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

Nancy Yasecko: Oral history video project. An interview with Edward Poe, Titusville, Florida, March 30, 1995. Interviewer Nancy Yasecko [00:00:10], cameraman Robert Gilbert [00:00:12], camera Sony DXCM-7, recorder Sony BBW-35. Copyright Brevard County Historical Commission 1995.

Nancy Yasecko: The first thing we'd like to do is have you tell us your name and when and [00:00:30] where you were born.

Edward Poe: My name is Edward Poe. I was born in Albany, New York August 26, 1918.

Nancy Yasecko: And when did you come to Brevard County?

Edward Poe: Well, my family, mother and father, decided to come down here shortly after the armistice of World War I and we took a nice steamship ride down, on Clyde-Mallory from New York to Jacksonville and arrived just before Christmas of 1918.

[00:01:00] I don't remember much about the voyage, but they tell me I was the only that did not get seasick. It was quite rough and they just opened the bottom bureau drawer and put me in it. So I came through in very fine fashion.

Nancy Yasecko: So all your growing up years were here, in this area?

Edward Poe: That's correct.

Nancy Yasecko: What was it like when you were a kid?

Edward Poe: Well, fighting mosquitoes was a big part of the time. And of course, we didn't have [00:01:30] playgrounds and such so we had to really improvise and develop our own things. Baseball in the street was a very popular game. You had to watch for cars though, but at that time they traveled rather slowly so it was not a real hazard. But to have playgrounds as we have now was just nonexisting at that time.

Nancy Yasecko: Where did your family settle?

Edward Poe: We settled right here in Titusville. My mother had a sister and her husband who came down here in about [00:02:00] 1912 from Cornell, New York. They were in the automobile business. I guess one of the first agencies here. I have no idea why my mother and father came because this was completely new to them. My mother was a schoolteacher, my father was a bookkeeper and a salesman and to come down to Titusville, a very frontier town, was--I just can't imagine them doing it. I can't understand why, but they did it.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). What kind of house [00:02:30] did they have when they came here?

Edward Poe: Well, houses were very primitive there and small. So, they probably built one or two new houses a year in this town. When they did, it was a groundbreaking ceremony. They were just really cracker style houses and no heating to speak of and of course no acoustical materials and so forth. They usually had a great big fireplace and you dressed in front of that fireplace in the morning and tried to stay warm. [00:03:00] It was just very, very primitive. I always remember it being cold. It's just the way it was at those times.

Nancy Yasecko: Now I would imagine that some people would think that it would be just too--too hot here.

Edward Poe: Well, you sort get use to it, I'm sure. We got acclimated. It was hot and the houses were built with what they considered cross ventilation. And you just had to have it in order to exist. And here on the east [00:03:30] coast we were fortunate, we usually had a southeast prevailing breeze in the summertime and that's what saved us. But mosquitoes were the real-- the biggest problem as I can remember as a kid and the cold in the wintertime. We just were not suited for it and not equipped to handle it.

Nancy Yasecko: Probably didn't have heavy winter clothes?

Edward Poe: No. And all mine were hand-me-downs. I was a little bit small for my age and I had a cousin who was a little bit older and bigger, so I got all his clothes. So, if he had warm clothes, [00:04:00] I had warm clothes. That's the way it was.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Edward Poe: I have two sisters who were born a little later in life. They're about seven and eight years younger than I am. And they were born here in Orlando. We were living in Orlando at that time, for just a short period of time.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). The big city.

Edward Poe: Yes, big city.

Nancy Yasecko: Compared to Titusville. The town wasn't very big.

Edward Poe: [00:04:30] No, it sure wasn't. I don't know how many people. There couldn't have been more than a thousand people here when we came here. U.S. 1 was a gravel road, oyster shell. And we lived right on the edge of the road and some of my recollections is the cattle drive that used to come very summer right down Garden Street, which is old U.S. 1. And in the summertime they would come and drive them across [00:05:00] the wooden bridge over to what we call Merritt Island where they probably burned the grass so they had fresh grass coming along. And that's a very memorable time.

They--our porch was sort of low to the ground and these cattle had great big menacing horns and they would come in and stick their neck about two or three feet over on that porch and shake their head try to get the flies off. Well, that scared a young fellow like me, I was about five or six at the [00:05:30] time.

Nancy Yasecko: That would be memorable.

Edward Poe: Sure was.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess they stopped doing that after a while.

Edward Poe: Yes, they did. They stopped them from doing it. But that was sort of a summer event each year for a number of years. I think they did it in several other towns also. And it's quite a job to drive cattle across a wooden bridge

Nancy Yasecko: I wouldn't think it would be easy.

Edward Poe: You've got to do a lot of encouraging. And I can remember the whip cracking at that time. It was loud pops.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:06:00] Were there rails on the bridge?

Edward Poe: Uh, yes, there were rails on the bridge.

Nancy Yasecko: So they didn't fall in?

Edward Poe: No, no problem there. An interesting time in my life, just to deviate a bit. Before the bridge was built, or while it was being built, my father and mother had decided that they were going to take up a homestead. And at that time the government said well if you'll go over and prove up ten acres and put it in production, we'll give you 160 acres. So my mother was a schoolteacher, [00:06:30] and I don't know what my father was doing, but he decided to go over and clear up 10 acres of grubbing out the palmettos. The palmetto grows right on top of the ground with about a thousand roots. And you grubbed it out with a great big instrument called a grubbing hoe.

So the way we'd get there was we walk part way on the bridge and being a small fellow looking down about 10 or 15 feet in the water walking on these pylon. [00:07:00] Then we'd get into a fish launch and go the rest of the way over across the river. Then we'd get in a horse and wagon and go about five miles to the little town of Wilson, which had a post office there and a little grocery store. Then you trudged about three or four miles right through the swamp to your place where you were clearing.

We had just a one room shack, probably a 10 by 20 with a little porch on the front, but it was very, very [00:07:30] primitive. And my mother and I would go over in the summertime, I was about five then, to help and be company to him. So it was quite another memorable page in my life.

Nancy Yasecko: That was over on the island, Merritt Island?

Edward Poe: Yes, it's on Merritt Island. It's on the way over to the ocean here. It was about 11 miles across the peninsula here and it's just north of where now they shoot the missiles from. There were a number of other homesteaders over there. Probably [00:08:00] 20 or 30

families over there that were homesteading at the same time and clearing up this land because there was just nothing much to do here.

Nancy Yasecko: Woah, that was hard work.

Edward Poe: Very, very hard. Again, why a man who was a bookkeeper and a salesman would undertake something like that I have no idea.

Nancy Yasecko: Did he get the 10 acres cleared?

Edward Poe: Yes, we proved it up, we planted potatoes and got deed to the 160 acres and we kept it up until the government [00:08:30] came along and said we sort of need this now and we'd like to take it from you. So, of course, they paid us for it.

Nancy Yasecko: Hardly paid for the effort of pulling out those-

Edward Poe: No.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you work with the grub hoe too or were you too little?

Edward Poe: I did. You had to--once you grubbed these roots out, you stacked 'em up in a big pile, pyramid, and you would let them dry and when they were dry then you'd burn them. So we--he did that for about two summers. Of course, there wasn't much to do here at that time. It was [00:09:00] very, very sparse business. Citrus and fishing was the only thing here.

