh, I thought [inaudible 00:58:22].

Nancy: What would it be like, you walk in, were there benches or seats?

Oliver: You would go up to the window like this one here and get your ticket from the window.

Go on in, find your seat where you want to sit down.

Nancy: Someone told me sometimes it was cooler in the theaters.

Oliver: It was, it was cool.

Rowena: Did they have popcorn?

Oliver: They had popcorn.

Nancy: Okay, I think we're near the end of this tape.

Oliver: Did you get that ready though?

[00:59:00]

Nancy: Tell us what we're looking at in this picture.

Camera man: Okay, Will you tell us what this picture is?

Nancy: Describe what we see.

Oliver: You're seeing Cocoa Beach in 1926, I'll put it that way, start with. What you see along here, you see the ocean here, and you see the ,look like, seashells right here because people would go down on the beach and get shells, take them out so they can make vases and things like that out of them. That's what you see there. Up here you see the old Cocoa Beach Casino, and under there the foundation after the hurricane, they came in and remodeled it. They had to come in and rework it or else it would have been dangerous for the people that used it.

[01:00:00]

Camera man: The beach looks wider there than it is now.

Oliver: It is, it looks much wider.

Nancy: The hurricane took away some of the beach.

Oliver: Took away some of the beach and also caused almost, up here at this place where you see the casino ...

Camera man: What year was that hurricane?

Oliver: About 1926, I would say.

Nancy: Right behind the casino would have been the old A1A road. What was it made out of?