We went--then went up in the north end of the county and developed a citrus grove. Again about 20 acres, which you have to cut down the palmettos-- big palmetto trees and clear all by hand, it was all done by hand. And we did that for another summer. So that's my very early days in the agriculture enterprise [00:09:28].

Nancy Yasecko: Well, you [00:09:30] must have run into some snakes and varmints.

Edward Poe: We had a very interestin' encounter with about a 12 foot rattlesnake one day. My mother and I was walking through the clearing and the rattlesnake went right in front of us. And 'course, it headed right for the pile of scrubs, palmettos and it took quite a little bit of work to find and kill that snake. But it had 14 buttons on it, so it was a good size rattlesnake.

Nancy Yasecko: You never got bit?

Edward Poe: No, stayed [00:10:00] away from 'em. Up in the north end of the Hammock, the thing that was interesting, they had drainage ditches and when the ditches were dry the hogs, the wild hogs would run up and down those drainage ditches. You could hear 'em coming about 100 miles--yards away because they rustled the palmettos. Of course immediately, the kids, we got out of that ditch. They came through like a freight train.

Nancy Yasecko: They were mean.

Edward Poe: Very mean. Very vicious. Big ones, wild.

Nancy Yasecko: Nothing to do.

Edward Poe: Big tusks [00:10:30] on ‘em.

Nancy Yasecko: Get out of the way.

Edward Poe: That’s right.

Nancy Yasecko: Wouldn’t want to tangle—well, did you ever go hunting?

Edward Poe: We used to hunt and I used to hunt before the war, duck hunting here. And we had very good duck hunting over on the east shore of the river, Banana Creek, which goes up to the missile now and Moore's Creek. And we were in the grocery business at that time and I had worked from about 6:00 in the morning until about 11 or 12 at night. Then we'd get into a canoe and paddle over there [00:11:00] and hunt all day and then paddle back. Needless to say, I was a little bit pooped when I came home.

Nancy Yasecko: But you brought some ducks with you?

Edward Poe: Yes. Hunting was very good. Very fine.

Nancy Yasecko: You were a little guy when you were going over thee with your dad?

Edward Poe: Yes, I was sort of small for my age. And I remember one day we went across the river and it started to rain. When we got to the other side, my mother covered me up with a Sears and Roebuck catalog she just [00:11:30] received. So we went to this Wilson store and this gentleman had five nice looking daughters and I was of course soaking wet and my mother started to change me right out there in the middle of the floor. And I said, "Not here.” So I said, “Take me back behind the mail bags," which she did to change me.

But once we'd get to Wilson's store and then you had to walk right through the scrub marsh and I being small and the mosquitoes being fierce, they put me in what's called a gunny sack, a croker [00:12:00] sack, which you can breathe through, but they just put me in there and tied the top and put it over his shoulder and that's how I rode to the camp.

Nancy Yasecko: What else would you do to deal with the mosquitoes?

Edward Poe: Another interesting thing is we would make switches out of palmettos, and you would shred them down and they'd be about three feet long, and you left about a foot for the handle, and you kept that switch moving constantly right around your shoulders. Everyone else had a great big hat on, and [00:12:30] you put netting down over that, you

wore boots and you wore long sleeve shirts and sometimes gloves on your hand. Because they would just sing around your head and just buzz, and they were just miserable.

Nancy Yasecko: Were they so many you could see them?

Edward Poe: Oh, yes, they just swarmed, they swarmed. And another thing you had to do, about 5:00 in the afternoon you had to paint the screens with kerosene because what we called a sand fly, some [00:13:00] people call them a “no-see-um” [00:13:01], they would come out of the sand, and the last thing you did before you turned the lamp out at night was get a newspaper and kill mosquitoes in the room. If you didn't, they would just eat you up all night long. So, it was an evening procedure that you had to do.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you have a net over the area where you slept?

Edward Poe: We did sometimes, yes. You could put netting over your bed. And yes, you had to do that to get any sleep at all. [00:13:30] And you'd put sometimes put additional netting on the screens, but the wind would blow it and it'd tear and so forth, so it was sort of hard to keep in place. It was just a very arduous time in my young life.

Nancy Yasecko: I can imagine, that would just be awful. What was the transportation like?

Edward Poe: Well, very few cars. Later on my father bought a couple trucks, and we were in what we called the transfer [00:14:00] business, the hauling business. The roads still were gravel at that time and we would truck sand, coquina rock and also haul fish.

We had quite a fishing industry here and right at the foot of Main Street there was a dock going about 1200 feet out into the water, into the river, and on each side there was probably three or four fish houses. And the fishermen would bring their fish--their catch in the night into those places and wash [00:14:30] them and pack them. You packed them in barrels, wooden barrels, which were made here in Titusville, and you packed them in ice. Then we would come on our Model T flatbed truck and pick up these many barrels of fish and take them over to the railroad station where they had built a regular platform there where you could put the fish inside and then when the trains came through that night they loaded it on the trains.

But, it was nothing for us to [00:15:00] haul 40-50 barrels of fish over there every day.

Nancy Yasecko: You're kidding? Those are big barrels. How big would they be?

Edward Poe: They're about 100 pound barrels. And they stand about three, three and a half feet high. And you pack them with a layer of fish, a layer of ice and another layer of fish and then you put a head in it. The barrels were made right here in Titusville, right behind the old post office. A family by the name of Scobie, [phonetic 00:15:25] George Scobie, Jr. Had a barrel factory there. Plus he had a very good [00:15:30] size fish house out on the pier and sold a lot of the netting and various supplies to various fishermen.

But there were probably five, six, seven fish houses along this pier, and it was just an old wooden dock with no rails on it at all, and it sort of scared me as a young fellow going out there to pick up these barrels of fish because you very little turning around room and driving a Model-T truck is not the easiest thing to do. So, that was my first driving experience. [00:16:00] Later on I could handle it all right, but in the beginning I was-- it was quite scary.

Nancy Yasecko: Where would they ship the fish off to?

Edward Poe: Most of them went to New York and this is our mullet. That was the mainstay. They caught some trout, of course, but mullet was the biggie. You had--the launches would go out every afternoon about 4:00 with about three other skiffs behind it and they'd put out the nets during the night, and they'd come in about 5:00 or 6:00 in the morning and process [00:16:30] the fish and 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon it was ready for us to pickup to take to the freight station.

Nancy Yasecko: That's a lot of fish.

Edward Poe: That's right. Shipped a lot of 'em. And that stayed very good until about '35 and then many of our fishing families sort of moved down to Sebastian. They have an inlet down there, and I don't think ours were fished out, but it was just more prevalent down there. And they could catch different species of fish. Also, they could go outside and fish. So I [00:17:00] would say 90 percent of our fishing families moved out about that time.

Nancy Yasecko: There were other boats that were on the water though.

Edward Poe: Oh, yes, you had some, you had a few. Not many. Our boat basin was constructed by WPA in 1935. Going back a little bit, in about 1925 a firm came up here from Miami and started to dredge out [00:17:30] in the river and put up a bulkhead line and they pumped in about three different spoil islands, but they weren't contiguous, they were sort of separated. About that time the Florida land boom as we knew it collapsed and mysteriously this one night about midnight the dredge burned and sank. And we used that for a very fine fishing spot for many, many years right off what's our bulkhead line now.

Nancy Yasecko: So you'd go fishing for fun?

Edward Poe: I never have fished much, [00:18:00] no. I don't why. Maybe I didn't catch many, so I just wasn't too encouraged. But the boat basin was a result of these little spoil islands. During the WPA they came in with the funds and a local man, and again, we hauled some of the coquina rock there, which lines the exterior, outline of the basin and that's when it was dug.

And also, at that time they built the overhead pass, so they excavated for the overhead pass [00:18:30] across the railroad track for U.S. 1. So that made a deep hole out there and thus became the yacht basin. We had a few boats here, but not many.

Nancy Yasecko: The railroad was used a lot for-

Edward Poe: Yes, the railroad was the main thing. And Florida East Coast ran the passenger trains as well as freight. And you had them going through here all the time of the day and into the night. You were well aware of the trains going through here at night. You sure were.

[00:19:00] Roads slowly got better, and the U.S. 1 was paved after a bit of course. An even trucking was just beginning in about the late '30s hauling citrus and so forth. So, trucking was just sort of beginning as I recall.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Well, the roads were just kind of ruts weren't they?

Edward Poe: Well, they were originally although oyster shell makes a pretty good base and that's what they were. A little [00:19:30] dusty, but they were sort of hard, and you'd have to scrape them to keep those little ripples out of them. That's what we had over at the beach for many, many years though, I think after World War II, before we got the road paved over the ocean. It was quite an experience to get on that rutted road. And you'd have to--to keep it from rattling your teeth out, you had to get up to 40-50 miles an hour just to stay on top of the ripples.

Nancy Yasecko: Were there [00:20:00] enough ruts that a car could come towards you and pass you? Or did you have to-

Edward Poe: Yeah, you slowed down and that's when your teeth really jarred because if you ever lost control, it's sort of like being on a wet pavement. If you didn't have control of your car at 40-50 miles an hour, because you were bouncing around just on the top of these ripples. As I call them ripples.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah. That's like the-- I heard the word [00:20:24] "washboard." Is that the same thing?

Edward Poe: Yes, that's the washboard, right. You'd probably experience those shaking of your teeth on a washboard. [00:20:30] That's what this was. And it was about 25 miles over to the beach we went to at De Soto Beach are where the missiles are fired from now. So that was a very hazardous ride.

Nancy Yasecko: Why would you go over to the beach?

Edward Poe: Well, it was a very fine bathing beach. Desoto was an excellent beach. A big flat beach and there were several houses over there. Some people from Orlando had built a couple houses. There was a casino over there, a good size casino. [00:21:00] So, that's where we went for our recreation. We did not have a swimming pool here at all, and the closest one was down in Rockledge, which we would take maybe once a month to go to, either that or go to the ocean. But Desoto beach was just a fine bathing beach and that's where we went.

Nancy Yasecko: I've heard other folks refer to casinos. What do you mean by a casino?

Edward Poe: Well, it was a picnic area. It was covered, you had your bath houses there and so forth and showers, [00:21:30] and you could go and have a big picnic there and so forth to get in out of the sun and mosquitoes.

Nancy Yasecko: Did they sell food there too?

Edward Poe: Yes, they had. So it was quite active there for quite a few years.

Nancy Yasecko: Sounds like a lot of fun?

Edward Poe: It was.

Nancy Yasecko: You were saying there was a golf course over here.

Edward Poe: We had a golf course called Whispering Hills built back in the boom time again. And the favorite uniform at that time was, of course, long socks [00:22:00] and knickers. My father was in the real estate business in about '24, '25, '26, so that was the gathering spot, the social center. It was a very nice club. And we did have some people who would come over from Orlando to visit, there could have been a little gambling going on, I don't know for sure, but it was a very nice spot, and it's still here.

Of course the golf course has been closed up, and the Baptist [00:22:30] church has bought it and it has classrooms in it and so forth. So it's still serving the community very well.

Nancy Yasecko: It sounds like your dad was involved in all kinds of stuff.

Edward Poe: Back then you had to do a number of things. From clearing land, to planting an orange grove, trucking business. We got into the chicken raisin' business. We probably had a 1,000 chickens at one time and dressed and sold the poultry to the stores here. Eggs. You just had to do [00:23:00] most anything during the depression days to try and put two nickels together. Mother still taught school and my dad sort of liked real estate for some reason.

Of course when the bubble broke with the Florida land boom, why we were left with several pieces of property. And ironically we just sold the last one in Indialantic the other day for much more than we paid for it, but prices were very high then. [00:23:30] In the land boom your neighbors knew you were going to pay for the piece of property because you thought you could sell it the next day for more money. So everything was done on paper.

So, the only piece of property we have left is a piece out at South Lake. We wound up with four or five and we struggled to pay for 'em too. Taxes. Of course at one time, nobody could pay taxes here. That's another story in the life of Titusville in the development period.

In '25 [00:24:00] they bonded themselves quite heavily to put in sewers and paved roads. Up until then we just didn't have them in the town except U.S. 1. So during the depression days people could not pay the taxes, the bonding company sort of foreclosed on the city, and they kept tryin' and tryin'. Of course, later on we got more people in here and that was the only way we were able to pay these bonds off it was newcomers. We just had to have people, [00:24:30] but we had to struggle there for about 10 years. Many other Florida towns had the same thing.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell me a little bit more about the boom. What was really going on there?

Edward Poe: Well, for some reason Florida land just got to be the hottest thing in the world, and the people would come down from, mostly from the Ohio, the Illinois area, and they'd come to Miami. They would bus them from there up to here and meet in Melbourne, Indialantic. Probably 30-40 people on a bus and then, I guess, I didn't [00:25:00] observe any of this, of course, but the real estate people came out and started entertaining these people and taking them around and showing them various properties. But that happened in many places in Florida, in Miami also, but prices were phenomenal.

Nancy Yasecko: Give me an example, if you can.

Edward Poe: Pardon.

Nancy Yasecko: Can you give me an example?

Edward Poe: Yes, I would say probably a lot sold for $30,000-$40,000 where at one time before that it would probably been eight or nine, six, seven eight [00:25:30] thousand. So they really boomed the prices up. And as I say, we probably got a little more than what we paid for this lot after 50-60 years, but not much more. It's so hard to determine what you did pay for it because at that time all you put on your deed was one dollar and other consideration. There was no stamp so you could not-- I had no way of proving what our parents had paid for this property.

And there happened to be one [00:26:00] old real estate operator in Melbourne, who's now deceased, Elton Hall, and I had to get letters from him as to what approximately the value was of what my parents paid for the property when we went to sell it. So, it was another little hassle.

Nancy Yasecko: Boy that's something. So there was a big boom and then that bust and that came with the depression.

Edward Poe: Yes. About '28, '29 when the stock market crashed.

Nancy Yasecko: Did the banks close here?

Edward Poe: The banks closed, all the banks closed. [00:26:30] And it stayed that way until about '35. And we got a reopening of a bank here. Up until that time you had to take your money

down to Cocoa Barnett Bank, it was about the only one that stayed afloat. So you went down there once a week with your cash in hand and made a deposit.

But in '35 we had a gentleman came in and started a local bank with local people subscribing. Up until then it was pretty, pretty [00:27:00] pathetic. Just nobody had money, very few cars, very few people had telephones. It was a very quiet little town.

Nancy Yasecko: I understand that people did a lot of bartering.

Edward Poe: Yes, you sure did. My new second wife here, her father was a doctor here, and he had to barter for his fees, of course, back at that time. Saturday night was a big night. Everybody came to town on Saturday night. There [00:27:30] were not too many parking places, so people would actually come in the morning and park their cars and walk home so we could come back at night, sit in their cars and visit with their neighbors. And at that time we kept our grocery stores open until about 11:00 at night and some people didn't do their shopping until they got out of the second movie. So it made a long day.

Nancy Yasecko: That's a different picture than you'd imagine.

Edward Poe: Yes. Before I got out of high school my parents had [00:28:00] bought a small store, grocery store, and through hard work and so forth why we developed a pretty good size store. There were about three or four competitors here, but the main one was a Piggly-Wiggly across the street from us and an A&P across the street from us. We were on one side and the two chains on the other and we were only about 200 feet apart, so we had quite a little battle going on.

Consequently, we had to sell for credit because [00:28:30] they sold for cash and that's the only way we could get the business. But I guess it worked out right because you didn't make much money because all your money was on the books. And you had to work about 80 hours a week so if you had money, it'd worried you, you wouldn't have time to spend it, so it balanced out.

Nancy Yasecko: Were there dances and things on Saturday night?

Edward Poe: Yes. They had quite a few here. Unfortunately, I was not a dancer, so I did not—I sorta missed that fun, but they had [00:29:00] quite a few here. They had a Pythian Sisters [00:29:03] Hall, which seemed to be the places where they held these dances and then we had another place down at Clarks Corner, which is State Road 50 and U.S. 1 intersection. We had a very nice dance hall and a restroom on the east side of the river and two service stations on the west side and that happened to be the bus station for many, many years so it was quite a gathering spot down there.

Also, later on we had just an outdoor swimming [00:29:30] pool, hole down there you might call it. It was not—it was just a diked up area. That's where we kids swam.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah. What about on holidays? What about July 4th?

Edward Poe: July 4th was a big time, and I got involved in the Jaycees a little later on in life, and we always sponsored and put on the 4th of July parade, but that was a rather hazardous undertaking. The [00:30:00] last time we did it we bought a lot of trinkets to sell and Bless Pat [00:30:05] it just rained all that day. So we had a financial loss as a result of that.

We did have horse races out on, again, on the Sand Point area where this land had been filled in following 1935 that connected all these islands. We had a baseball field out there. We had semi-pro baseball here.

Nancy Yasecko: Oh, tell me about that.

Edward Poe: It was quite prominent in this part of the area, Cocoa-Melbourne-New Smyrna-Orlando, [00:30:30] Sanford all had semi-pro baseball teams. So that was the big, you might say entertainment, and the 4th we would have the horse races out there. These were cow ponies that came in off the marsh.

Nancy Yasecko: Local horses?

Edward Poe: Yes. They even tried to have a couple stock car races, but that was not too successful.

Nancy Yasecko: It's hard to imagine these cowboys coming in.

Edward Poe: Yes, they came in from the Kissimmee area between here and Orlando. [00:31:00] There was quite a bit of cattle out there. And around Melbourne there was a lot of cattle. So it would be nothing for 40, 50 or 100 of them to come here for the 4th and of course we always had the horses in the parade. Last thing.

Nancy Yasecko: The horses were the last, the big finish.

Edward Poe: The finale.

Nancy Yasecko: What about other--did you have something at May Day?

Edward Poe: Not much at May Day. We [00:31:30] had a little bit in school May Day as I recall, but it wasn't a big day down here, no.

Nancy Yasecko: The 4th was the big community day?

Edward Poe: The 4th was a biggie. It sure was.

Nancy Yasecko: Let's talk a little bit about school. When you went to school, what was your school day like?

Edward Poe: Well, I guess I was very poor student. I think they added my grades together rather than averaging so I could get out. I was interested in sports and many other things and I got involved in basketball while [00:32:00] I was in school. I guess I didn't notice girls ‘til I got

quite a bit older, so I must have been sort of sports minded up until I got out of high school.

We started a course in the downtown where the City Hall is now and what we called the elementary school. Then during the time we were there about '27 they built the high school and then moved the last seven grades down to the high school. I guess I went down there in about the third or fourth year it was open.

It was a very nice [00:32:30] building. Again, about all we had in the way of sports was the football. I don't think we had baseball until my last year in high school. We were just sort of strapped at this time. Did not have lights on the football field. A few years later they lighted the field with some old coal buckets they brought down here from Kentucky. We had a coach here from Kentucky, so he went up there and got a lot of coal buckets and brought 'em down here, and they converted those into football [00:33:00] lights, so that was our first lighted field. It was after I got out of school.

A little bit of intermural, but not much. No tennis at all. Our first tennis court was built here, that is a public court, in about '35, again, by WPA. So up until then we just didn't know what tennis was all about.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, y'all were country folks.

Edward Poe: Very much so. Still a very small town, probably 2500 to 3000 people [00:33:30] with citrus and fishing being the mainstay. We had no tourist business to speak of. Everybody went through here on their way to Miami that's when we got to see them.

Nancy Yasecko: You said your dad had planted a citrus grove. Did you ever work that?

Edward Poe: He planted it and then he later sold it. So we really didn't keep it too long.

Nancy Yasecko: It's a lot of work.

Edward Poe: A lot of work, and he just went off into other endeavors and so forth and got involved in other real estate activities.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:34:00] Okay. You told us about your grocery store downtown. What other businesses do you recall that were downtown?

Edward Poe: Well, right across the street from us was a feed store where they sold all the feed for the various people around here. We had a couple of dry goods stores down next the bank. We had a very fine Greek family here who ran a restaurant and bar, Karentinas [phonetic 00:34:29] family, for [00:34:30] many years. So they were all small merchants. We had some dry goods stores. They were just small, small stores. Nothing large at all.

Lot of it was on credit, and the one Jewish gentleman had a very favorite saying I still think about. He says, "You don't need to pay me now, just give me your check." Which is the same as saying, "Gee, I'll give you a slow [00:35:00] note. Don't bank until 30 days from

now." Anyway, they were just very honorable people back here. Small business people, small in size.

Nancy Yasecko: There was a theater, I guess, a movie theater?

Edward Poe: We had a theater. Yes, we had one theater in town and later on we had a second one. Didn't last too long, but the Magnolia Theater, and before that we had, yes, let me mention, we had a Van Croix Theater. It started back about in '23, '24, [00:35:30] and this is when you had an organist play the music. And we lived right next door to this lady who was the organist there, and she had a rather attractive daughter too.

But they also built one in Melbourne, which they ran for quite a few years. But that was the big thing here going to Saturday afternoon matinee see Tom Mix and Tom Holt and some of those boys.

Nancy Yasecko: Bunch of kids go and meet there?

Edward Poe: Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative). Saturday [00:36:00] matinee was a biggie.

Nancy Yasecko: Your parents pretty much just let you run loose didn't they?

Edward Poe: Yes, yeah, pretty much so. No curfew or anything like that. There was no misbehaving to speak of.

Nancy Yasecko: You never got in trouble?

Edward Poe: No, not much, no. Not that I can recall that I got caught at anyway.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:36:30] Let's see, what about doctors?

Edward Poe: Well, we had several doctors here. Of course my second wife's father was a new doctor here. I had an interesting experience with him.

Nancy Yasecko: What was his name?

Edward Poe: I fell out of a tree when I was about five years old. It seems I didn't like to keep my feet on the ground and my mother warned me to come down out of that tree you're going to fall. I said, "I won't fall." Well, sure enough I fell, fell on a lot of broken bottles. Broke my [00:37:00] arm and the arm was sticking up about an inch this way and the blood's coming down out of my chin and I'm scared to death.

They took me to Jeanette McLeod's father, Dr. McLeod, Bob McLeod, and he tells an interesting thing. Says, "I couldn't stop him from crying." He said, "Is the arm hurting you?" "No, the arms not hurting me. The only reason I'm crying I'm afraid of the spanking I'm going to get when I get home."

Nancy Yasecko: Did you get a spanking when you got home?

Edward Poe: Yes, I'm sure I got one. I'm sure I got one. [00:37:30] That's my earliest recollection of a doctor. We had another interesting little situation when you wanted your tonsils out they had a traveling doctor come here. And they'd get about 30 or 40 of us up on the top floor of the elementary school, this big gymnasium up there and of course it meant our dads had to stay with us all night while we were up there hooping and trying to get water down. They'd do about 25 of us at a time, once a year when they came through here. Sort of like they do cattle, I guess, [00:38:00] and removed our tonsils.

So that's another experience I remember all night long.

Nancy Yasecko: Oh, man. That must have been miserable.

Edward Poe: Yes. We had several other doctors here too. Jeanette's father died when he was very young. We had a gentleman named Dr. Potoff [phonetics 00:38:19] and a Dr. Adams here. Dr. Adams had a big family. Those were about the only two that were here and they were here quite a while.

Nancy Yasecko: Was there as [00:38:30] dentist?

Edward Poe: Yes. We had a dentist, a Dr. Lichtenberger who had been here for many years. He practiced up until just a few years back when he passed away.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you ever have to go see him?

Edward Poe: Yes, quite a few times, quite a few times. My favorite trip was after I went to the dentist, I'd go to the dime store and buy caramel candy. I guess I wanted to test the fillings because I'd eat that caramel candy. Sure enough none of them ever came out. But it was not a very [00:39:00] pleasant experience up in that dentist chair.

Nancy Yasecko: Where was his office?

Edward Poe: Right up in the center of town. It was right up over where Nevin's Fruit Company had their office. Right up over the Rexall Drug Store. Which a Dr. Spell, a pharmacist, came here many years ago and built a Rexall Drug Store right down in town. A two story building and that seemed to be where the doctors sort of had their offices most of the time.

Nancy Yasecko: That makes sense.

Edward Poe: Yeah, right close by. Go downstairs and get your prescription filled.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:39:30] Prescription filled. Well, let's see now, in Titusville it was the county seat.

Edward Poe: Yes, it was. Of course, they had some interesting trials here back in the old days the courthouse being here and this is where all the murder cases were tried. And we had several back in those days.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you ever go watch?

Edward Poe: Oh, yes, I went up there several times. It was quite interesting. [00:40:00] We had several very fine attorneys here at that time. One was called Colonel Noah Butts [00:40:08] from Cocoa and he was quite a barrister. He could sort of pound the counter there. He was very interesting to watch.

Nancy Yasecko: It'd be high drama?

Edward Poe: Yes, yes.

Nancy Yasecko: I've heard it said he never lost a case. Do you think that--?

Edward Poe: Well, I doubt it. I never heard, but I didn't keep up with it that closely. But he was quite a famous--[00:40:30] a well-known attorney. He usually took the murder cases, I think, probably paid more money.

Nancy Yasecko: Would people then from town, if it was a good case, they'd go up?

Edward Poe: Yes, that's right. If they were interested in it or if they had a lot of kinfolks. There was one case that drew a lot of attention because she had seven sons, I think, and there was a lot of people who went to listen to that case.

Nancy Yasecko: What was it about?

Edward Poe: She had shot her husband and killed [00:41:00] him.

Nancy Yasecko: Uh-huh.

Edward Poe: An he sort of mistreated her and I guess she had had enough of it so she decided to end it all. But she was set free.

Nancy Yasecko: Was she?

Edward Poe: Evidently she had very good cause. His reputation was not too good. She did raise seven real fine sons. Just excellent citizens.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you remember any other particular cases?

Edward Poe: No, not off hand I don't. That's probably the one I remember [00:41:30] the most.

Nancy Yasecko: What about--Let's see there were county commissioners and all kinds of county work going on.

Edward Poe: Yes, we did. We had of course back then you didn't have aid to children or families or something like that so the county commissioners was the one that doled out the money and the help. We had a very interesting gentleman here who was our county commissioner and somebody go up and plead their case [00:42:00] and he'd just scribble on a paper bag or piece of paper and say take this down to Poe's Grocery and get your

groceries. And that's about what they helped them with is groceries, but it was quite common and that's the way it was handled.

And we had a commissioner up in Mims who sort of handled things in that area. Each commissioner sort of took care of his own district back then.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you remember the commissioner from your area?

Edward Poe: Yes, his name was W. C. Ward Klingensmith. And he was commissioner for quite a while. Incidentally [00:42:30] we sold our grove up in Hammock to him and it's still bearing fruit. And the other commissioner for a long time was Arthur Dunn from Mims. After Klingensmith we had a fellow named Carpenter, Roy Carpenter, who was excellent at it too.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell me what were the elections like?

Edward Poe: Well, they were pretty exciting times here. And always a lot of politicking. You would gather around the Star Advocate [00:43:00] office at night because that's where the votes came in, the count came in. And so you'd maybe have 100, 200 people down there peering in the window. Bob Hudson and his father would post them on a great big card in the window and so forth. So you'd stay there until about midnight until you knew who had won or lost. But it was very interesting times. It sure was.

And it was also interesting when the governor, a gentleman running for governorship would come through here. [00:43:30] They would always makes speeches downtown and attract big crowds and make big promises and so forth. So, it was quite exciting when it came to the political arena.

Nancy Yasecko: Mostly Democrats, I guess?

Edward Poe: Yes. There was no Republicans in the territory. And it was not until quite a few years later that Republicans came to make a show and now they're the dominant force pretty much. So, it's interesting to see how these things do change. Because [00:44:00] nobody registered as a Republican then because you couldn't vote in the primaries, you just couldn't participate because there was no primaries. So you didn't have much of a voice, you could only vote in the final election. So consequently everybody went as Democrat.

Nancy Yasecko: So the primaries were really the election.

Edward Poe: Pretty much the election, they sure were. They were pretty hard fought. Lot of political speeches in the various towns and so forth.

Nancy Yasecko: And once a commissioner would get [00:44:30] elected ...

Edward Poe: They usually stayed in for some time and fortunately, I guess, we had good commissioners. They were easy to talk to, of course they knew everybody and we didn't

have big problems back then like we do here in recent years so they would usually serve for quite a few years.

I know Mr. Arthur Dunn at Mims must have been in there 30-40 years. And a gentleman named Mr. Fortenberry [00:44:55] over on Merritt Island was in there for many years. As I say, they just didn't [00:45:00] change much back then. Sure didn't.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, you get to know your commissioner, know how to talk to him.

Edward Poe: Yes. You just knew him as one-on-one basis and you could get his ear without any trouble. And they were very well aware of what the situation was because all of them had grown up here, been here for many years. And I guess roads were a big thing, especially up in the groves, because you had to have roads and you had to have good drainage so your commissioner had to be well attuned [00:45:30] to needs and had to supply those needs in order to stay in office. That was prevalent in Titusville as well as the Mims area.

Nancy Yasecko: Drainage made a big difference.

Edward Poe: Yes.

Nancy Yasecko: That started in the 20s or 30s and I guess the stuff wasn't finished, they weren't finished with it until the 50s sometime.

Edward Poe: That's right.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah. Okay. We'll just go back a little bit and talk about the railroad.

Edward Poe: Okay.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:46:00] It was an important traveling-

Edward Poe: Yes, it was a real cog here. And if you wanted to go Miami or anyplace like that, or Jacksonville, you had to go on the rail. This was before truck traffic amounted to anything. We were probably one of the first truck agents here for a truck line and again we still had our transfer business. This is when I'm still in school. We had a warehouse and they would drop the merchandise off and we'd [00:46:30] deliver it, but the trucking was very small at that period of time.

So the railroad was a biggie. And, of course, we had a lot of citrus that was shipped out of here. And it all went by rail at that time. Most of it went to the northern auction markets and that was the predominant way of disposing or selling of your fruit was putting it on auction in New York or Philadelphia or Baltimore. So, you took what they gave you [00:47:00] in a way because you couldn't do otherwise. You couldn't ship it back, you had too many charges against it already. But the railroad was a real key at that period of time in the early citrus days and in the fish industry too.

Nancy Yasecko: And passenger service?

Edward Poe: Pardon.

Nancy Yasecko: And passenger service.

Edward Poe: Passenger service, yes.

Nancy Yasecko: And I guess there was an accident with-

Edward Poe: We had a very bad train wreck at one time back in the early '30s there. We had [00:47:30] a train south bound, FEC passenger derailed right above the overhead pass here and turned over. Of course all us school kids just sort of either let us out or we skipped hooky and we went up there to see what was going on. It was right in the middle of daytime. It was quite a bad wreck, several people were killed and so forth. I guess the train was just going too fast for the curve and rolled over.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). When the circus came to town?

Edward Poe: Well, we had the circus come through here [00:48:00] every once in a while and Evangelist, they were always interested in selling the snake medicine and so forth. And they set up right downtown in a vacant lot on Broad Street. Lot of people went to hear the evangelist and buy some of his wares and so forth. And we did have the circus and the carnivals like every other town.

Nancy Yasecko: Would the carnival and circus come on the rails too?

Edward Poe: Yes, uh-huh. The big circus usually went to Orlando, [00:48:30] but we did have the small ones would come through here. But Orlando drew the Ringling Brothers and so forth and that's where a lot of people, of course, would go over there watch those. We happened to be living in Orlando at one time when Ringling Brothers came there and father took me down there to watch the elephants put the tents up and so forth. And they always had a big parade right down through the main part of Orlando with the wild animals and so forth in their carts.

Nancy Yasecko: The tourist industry?

Edward Poe: The tourist [00:49:00] industry was very quiet back then. We just didn't have anything to attract in my opinion. We had a few tourist courts they called them back then. They were just individual cabins, cottages and we had a few tourists but not many. It was just nonexistent almost. For some reason they went on to Miami and Palm Beach and places like that. Cocoa Beach might have had a few, but I don't [00:49:30] think they had a whole lot of them.

Daytona was a big tourist area and always has been. And they promoted it and they did a good job at it and they had facilities up there for them. We kids, later on when we wanted to go to the beach, we'd go to New Smyrna or Daytona because that's where the action was. And our beaches sort of played out by that time.

Nancy Yasecko: All you could do was go swimming.

Edward Poe: That's right.

Nancy Yasecko: The big changes here all seem to come after World War II. What was your involvement?

Edward Poe: [00:50:00] Well, I went into the service in October 1, 1941, just before Pearl Harbor, and didn't get out until October--November of '45. And of course during the war they did a lot of good things here. One of the biggest and most important thing was they started to eradicate mosquitoes. And this was done through the efforts of the navy over at the Banana [00:50:30] River Naval Air Station, which is on Cocoa Beach. And they really fought the mosquitoes and it started the beginning of the spray program and that started to eliminate mosquitoes and that changed the whole environment here.

People came out of the woodwork, you could go outdoors and enjoy life. I think that was the beginning maybe of the tourists coming into the area and noting what we had here and the fine weather, but it was not 'til after the war, [00:51:00] World War II.

And we didn't really grow much in the beginning of the missile industry. I had moved to Vero Beach for a short period of time after we had sold our grocery store. I was looking for a new livelihood so I moved back here in 1957 and at that time we still only had about 3500 people in Titusville. Probably about 60,000 people in the whole county and we [00:51:30] got into the Burger King business.

This is when the construction worker just started to come in then. They would come in they would be people with young families, engineers. First, of course, is construction people, then came the engineers with the young families. It was just a godsend to our Burger King business because they were prime customers. They had the money, they didn't want to cook all the time and they had kids that wanted to have burgers.

[00:52:00] So, that's when we really began to grow in about '57, '58 or '59 and our population began to multiply. We couldn't keep up with roads, we couldn't keep up with the schools. It was when portable school buildings became into wide use. So, that's when we really began to take off and it's just been a wonderful thing for this area. The quality of the people who came in here, the well-educated, the engineers, and that type of people, [00:52:30] it's just been wonderful for us. For schools, for hospitals and all other things. Just added to our quality of life immensely.

Of course the mosquito problem is being eliminated all the time because the county got quite active in it after World War II. We had mosquito control set up and they impounded areas to keep the larva down, that was the [00:53:00] beginning of it in my estimation. I think you talk to Mr. Joe Wickham [00:53:04] he'll agree with ya. He was a commissioner at that time. But that changed the complexion of things.

Nancy Yasecko: And also World War II brought some little airports in here too.

Edward Poe: We had several airports. They developed one down in what they call Tico now and that was sort of a naval training place down there and that helped. Of course, you had several [00:53:30] of them in the vicinity around Sanford. This place. But the airplane traffic became more prevalent. We had a small airport at the north part of Titusville called Arthur Dunn Airport, which had been in existence for quite a while but didn't have much facilities there.

But again, after the World War II, you had these people come in who could afford planes and took up flying and it became-- And we had a flying school down at Tico at one time. Good friend of ours, Charlie Robershard [phonetic 00:54:00] [00:54:00] who was a naval pilot decided to develop a flying school. My first wife worked there in this little school and they did pretty good for about three or four years. But that was sort of the beginning I would say of the aviation in this area and the interest thereof.

Nancy Yasecko: There might have been a few planes around when you were a kid?

Edward Poe: Just a few. One time we had a very bad accident out at Arthur Dunn Airport and that was when a three engine [00:54:30] Stinson came into town and it happened to rain that night. And of course the airport did not drain just exactly right and as the plane attempted to take off it did not get quite high enough, the wheels caught in the water and just flipped right over.

Later on in my military life I ran into one of the gentleman that was on that plane. He would remember it very well. Titusville airport was prominent in his mind.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:55:00] Other things that changed around here, I mean the space program took away the beach.

Edward Poe: Yes. This is when they started to expand and condemn the land on the north end of the island up here when my mother sold her land or they condemned it and so forth. We lost our beach. Later one of our commissioners, Gene Roberts, who was quite a developer [00:55:30] and he bought a good size piece out at Fox Lake and developed that into a very fine park. Had a big pavilion out there, it's well equipped and it's used quite often for large functions.

That's where we hold our Cracker Day once a year and we have two to three thousand people gather there, last Sunday in October.

Nancy Yasecko: A nice cool time of year.

Edward Poe: Yes. No mosquitoes.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us about your little development project there.

Edward Poe: Well, it's a long story. [00:56:00] My parents had bought this piece of land right on U.S. 1 on the river, on the causeway, at Titusville in about 1943-'45. When I came home from the war at the end of '45 I said to myself, "This is where I'm going to make my fortune."

So I went down to Miami and bought an old dredge, which is a hydraulic dredge with a cutter head, on the west side of Miami where they dig the [00:56:30] coral rock back there. Hired a trucking company bring it up to Titusville. Hired a man who said he was a dredge man, I took his word for it.

Anyway, we started to dredge the land where the Burger King is now. We were out in the river and we had bought some submerged land at this time and you had to buy your submerged land and get permission to pump. About '48 we got the dredge going and I'm pumping in where the Burger King is now and after [00:57:00] about a year I decided I could do better with a wheelbarrow and a shovel than I could with that dredge.

So, I shut the dredge down and a few years later when we got ready to build the Burger King I had not filled in the land enough to build it, I got a firm from Jacksonville to come down. And they set up out in the river and they did pretty good. We pumped in about a city block. Where the Burger King was right on U.S. 1 was about six or seven feet below [00:57:30] the level of the road and it was one of the finest muck gardens around here. So we had to fill that whole garden up and the land along the causeway because when the dredge got done pumping the causeway, which was done in 1942, right from the crown of the road why you sloped right off into the marsh so you had very little shoulder to work with.

So they just left you with a big marsh there and so forth [00:58:00] and consequently they dug a deep ditch all the way across the river about 200 feet wide and about 18 feet deep. And this shows up on your coast maps now. So I came along, keep struggling with this piece of property and each year I'd be able to buy a little bit more from the Trustees Internal Improvement Fund until we made five purchases of this submerged land.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:58:30] Where we had left off you had purchased some additional bottom land from the Internal Improvement Fund and you were going to do some more dredging.

Edward Poe: Yes. We would eventually buy another piece of land due to circumstances. As I say, this one lady who was in the next block, was always object to what we wanted to do. And Mr. Mack who has the Ford garage and Eddie Nelson who had another piece of land, we always went together and made our applications-- [00:59:00] separate applications, but we always went up and fought the battles together. And this one party who had a son who went to school just long enough to find out how to file a lawsuit was always come along and the first thing we know we have a lawsuit to go back and fight against.

But this went on for eight or ten years and then Mack McCotter and Eddie Nelson tried to buy the land from this lady who was right in between [00:59:30] us and she just wouldn't do anything and she wouldn't develop her land or anything. But unfortunately she got killed on the highway right in front of the Burger King and it was just unfortunate. But, this was the end of really the problems.

But, we continued to go on and I made five different land purchases of submerged land, and we finally wound up [01:00:00] by compromising and doing this we wound up with about a 1,000 feet of waterfront and 16 acres of land. Well, I started filling these in about

10 years ago and I was all ready to do it when Governor Askew did a 180 degrees up in Tallahassee. They said they'll be no more filling, no more dredging, this, that and the other, unless your dredge is actually working filling, and, of course, ours wasn't.

So it took us another six or seven [01:00:30] years before we could get a permit to fill and then we had to truck in the dirt. We could not dredge it, which makes it very expensive and doesn't get you as near as good compaction and so forth. Anyway, I found a very reputable black person in Mims who had some nice trucks and a great big place to dig dirt. So we hauled dirt for about four or five years filling up this deep hole that's now 18 feet deep and you've got to come three or four feet above, it's almost 21 vertical feet of fill.

[01:01:00] So we worked there for two or three years. We had another problem develop, this had been a collection basin for 40 some years of silt. Being all the southeast wind brought all the silt in and deposited it on our land. As we pushed the new dirt in and pushed the silt out of the way, it became so thick, the silt did, we could not push any more dirt to the river. We then had to get a dredging permit from the Corp of Engineers [01:01:30] to remove the top 10 feet of the silt. So that relieved the situation so we could continue filling.

So, anyway, to make a long story short, we now have a marina out there with 40 slips and a very modern concrete floating docks on about seven acres of submerged land. We have 10 acres of upland already to fill, all ready to build on with nice coquina rock wall. We built a 50 by 50 [01:02:00] two story office building, which we have the top floor rented, but unfortunately not the bottom floor. So we're looking for developers with nerve and money. So far we've only found them with nerve.

They've just got an idea and at our delicate age we said, gee, we can't become involved in long range, long mortgage situations, so we're still striving to find a good conscientious, quality minded developer [01:02:30] who's got some money. So, if you know anybody, pass the word along. But I worked on this for about 50 years now, here I'm getting to the end of the line and I need to move in a hurry.

I have two sisters younger than I and of course they have five sons who could probably carry on and develop something nice. We have had some quality developers come in, but for some reason they just couldn't sell themselves on Titusville. They had the money, they had [01:03:00] done it before, but unfortunately, and the city just cooperates wonderfully, but they just sort of drift away after a while. But someday, we hope, somebody will come along to conclude my 50 years of work. That's about all I can tell you about that one.

Getting back to the land development idea, I have one other interesting thing I'd like to comment on. When we got our application to put in the docks, we were [01:03:30] prepared to do the whole marina, but we got the bid and the bid came in pretty high, about a million dollars and we said to ourselves, "Gee, I don't know if we want to gamble a million dollars on a marina." And the city at that time was expanding, they had more than doubled it. So we said why don't we get our big foot well in the door and build a big first half of the marina, which is what we did.

So we built 40 slips. The second we could come back in just a couple of years without any trouble and get [01:04:00] another permit. So we put in a permit in '90, March of '90, and it went through all the circles and so forth and we thought we were in pretty good position. And all of a sudden the manatee thing pops up. So they say in just a few words, we will not talk to you anymore until the county adopts a manatee protection plan.

Well, they've been working on this now about two years and my guess is it'll be another year to a year and a [01:04:30] half before this manatee plan is adopted. And right now it's very restrictive. No one could build a marina now. I think they allow one slip for every 100 feet. So, you'd have to have a pretty good frontage in order to put a marina in. It's most unfair. But, anyway, that's the predicament we're in right at this moment.

We sit there waiting, our marina is too small to make a profit. The county has seen fit to put a $30,000 [01:05:00] tax bill on us here this last year—there's no way we can make it--We just have to sit there and suffer, but I'm hoping things will turn around. The manatee eventually be adopted, the plan, and we can get our permit to continue on. But we're certainly caught in the middle right now and I can sympathize with some of our other pioneers in this area who have gone to extremes in this kind of situation.

That's about the end [01:05:30] of my development thing right now. All I do is sit there and pay taxes and cut the weeds right now. Thank goodness there's no mosquitoes to kill though.

Nancy Yasecko: Don't have to put kerosene on everything. Well things kind of boom and bust out at the space center too.

Edward Poe: Yes. Unfortunately I invested in some real estate thinking that Clinton when he got in there would really turn the thing around. Invested in another piece [01:06:00] of waterfront and I got involved in a tennis facility with some building lots and real estate is just at a very slow pace right now. You just can't hardly give it away and I hope our tax man takes heed of this. I think they're doing a great disservice to the whole county, in my opinion they're slowing down growth we just-- The businesses just cannot afford this type of overhead, cannot make it.

And I see it's prevalent now [01:06:30] somewhat, this thinking, in our city council. We have a new city council, three members, we have a new city manager coming on board. And again, here recently, they turned down a very nice grant from the state where they had big plans to do the waterfront development and lo and behold one night the three councilmen who were against it fired the city manager and they were the ones that we up for re-election. They had already announced they were not going re-run.

So we've sort of been in [01:07:00] a holding pattern here for about eight or nine months now and I hope something productive is forthcoming soon.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah.

Edward Poe: We'll all be gone. It'll be worse than the depression days.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, it has happened here because the space program boomed and then starting in '70 to '80 it was very poor kind of situation.

Edward Poe: When Johnson moved everything to Houston, the motels on Cocoa Beach really suffered because they had big mortgages and they were predicated on [01:07:30] probably leasing those rooms for two to three years to the space companies and they just pulled out. They just left us holding the bag. Our property values here dropped way down. Many people came up from Miami and invested here and got good buys.

Nancy Yasecko: It was really the start of the sort of senior citizens retirement thing.

Edward Poe: Yes, it was.

Nancy Yasecko: Because all of a sudden wonderful properties were for sale for the mortgage.

Edward Poe: That's right. Just pick them up for what's due. But right [01:08:00] now we're in a very low ebb of real estate and I hope something is forth coming soon, especially in the space program. To get some direction from Congress as well as from NASA is what they want to do. Right now we don't have it.

Nancy Yasecko: They're talking about they might move the stuff from Houston back here.

Edward Poe: It may turn around and come back, it could. Congress is getting on them quite severely for cleaning the house and cutting back, [01:08:30] curtailing their expenditures. So maybe it will be productive in the long run. We could use it.

Nancy Yasecko: That would be good. Before the 1960s, all of the black families all lived in one part of town here in Titusville the whites in the other. How did that work?

Edward Poe: Well, fortunately we've never had a problem here with integration. It's amusing, when I was a young boy of about 10, 11 or 12, we played with the black children. [01:09:00] Some of our best friends were a family up at La Grange and we used to play baseball together. It was a large family and they're still around here. The Wilson family. They've just been outstanding. But we just never had an integration problem here. I haven't heard of any.

There's a little bit of tense at one time, but it was a very short period of time. But, I see now the blacks living in many neighborhoods where the whites and blacks are [01:09:30] co-mingling. So we just fortunately never had a real problem here. The schools are much better and so forth.

At one time I do think they were disadvantaged, no question about it, but it's greatly improved and they've just been real good neighbors. They've always remained somewhat separated, up in Mims it's the same way. And, of course, a great number of these black people worked in the citrus, but that is waning [01:10:00] now somewhat. A lot of them were able to go to the Cape and get good jobs. But they were heavy into citrus and the farming and so forth. Not much into fishing, but into the citrus.

So I'm very grateful that we just had no real problem here. I think we were way ahead of the rest of the nation. We just had some excellent black people who had been here for many years and I still have many of them that are friends.

Matter of fact, I guess a big part of our grocery business, I spoke, was credit [01:10:30] and we raised quite a few black families here on credit. And they were very good pay. We had quite a few section hands on the railroad that would come in twice a month and that was always an innocent time because they just got paid twice a month and they lived out at Maytown, a few miles away. And the groceries were so cheap then that probably 10 dollars you could fill a great big croker sack with food that all that two of us could carry. [01:11:00] We'd load up the old car and take 'em down to the railroad station and put 'em on their little handcarts and send them off on their way.

So, we've just, certainly in our family, had a good relationship with blacks and grateful for it.

Nancy Yasecko: It seems that's often the case when you have small enough towns where people know, everybody knows everybody else.

Edward Poe: Knew everybody. My father was very generous. He gave to the churches. Anybody who wanted to build a church, [01:11:30] he would give 'em money. We just cultivated that type of relationship and that's the way it was. We knew each other and we respected them and they were good workers and good pay. No problems.

Nancy Yasecko: That's great. You were going to tell us a little bit about the citrus.

Edward Poe: Yes. Shortly after the war I got ill and had to find a sitting down job. So therefore we sold the grocery store business and I [01:12:00] was able to get a job as executive secretary of a citrus trade association in Vero Beach. This is in the 1948. So my wife and I moved to Vero Beach and there was about 1200 growers in the association and all the prominent shippers. The saying was, "Well, you'll never get all these shippers together because they're sort of very competitive and they're very jealous of their accounts, their growers and so forth."

So anyway, we kept working away [01:12:30] and working away and it turned out that the Citrus League became very prominent and it's still very prominent today. Vero Beach is pretty much the center of the citrus. It wasn't so much then because we had quite a few groves still up in the north end of Brevard County and a little bit in South Volusia. But you could see the growth going southward all the time. Cold became a problem. Most [01:13:00] of the packing houses were down in Vero Beach, Fort Pierce area.

So the new groves, [01:13:06] and they seemed to like the northern people with the money and they were industrial steel people and so forth came down with big sums of capital and invested in that area because it's warmer. They had a water control structure for the dikes and so forth so they could control the flooding areas. They were just much better prepared. [01:13:30] They also had wider east west areas to develop in.

And what would happen, the tomato man would come in first and he would put in one or two crops of tomatoes, that would clear the land and fertilize it, and then you can't replant tomatoes too often so then they would go to citrus. So it was just sort of a natural. You would use it first as tomatoes and then when it was all cleared and ready to go, you planted citrus and it was warmer. It does probably have a little bit more of a hurricane risk.

[01:14:00] We had a bad hurricane in '50 and we had to bring the people down from Washington, fly them all over the Okeechobee area. It flooded even down into Miami. It flooded up into Saint Lucie and Vero Beach. I've seen the water two and three feet up on the trunk of the trees for two weeks at a time. So, anyway, it was a very interesting time of my business life and I was there for eight years in this job.

And a [01:14:30] few years ago we had several bad freezes and that really began to tell the story. And again, the big money now is even going further south, down south of Okeechobee now. So it's too bad we're losing out on the citrus, but I do think maybe the retirees coming in and tourist availability is picking up some now, so we're getting an off-set. But it's probably hard on the black folks who are heavy workers in the industry and [01:15:00] they've had to find other, other means of livelihood.

But it certainly is a changing industry and still I guess a fairly good investment, but when the big companies got into it and the small grower was just out of it, put out of business. That was just an innocent time of my life.

Nancy Yasecko: It was about that time, I guess, that the Indian River Fruit got a reputation separate from other fruits.

Edward Poe: Well, we had established that way back in the 30s. [01:15:30] And that was done just before I went with the League. They had gotten the Federal Trade Commission down here and had many hearings. And the Federal Trade Commission ruled that this was a distinct and unique growing area and therefore only fruit grown in this area could use the label Indian River. Now that's being infringed upon a little bit because where does the river stop and end as these new plantings are going southward. [01:16:00] But that was all accomplished back in the 1930s, '35, and it really has helped the River to get a premium price for their citrus.

But that was done just before I went with the citrus league, but they still have to fight to protect that label, that brand name.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative).