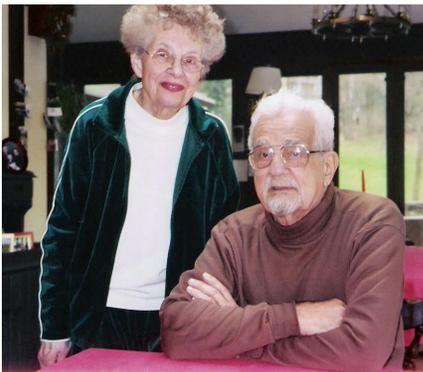


Historical Commission of Schuylkill Township
Oral History Project

Herman John and Virginia John



***Summary.** Herman and Virginia John moved to Schuylkill Township in 1955, and Mrs. John became involved in township activities before her husband did. In 1978, Mr. John was elected a supervisor. He served as a supervisor for 18 years. Later he served as a census clerk to the Phoenixville Area School District and as a part-time consultant to the Board of Supervisors. Mr. John shares some of his personal history, and also gives in-depth information about development in Schuylkill Township. Included is information about the Showalter Tract, Fernleigh,*

Moore Hall development, Valley Forge Woods, the Beacon Hill area, Maisfield, and more. One of Mr. John's interests is storm water control in the township. He would like Schuylkill Township to remain a "rural residential" landscape. Four interviews.

1st interview (final revision) – September 27, 2004

Herman John

Interviewed by Nancy Loane

Transcribed by Nancy Loane

NL: Good morning, this is Nancy Loane. Today I will be interviewing Herman John for the oral history project of the Historical Commission of Schuylkill Township. Today is Monday, September the 27, 2004.

HJ: I was born and raised in Southwestern Pennsylvania, approximately the same geographical location as we have here in Southeastern Pennsylvania but it was the Southwestern portion, just below Pittsburgh. My parents were immigrants. They were business people. They did not work for other people; they only worked for themselves.

NL: Entrepreneurial types....What did they do?

HJ: My father owned a ...(unclear) house and he was building a confectionary store. My mother was a dressmaker; she supplied a selected clientele that she selected. She did all right. Of course, I grew up in a small town – a little larger than Phoenixville – but it was in the Southwestern coal country. My parents died - each – when they were forty. There were six of us children. The youngest one was just two years old or so – no, she, yeah, two years old when my mother died. She had just been born when my father died. They died two years apart.

NL: Oh, my goodness.

HJ: Now the five – she was adopted by an aunt and uncle –

NL : The little one...

HL: The little one. There were five of us at home then. And over the years we raised ourselves.

NL: Really? How old was the oldest?

HL: When my father died he was sixteen; when my mother died he was eighteen.

NL: Where were you in the family?

HL: I was in the middle...

NL: So we have five children raising themselves?

HL: Yes. My oldest sister left home after a couple of years, and that left four of us. I had three brothers and a sister. And we did raise ourselves.

NL: How old were you when your parents died?

HL: When my father died I was eleven; thirteen when my mother died. I don't look at that as having being a real handicap. You might call it a learning experience. We learned a lot, and we learned the hard way. I was not a street kid. We learned how to cope with family situations and with growing up. My older brother had – when my father died – had gone – had dropped out of high school. He had to, in order to work. We really had no income. There were family problems when my father's business was taken over by relatives, and my mother was dying; things were tough all over. But, we managed or survived, very nicely.

I said my brother had dropped out of high school but later on he came back, and even when he was working he went back to school and finished and graduated.

NL: Very determined.

HJ: Yes. I was a good student, generally at the top of my class, and even though I graduated valedictorian and everything, top of my class, I could not afford to go to college. I had a scholarship to Duquesne University, but I didn't have the smarts, really, to take advantage of it. So I worked at a number of jobs, basically. I worked as a laborer, U.S. Steel, once I got part seventeen. And I worked as a brake man on the Pennsylvania RR, that was in Eastern Ohio and around Pittsburgh. When World War II started, I can remember very clearly where I was and what I was doing. I was coming home from work

on a street car in Pittsburgh, and people were really talking, and I couldn't get a clue about what they were talking about. I got to the place where I roomed, and they had the radio on, and all the information was coming in.

Well I had a secure job on the railroad, but after a few months I got itchy and decided I wasn't going to wait for the draft. I would enlist, but I would enlist in the Army Air Corps. And I surprised myself by qualifying.

NL: What was the date? When did you go in?

HJ: I enlisted in July of '42; went on active duty in February of '43. The reason for the delay was that there was a backlog in the enlistees, and they didn't have room in the training program for all who had enlisted as aviation corps. I went directly into the aviation cadets in February of '43. Because of my previous flying experience – I had gotten a private pilot's license through a government program known as the Civilian Private Pilot Program – which was initiated by Roosevelt – he knew he was going to have to have pilots – and they trained young people who were educationally and physically qualified to fly in little civilian planes. So I got my private license that way and because of that when they had some very heavy losses overseas they had to move up a class and so instead of spending two months in one phase of training I only spent one month and skipped a class. So I am skipping grades already!

NL: Yes, you are.

HJ: I never did that in grade school, but I might have because I was always bored in school. We had two grades to a classroom and I was always learning with the upper grade was doing.

NL: A real go-getter...

HJ: No, just bored.

NL: And smart.

HJ: So I graduated from pilot training in September of '43, was assigned to central instructor's school at Randolph Field in Texas - San Antonio – came out of that, went right to the squadron and flight that I had been a cadet in back in Bainbridge, Georgia. I don't think that that happened to too many. They had me spotted and they brought me right back.

NL: Yes, they did.

HJ: Well, I lasted a year as an instructor; then they transferred me to twin engine training and finally to B29s and I spent most of my career in the military in training commands. I never went overseas. We were scheduled to go but the war ended. I wouldn't volunteer for a program to map China – I figured that – that wouldn't lead anywhere.

I came out of the Air Force in December of '45 but my leave was over in January of '46. And now what am I going to do? I'm going to school to make up for time. What am I going to do at school? I have no clue. So, I applied to several colleges in the area and the first one that accepted me was Carnegie Tech. OK. Engineering School. The GI bill made it affordable; I didn't have the financial problems that I had before when I had the scholarship to Duquesne. You couldn't really *live* on the GI bill, but it sure made a big dent in things.

I took school in 8 straight semesters. Three a year. Came out, had two good job offers; one in Seattle with Boeing Aircraft, which I really wanted, and the other was in U.S. Steel, and that was closer to home. So – and that was \$30.00 a month more. I didn't have to go all across the country.

So I went to Lorain, Ohio, in September of '48, on an accelerated student engineer program, and then I was moved up to process engineer, roll and tool engineer, and then I turned supervisor. I had about 25 people working for me on one of the newest mills in U.S. Steel at the time. We considered it a hot shot mill. That thing is still operating today. I think the Japanese have part ownership in it, but it is still operating. It was a new one.

You are getting a lot of personal history. During this time in Lorain, while I was in Carnegie, I met the girl who was going to be my wife. So, after I got settled in Ohio, we got married. I took her out of New York City and brought her to Lorraine, Ohio – which she will tell you today is the best thing that ever happened to her. We got 500 miles away from her home and we had to make it.

We stayed in Lorain for 9 years – she was there 8 years and I was there 9. I - uh - was beginning to get itchy. I was having trouble – and always have had trouble and always will have trouble - with bureaucracy. Getting blocked off because you are working within a bureaucracy and if there is any bigger bureaucracy than the U.S. government or the U.S. military it is U.S. business. So – anyway – I thought fairly clearly about that. I didn't want to work for a big company anymore. I would rather be a bigger fish in a smaller company. So I started looking.

The strange part of this – the most coincidental part of this was – my wife was from New York City. Maybe twice a year we would drive from Lorain, Ohio to New York City. And we would get right to this area on the turnpike, and she would turn to me and say to me, "Isn't there a steel mill around here someplace where you could get a job?"

And I would say, "Huh. There is Lukens Steel over there but that is a different type of process, that is not my field."

But she kept that up. And I can recall today that it happened precisely when we were passing the Octagonal School House, on the other side of Diamond Rock Road.

HJ: While I am still at Lorain I get a phone call one day asking I would come to an interview in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania, with a steel plant. Well, having been born and raised in Pennsylvania, my first question was, “Where is Phoenixville?” I had never heard of it. So they explained where they were and how to get here. I came down here myself, interviewed, was interested, went back and told my wife that if we got a job offer, we were coming. So we did.

NL: And this was Phoenix Steel Company?

HJ: Phoenix Steel. The person who interviewed me was John Miles, who was a Vice President of Operations of Phoenix Steel, and he hired me.

I came down to Phoenixville just after Labor Day, 1957. I stayed at what we called at the “big house” on Main Street in Phoenixville; it belonged to the company at that time. It is the big gray stone mansion-type place that sits on the corner of Third Avenue and Main Street, right across from Reeves Park.

HJ: The vice-president lived there, too, and they used it as a place for visiting dignitaries, and I stayed there until my wife was ready to come town. My wife was 8 months pregnant at the time. She had had an accident at home while I was down here, not an automobile accident. Relighting a gas heater and it blew up on her and she said, “That’s the end of that, we’re going.” So we moved down here late October of ’57 to a small house in Royersford. We stayed there for 6 months; moved to another house in Royersford. Finally, rented another house in Phoenixville.

In the mean time, we had been introduced to the area by my superior – superintendent of the area in which I was working – and one of the first places he took us was out of Country Club Road to the new development that was being built. They called it Knob Hill – but it was really Beacon Hill. We looked at that...my wife walked into the house and she said, “This is it!” I said, “Yes, it is real nice, but we can’t afford it.” So, we continued to look,, but she always came back to that house. She liked the location and the layout. And it really was one of the first developments in Schuylkill Township, except for a few places very close to Phoenixville.

NK: And that was where, again? Off Country Club?

HJ: It was Beacon Hill Drive, off of Country Club Road. Right above the Phoenixville Country Club.

We had a house built, the first built in the second phase of the development. The first section was along Country Club Road, and down Beacon Hill Lane. Then he bought a piece of property I believe that was from the Whitehall Estate – which was a very well-known name around here – Dr. Whitehall was a prominent physician in Phoenixville – I didn’t know him but I knew of him. We took the first one. We picked our location and we had our house built. This stretched over a period of maybe six months or so. I think my wife was over there every day supervising what was going on.

NL: And that was '57?

HJ: '59. We had moved to the Phoenixville area in '57. We actually moved into the home in November of '59, about a week before our youngest daughter was born. That was an experience by itself, but we went through it. We had six children at the time. We had traveled from Ohio with five.

I went to work at Phoenix Steel. I was successful and moved up the line. My first, let's see - from '57 when we started here until '67 - I moved from Assistant Superintendent to Superintendent of the Department. In '67 I became plant manager of a plant in Claymont, Del. That was an hour drive - 45 minutes if you left before the school buses - an hour if you left after the school buses. I was driving counter to the traffic. Traffic was coming up 202 at the time, and I was driving down. My wife and I looked at homes down in Delaware, and the only ones that were comparable to the one we had, were more than a half-hour away from the plant there. So I said, "That's stupid. Let's stay where we are." So we stayed in Schuylkill Township.

During this period of time my wife was active in the Township. I was not. I had a 24 hour a day, 7 day a week job. And one of my greatest joys today is watching people on their cell phones and saying, "Thank God they didn't have those things when I was working. I wouldn't have survived." But as it was, every time I stopped I called the plant.

I was department superintendent in '67. I became plant manager of a larger plant in '67 in Claymont, Delaware. In '68, they began to have trouble here - profit problems - and they brought me back as plant manager to Phoenixville. I didn't mind that at all. It wasn't until 1975 that I began to have time to get more involved in the politics of Schuylkill Township.

To get back to more historical things. When we moved here in Schuylkill Township in 1959, if you started at the west end of Pot House Road - of course there was no shopping center out there. There was no Evergreen Acres, which I believe is 100 homes. There was not Wilbourne Acres, which is another 60-70 homes. There was nothing to the south of Pot House Road. It was all open country. The Weinstock Farm and the Showalter Farm - and the Showalter's had a dairy. There was an ice cream store right at the corner of Pot House Road and Route 29. And they used to do very, very good business. And the kids - not just the kids but the grown-ups too - stopped there quite frequently. The problem was that the older people grew old, and the younger people weren't too interested in maintaining it. But at the same time, the dairy business became too enmeshed in the governmental bureaucracy. We lost the Showalter Dairy, and then we lost the Thompson Dairy.

NL: Where was that?

HJ: That was south on White Horse Road. Right on the other side of the golf course. There is a little red brick building on the right hand side, it's right off the end of Ashenfelter Road. Thompson was from Alabama, who came out of the service and married a local girl. He took over the family farm and ran a good dairy. He sold milk to everybody. He raised a very large family on that. Then that got too large for him and they went in - and they closed the dairy because of over-regulation from the government, and he just couldn't handle it. They were interfering too much and he closed.

NL: And when did he close?

HJ: It's hard to put a time-frame on it - about the middle 70s.

NL: And what was the name again?

HJ: Thompson. They still have the sign sitting on the rail on White Horse Road; they left the sign sitting there. Right up the road. A lot of these people know about this - Sandy Momyer and Joanne Brown - they know more about it than I do. They know more about it than I do, really.

In the mean time, Evergreen Acres had been built, and Wilbourne Acres - 50, 60 homes, whatever - and they began to develop to Valley Forge Mountain. The circle area around the Lutheran Church and the Elementary School. Another big one was on Rossiter Avenue which is across from Kennedy Ford.

Three of those developments had major problems. The biggest problem was sewage. The land was not suitable for on-site sewage. We had hepatitis epidemics. The Weinstock family lost one of their children to hepatitis.

NL: When was this?

HJ: In the '70s. From my viewpoint we had enough of development - at least this type of development. So I began to - my wife had been active all the time - she had attended planning meetings and supervisors meetings - and kept me informed. I really didn't have time to be involved.

In the middle '70s - I was the plant manager in Phoenixville - and I didn't have the really hand-on operating responsibility that I had had before. So a little more time became available to me. So I began to attend the supervisors' meetings, and my wife continues to attend the planning meetings so she could become informed.

In 1976-77 there was an opening on the Board of Supervisors. One of my neighbors wanted to run and for whatever reason, I guess I decided to interview him. And from his comments, I got the impression he was too ready to get the place developed. So I decided - with the help of my wife - to file the nomination petition to enter the election process. I can recall very clearly that the chairman of the Republican Committee of Schuylkill Township at the time called me and tried to talk me out of running.

NL: Why was that?

HJ: Because he also wanted development. I'll go back a little further now. Just about the same time – about the time I filed – there was a movement in the Township to rename the Township “Valley Forge Township.”

This is an interesting article written by John Lukacs (shows article) And the sole purpose of the name change was to make this area a magnet for growth. I mean “Valley Forge!”

NL: To use the name “Valley Forge.”

HJ: To use the name Valley Forge.

Anyway, John Lukacs' wife, and several other women, and a lot of other people, decided “no.” The name “Schuylkill Township” didn't have any cachet, but it was good enough for us. Well...and we did not like the idea of naming it Valley Forge Township because it would have become a magnet for growth, and not necessarily the type of growth we wanted. It would become too commercial. So, these women - really – and my wife was part of the group – mounted a campaign and defeated the proposition to change the name. That was in '72 or so.

NL: So the movement to change to name was defeated....Now you are about to run yourself....

HJ: It wasn't too long after that when I decided to run for supervisor, and I came into office in 1978.

NL: Did you win your first time out?

HJ: Yes, I did. I ran again 6 years later and won again. The election came after there was another movement in the Township to increase the Board of Supervisors from 3 in number to 5. And the purpose of that was to take control of the Board away from the old-timers. I was an old-timer. I moved here in 1955 and this was 1975. I wasn't an old-timer, but I was looked upon as being one. A conservative. In any event, the consortium that got up to beat us, didn't. I was elected anyway. So, I had another 6 years.

This would have been in '84... no, in '83. I took office in '84. In 1989, I ran again, and this time I was defeated. I did not have party backing. In fact, they campaigned against me. So I was out of office for 2 years. In '91 I ran again and was reelected. I spent 18 years as a Supervisor. I'm still around.

I went through periods of the biggest development of the Township. Now how did this come about? In 1975 some things happened that really got my attention. The Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors decided to revise the zoning ordinance, and

subdivision ordinance, and the zoning map. And they did. But during the process, the advertising of the proposed ordinance was delayed a month. And rumors began to float that it was delayed for a reason. And the reason was to permit filing of a plan for a Fernleigh Tract – Valley Forge Woods, for approximately 1400 living units. Now this was the second largest proposal we had had. Some years before there had been another proposal floated to develop all the property from White Horse Road over to Country Club Road, which would have, in effect, doubled the population of the Township. Just that one development. That was defeated. That was proposed by the people who wanted to change the name of the Township and were really in favor of development. That one was defeated and they couldn't resurrect it. Then this Fernleigh deal came along in March or April of '75, and timing smelled. Even I smelled it, and I wasn't all that active. That was one of major reasons I became active.

The Board of Supervisors at that time did fight the application. It went to hearing before the Board and before the Planning Commission and finally into the courts. The Township prevailed in all the hearing except in the State Supreme Court. The State Supreme Court remanded it back to the Chester County Courts.

NL: What does 'remanded' mean?

HJ: It was sent back down to the Chester County Courts. So the Township Board was directed to negotiate with the developers. During this period of time I became Chairman of the Board of Supervisors. We had many long, hard negotiating sessions – hearings. I refused to have any private meetings. Every meeting we had was open. It was not just the Supervisors but the Planning Commission. I wanted it out in the open.

NL: Sunshine.

HJ: We hired experts – legal experts, engineering experts – we finally beat the darn thing down from roughly 1400 units to 325 units.

NL: Wow. That was huge.

Side 2

HJ: If I remember correctly, there were 109 town houses and 216 single family homes built. And that's the way it wound up. This Agreement in Principle was reached, I believe, in May of 1997. Now this had been going on since May of 1975. So they had to go back and draw up plans. Now this was just an Agreement in Principle, it was not an agreement to the plans. They came back with plans and they were turned down a number of times. Finally I was voted out of office, but I was re-elected. But just before I came back into office, a majority of the Board of Supervisors approved the set of plans.

So, we were stuck with those. Those are the plans they approved for the Fernleigh and Valley Forge Woods development.

(Mechanical problems with recorder, changed tape recorders.)

HJ: Ok. Despite the fact that I have been a registered Republican since roughly 1941, I have always been an independent voter. Schuylkill Township has, for the most part since I have been active, been on the outs with West Chester because nobody – well very few people in Schuylkill Township – would adhere to the party line. We went our own independent way.

I can recall an occasion when there was a vacancy on the Board of Supervisors and the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors at that time had decided to appoint a fellow who was a registered Democrat. He was politely – or impolitely - informed by whoever was down at West Chester – we don't do that. Well, yes we do.

At any event, that was probably the most glaring thing that I know of that I happened. I never really had any dealings with West Chester with that respect. I dealt with Chester County Planning Commission but not with any political figures. I think that is sort of symptomatic of this whole area, because Phoenixville along with Coatesville is a Democratic enclave in Chester County. The national politics – we don't have to worry about that – it has nothing to do with the Township. It fits in line with my point of view that party politics should have nothing with the Township. Decide our issues on the issues, and not along party lines.

One of the reasons that this can be is that we have no industrial base. We don't have the pressures that might arise from that sort of thing. Schuylkill Township was a rural township when I first came here. It became a rural residential township during my time here. And basically this is what I would like to have it remain. A rural residential township with, yes, housing, and open space.

I talk about open space as a desirable thing. Not just because it is green – but because it helps with the storm water and erosion control, it does a job toward filtering out impurities in the ground water – there are any number of reasons, some esoteric and some not. There have been numerous proposals to change the area along Valley Forge Road to commercial. I say, if you want that, just drive to the other side of Phoenixville and see what that looks like. Now if that is what you want....that is what would happen if we changed the zoning here. So that has been consistently defeated over the years.

One of the things I am most proud of, is that during my tenure in office we have gone to a goal that I have wanted for a long time. People accuse me of being anti-development. I say, no, I am not anti-development. I'll tell you what I am in favor of. I am in favor of *disciplined* development. And they don't like that word "*discipline.*" And that is basically what we are doing. Now not a good as we might be, perhaps, but within the laws of the Township. The Township Engineer is under strict orders to follow the requirements of the law. We are not cutting any special deals. We have, I think, the reputation of being one of the most restrictive townships in Chester County. Not because our laws are that restrictive but because of our enforcement of the law. We could be

much more restrictive. So that term “disciplined development” is something I threw out in my various campaigns, and was beat up on it, but I’ll stick with it.

NL: That is your story and you are sticking to it.

HJ: Yes, I’m proud of the fact that the township over the last fifteen years has steadily progressed along this line.

NL: So you are pleased with what is happening with the Township now?

HJ: Not totally, but I feel that it is within some degree of control. For instance, the School District wants to build a new school. Fine. That’s their prerogative, if they want to take on the onus and cost and all of that, but they are not going to violate the Township rules while they are doing it. They are being held to the same standards as a commercial developer. That’s only fair. Not only fair, but it’s right. If I sound moral at times, I guess that I am. Judgmental. I’ve earned it. Been around a long time.

The biggest problem facing the Township today – a good part of the Township is - besides the taxes, that’s something that’s always here – is the problems created by the fact that this is a relatively hilly township, and that means storm water and erosion. I think that you live over in an area (Valley Forge Mountain) where you see water coming down the hill. Can’t stop that water coming down the hill. It has been a problem – it is a problem. And one of the things that this disciplined development can do is to negate the natural tendency of development to exacerbate the problem but rather ameliorate the problem and make it less, make it more controlled. So that the people downstream, even though they may be faced with more water, over a time period, than they were before, it would be controlled in such a way that it wouldn’t wash them out. That is a very important thing. All that water comes down.

Traffic. We are all witnesses to traffic. It hasn’t always been peaches and cream. Forty years ago, the Valley Forge Army Hospital was on the other end of town, and there were a lot of people who worked there. Most of whom came through Schuylkill Township and went back out Schuylkill Township. So it wasn’t always easy.

One of the most graphic demonstrations of it was, I guess, 25-30 years ago. They repaved Route 23 – Valley Forge Road. They did it over a period of time, rather than the way they do it now – zing! They had Route 23 closed for a couple of weeks. The people at the Valley Forge Army Hospital found Valley Park Road. In the mornings I would count the traffic going opposite, it was amazing the number of people who found that road. Then after Route 23 was open again, it was amazing how many of them stayed on that road. It was a short-cut. They didn’t have to go through Phoenixville. But eventually in the middle ‘70s, the Valley Forge Army Hospital closed, so that problem went away, so there was a period of relatively light period, and then it began to build up again. Today it is a mess. If you have to go out there during rush hour – don’t.

NL: You will be there for awhile.

HL: One of the major attractions of Schuylkill Township to me was – one of the parameters that I had set when we were looking for a house, and I told my wife this - we are going to look within a radius of ten miles mainly to the south and east of where I work. And she said, “Why?” I said that I am tired of driving into the sun.

NL: Into the sun...

HJ: When you drive into the sun every day – on the Schuylkill – traffic piles up there every day because of the sun glare. That is true.

NL: Changing the subject...when did you stop working at Phoenix Steel?

HL: I stopped working at the steel company in 1983. I immediately got another job with a little company up in Pottstown – worked up there as Vice President of Operations from 1983-1989. Then I retired again.

For seven years I was a census clerk for the Phoenixville Area School District. You know what they do?

NL: Tell me.

HJ: I told the business manager I was out there looking for tax payers to pay the bills. It was a part-time job. It was something suitable for me because I knew this area intimately. There was no problem finding addresses no one else could find. In a sense, that was a fun job. There wasn't any pressure. I mean, I went down to the lowest job in the administrative building.

I could appreciate what the Superintendent was going through and what the Business Manager was going through.

I came back into office as a Supervisor in 1992 through the end of 1997. Since then I have served as a part-time consultant for historical purposes – not as ancient history, but as relatively recent history. I can tie things together for them. I also, along with our Township Engineer, inspect the developments once a week, to see that they are not getting mud out on the roads. You know, that is a very dangerous condition. You get a glaze of mud out on Valley Park Road, and that stuff becomes just like ice. We really control that. In the meantime I can bring them up on the history on the particular area or particular developers, or whatever. And that keep the juices going. Gotta do that...

NL: We are going to stop here. This has been wonderful.

HJ: The editor of the Phoenix interviewed me in 1991. He was charged by the paper to come up with a recommendation for an endorsement for a candidate for Supervisor. One thing he said, “I sat down with Herman John and I found out he is a chatty cat A feisty,

tough guy...” I guess I don’t get too much of a chance to talk at home. THAT statement is going to get me in all kinds of trouble!

NL: Before I turn this off the tape recorder, is there any final thing you want to say?

HJ: I think we need to see what we have, then we can fill in the blanks or go off on another track.

NL: Sounds good to me. Thanks very much!

2nd Interview (final revision) - October 15, 2004

Herman and Virginia John

Nancy Loane, Interviewer

Nancy Loane, Transcriber

(HJ opens by talking about how Phoenixville annexed the land north and west of Phoenixville commonly known as the Loop.. Refers to 1976 zoning map. Other land annexed was some considerable acreage north of Pothouse Road, between Township Line Road and Charlestown Road (West Bridge Street) and another parcel fronting on the east side of Bridge Street (behind the car wash and Veterinarian's office).

HJ: Schuylkill Township challenged the annexation and it went to the Court of Common Pleas. Due, in my estimation to the failure of prior Boards of Supervisors and I don’t know who else, the appeal was not properly adjudicated. In the late 1970s, early 1980s the Board of Supervisors of which I had just become a part, woke up to the fact that there was no action on this appeal. We started to investigate pursuing the appeal. Our conclusion at that time was that the tax revenues were not sufficient to offset the cost of required improvements, specifically to roads and road maintenance, and policing. So, we let the appeal drop. So we lost a considerable portion of land that had been zoned I Industrial and neighborhood commercial.

NL: How do you feel about that?

HJ: What’s gone is gone. I can’t do anything about it. I do not know of any historical – really important historical – building in that area. Much of it was open farm land.

In any event, if we start again at the west end of Pothouse Road, and drive east, on the south side, this portion consisted of possibly two farms...

NL: This portion being between east from Township Line Road to Charlestown Road.. south of Pothouse...

HJ: ...until we got to the Valley Forge Hospital at that time. That was open. There were and are a few homes of the intersection of Pothouse Road and Charlestown Road on the

south side, in existence at that time; a number of old homes, a church, and a couple of business establishments. That area was known as Wilmer.

Then we continue across Pothouse Road, there were, as I can best recall, a couple of farm houses, mainly the Showalter main house.

NL: And where was the Showalter main house?

HJ: That was south of Pothouse Road, between Charlestown Road and State Road, (Route 29). That was all open. Now we go back over that area. The first development that I recall was Wilbourne Acres, which was adjacent to the western end of the Showalter property. That is a community that is still in existence, of single family homes, maybe $\frac{3}{4}$ acre lots. Some years later the facility that is now known as the Chester County Intermediate Unit was built southwest of Wilbourne Acres, fronting on Charlestown Road. North of the Chester County Intermediate Unit were a couple of businesses and trailer parks. These trailer parks and a trailer park on Township Line Road south of Pothouse Road serviced mainly the army hospital personnel. Those trailer parks are still in existence. They have been upgraded, and the one on Charlestown Road expanded but they are still basically there.

After the construction of Wilbourne Acres, later in the 1960s, the development of Evergreen Acres took place. And that was just east of the corner of Township Line Road and Pothouse Road to the south. There were approximately 100 units there. I would say there were 40-50 units on Wilbourne Acres. There was another development built in the middle 70s, between Charlestown Road and Evergreen Acres. And what was that called, Ginny? Well, the names of the development escape me. That is the history of growth in that area in the 1960s and 70s. That was all open, basically, in the 1950s.

VJ: There are a lot more zoning maps before 1975; they go before 1975. I have 1971, 1972...(shows maps...)

HJ: Let me have 1971....see, these were constructed in the late 1960s. This one comes in here 1970s. This is the zoning map of 1955, revised October, 1975. The first zoning map was a sheet was like this with the provisions of the zoning ordinances were printed on the back.

VJ: We should have one of those maps. That was what our house was built on. Any addition has to abide to that, not the new thing. It's grandfathered.

HJ: In any event, we continue along Pothouse Road to the east of route 29, right here. There was a continuation of the Showalter Farm. This was the Showalter Farm in 1975. There were two homes east of State Road south of Pothouse Road.

That was all open and used as farmland and pasture. As we come to Williams Corner, which is the intersection of Pothouse Road, south Whitehouse Road, and Valley Park Road, where the Township Building is located. That was known as Williams Corner.

NL: Why was it known as Williams Corner?

HJ: I don't know why. It may be recorded in Pennypacker's. The Historical Commission should have it. Joanne Brown may know.

Anyway, the only thing that happened since 1975 is that the portion of the Showalter Farm east of Route 29, some 25 acres, was purchased in the late 80s to early 90s was purchased by Schuylkill Township as open space. It's now known as Pickering Preserve. The one establishment that existed, and I mentioned this to you earlier, was the Showalter Dairy Store that was located behind a house on the corner of Pothouse Road and Route 29, on the Southeast corner, that now houses the Stove Shop. That was a dairy and dairy store. It was very popular. All the kids - and their parents - got their ice cream there.

NL: Can I stop you here for just one second? You also mentioned the Thompson Dairy Farm. Where would that have been?

HJ: We will get to that eventually. I'm trying to work in logical progression.

There were no residences on the south side except the two previously mentioned on State Road.. The one on the corner was owned by the Showalters and at least one family of Showalters lived there. The next thing was east of that, and that became the Phoenixville YMCA, and that was in the middle 70s.

VJ: It was before that. It was before William was born, that the pool was in. Because it was the summer of 1968 that Mary Virginia took the kids to the pool, the high school pool. The original one.

HJ: So it was in the late 60s. In the late 60s the YMCA was built. There was a considerable controversy at the time that caused a rift between the Planning Commission and the Board of Supervisors in permitting the YMCA to locate there. This was to have been part of the green belt along the Pickering Creek. This really infringed on this idea. The green belt was to have extended from State Road to the Pickering Dam. It never really happened because of the Phoenixville YMCA and the policy of the Philadelphia Suburban Water Company, for reasons of security, even in those days, to not permit open access to the land immediately adjacent to the water supply. So that...so it was there...and it was designated as green space. On most locations along this portion of the Pickering Creek the residents do not own to the water. There is a strip on land that belongs to Philadelphia Suburban and whatever their successor is now - Aqua Corporation. That takes care of that area.

I have to digress to go back to the areas south of Showalter Farm. And that is the development of a few homes in Schuylkill Township along Tinker Hill Road, south of Creek Road. There is one strip of homes along there and a couple of homes along Creek Road. We do have to take a ride in the township, when you have a chance to see the areas that we have been talking about.

This is something that 95% of the newer residents have difficulty visualizing. I have to qualify this by saying we considered ourselves new residents for a long time, but that was a lot of years ago. But we were active new residents who learned about these things. I was not that active then, and I mentioned this before, I was not that active in the township itself, because of the nature of the job I had then, but my driving route was up along this area, and I saw and I saw what I was looking at. Virginia became politically active long before I did.

VJ: What started the whole thing was that they wanted...opposite Whitehorse Road...basically the triangle from Whitehorse Road to Country Club Road to the top of the mountain...no, no Whitehorse Road to the road opposite the dairy that we come off Whitehorse...where the fellow has the big house that wants to divide it up into a nursing home in Charlestown Township...Rauches' property in what is Ed Gold's property, and they wanted to put a development like up in Connecticut of town houses. And right away the people decided that they didn't want that on that corner...

HJ: That was in the late 60s. The major property south of Creek Road which is south of Pothouse Road in the Thompson Farm, which I mentioned before. The Thompson dairy farm was a major supplier of milk to the area and was where many area residents purchased their milk for years. The dairy operation was closed down, according to Gilbert Thompson, the owner, due to the increase of government regulation and harassment by government officials. The dairy was followed by a small supermarket for several years. The market was closed after several years and the major portion of the Thompson property was converted to the Pickering Valley Golf Course.

Across the road to the east from the Thompson Farm was the Penowa Farms property, which now encompasses what Ginny called the Horse Farm. Many people still refer to the property by that name today. It is the property south of Valley Park Road, extending up Clothier Springs Road, extending to the Clothier property and bounded on the west by Whitehorse Road. Development would have effectively doubled the population of the township, with absolutely no improvement in the road system.

VJ: They were not going to give the township anything except people.

HJ: It would have brought profit to the developers. That's basically what it would do. It was vigorously opposed by a group of dedicated property owners and residents. And it was during that period of time that the move took place to change the name from Schuylkill Township to Valley Forge Township, and that woman right over there was one of the key people in opposing the change.

VJ: I asked, "Would they deliver mail to the house?" "No." "Well, then why should we give up our name?" It's bad enough that we have to put Phoenixville on our address because the mail comes out of Phoenixville, but then to change it to Valley Forge, and still have our mail come out of Phoenixville, or have to go down and pick it up. I didn't see where we (the township) would gain anything.

HJ: At any rate, both proposals were defeated after a bitter battle.

NL: And your wife was one of the key figures there.

HJ: She, and Mrs. Bartlett, Dr. & Mrs. John Lukacs, Mr. & Mrs. Larry Drake, and most significantly, J Ewing, Esq. and many, many others...

HJ: If the truth were told, it was a band of Republicans and Democrats - the only time the Democrats and Republicans ever agreed on anything. That one time.

VJ: We met down is in what was J. Ewing's home on Valley Park Road. The property is now under development within the zoning requirements.

HJ: The Rausch proposal was defeated. Today that is still open land. My own suspicion is that it will remain open, until the development of the piece of Altemose property on the southeast corner of Ashenfelter Road and Whitehorse Road in Charlestown Township. It would require some sort of community sewer system or an extension of the Valley Forge sewer system, and if the Valley Forge system would extend, it would add legal grounds to the possible challenge of the existing zoning ordinance and subdivision ordinances and the 537 plan (designating areas to be serviced by public sewers) of Schuylkill Township, as that area is designated as FR.

NL: FR? What is that?

HJ: Farm land. On the zoning map and in the zoning ordinance. 2 ½ acres minimum lot size.

VJ: Which is what the Anderson Farm is developed under. 2 ½ acres gives them enough.

HJ: At any rate, I believe there will be no challenge until something happens to the Altemose property in Charlestown Township. That is in the future. We don't expect any immediate action; we've heard rumbles, but nothing specific.

That brings us along the basic stretch along Clothier Springs Road, to the south. There has been only one development, and that is on the corner of Diamond Rock Road and Clothier Springs Road, and they are large lot properties with individual on-site sewers. The rest of Diamond Rock and Clothier Springs remain essentially open. There is one small development, on the east side, that is slowly being built in. Again, it is large lot size. The developers did not challenge the zoning.

We come back down Clothier Springs Road to Valley Park Road and continue east. We pass the Gold property (Penowa Farms) which we just talked about, and continue along Valley Park Road to Country Club Road. That whole area was designated as FR – low density. In 1975, and I don't know how much of this I told you...

NL: Yes, we talked about this...

HJ: In 1975 the original plans were produced for the Fernleigh property, abutting the south side of Valley Park and the west side of Country Club Road except the two properties at the intersection. I don't remember the acreage, but I know something in excess of 1300 residential units of mixed type were designated for this area by this plan. The Township went through all the necessary hearings – I explained all that in detail before (see interview #1. with Herman John). The result of all this was 325 units – which included 109 townhouses which were in 3 and 4 unit sections and 216, single family homes on average of $\frac{3}{4}$ acre lots. I drove through the development early this week, and it is beginning to mature. And it looks, from appearance, fine. It looks like a well to do neighborhood. Unfortunately, the original area was a heavily forested, steep-sloped property. Not all of the problems from the steep slopes could be cured. I think this is the time to digress into the control – and I used the term disciplined before – that is required to meet the types of problems presented in such developments as Valley Forge Woods (Fernleigh).

What was done in Valley Forge Woods was a combination of storm sewer and detention basins, with some application of on-site ground absorption system. The most desirable method of controlling stormwater run-off is ground water absorption. That, unfortunately, isn't realistic in areas where the composition of the under-soil is not amenable to it or the slopes are too steep. So then we go to the fallback of basins - that are unsightly and can be maintenance problems. A continuing problem – by a continuing problem I mean maintenance of the basins - they are not totally self-maintaining, because each one is a structure unto itself. Water goes in, and water goes out. The detention basin meters the outflow rate which is somewhat less than pre-development flow. That, in a majority of cases, works pretty well. But, when we have two storms like we had last week, the detention basins do the job, until they are overloaded, and then you are back where you started.

And, unfortunately, the science of stormwater control is not a science. In my opinion, it is not even a well-developed art. It is there, and it an on-going thing. But Schuylkill Township over the last 20 years has done as much or anyone in trying to control this. And I am pretty proud of the results. Not ecstatic, but pretty proud. We cannot stop water from flowing downhill. Too many people who had not experienced this before, come in from other areas, to a situation like this, and they see a river flowing down their backyard, or aiming directly at their house, and this is frightening. And somebody has to do something about it. And who has to do something about it? The township is aware that this is a problem. The township is trying to determine what can be done to control all this. But they can legislate controls for future developments. The existing developments and problems will have to be addressed on a different level. It can be planned, but it would be extremely expensive project to implement once engineering plans are made. Running into the millions of dollars. And I don't know how many millions. And how to finance this is a problem that has not been approached. Whether it would be on an individual basis or the entire township paying the bill, I don't know.

VJ: The Federal Government has to come in and help...giving low interest loans in a township trying to do what is mandated. This are some of the things we had said about Valley Forge Woods and each of the big developments going in, that we don't have the facilities to take care of it. Macadam roads which make it impervious, it has a straight run...

(Tape runs out. Side B of tape)

HJ: You try to build controls into the requirements so that the developer must take care of that. We have attempted to do that in the Meadows and Pickering Glen and the newer developments. But it still isn't absolutely right. We are digressing from the history of the township into the present and the future, and unfortunately we went into the problems and we have to recognize them. We are not entirely successful, because someone must maintain the basins. Maybe not this year, maybe not next year. But 10 years, 20 years down the road – are they going to be allowed to be overgrown? What will happen to them? Who is responsible for them? Right now in the developments it is the homeowners association. On individual lots it can be the home owner if he happens to have a basin on his property. If there is a development with no home owners association today, those storm basins are the problem of the homeowner. Which seems to be unfair.

But, on the other side of the coin, we have people who have taken care of their property for 50 years today, why should have they have to pay for something that is built 50 years later? That's the reality of the situation. The severity of the problem and the reality of it make it extremely difficult, aside from the cost. Let's get back to our tour.

So we just built Valley Forge Woods. We come to the East side of Country Club Road, South of Valley Park Road. We come to one of the first developments out of the immediate area of the Borough of Phoenixville, and that happens to be exactly where we are sitting. This was one of first to be developed outside of the immediate vicinity of the borough.

VJ: This is the 1991 map, and it has us up here. It was started here in '56, because Beacon Hill Lane is there coming off Country Club. Then the builder started the road coming down the drive – Beacon Hill Drive...

HJ: In any event, this was, to our knowledge, the first actual development of any significant size – approximately 30-35 homes that were built in phases. We bought the property and had a house built on it with absolutely NO provisions for storm drain water.

VJ: No Our house in Ohio had drain tile put around the base of the house and we asked the builder about drain tile. Oh no, no, no – he guaranteed a dry basement. I wish we would have had that in writing.

HJ: Anyway, we were ignorant, too, so we too had to be educated. We are not unaware of the problems. I had my last physical step towards working against that just two

months ago. I had been working on it for 45 years. Because a large portion of the drainage from an area stretching to the south from our back yard south to the portion And I dumbly put a pool right in the middle of the swale. Well after having my pool flooded so many times, it finally dawned on me how to really move the water, without affecting downstream people. That is part of the problem. You don't want to create a problem for others. Over the years we had done many things that increased ground water absorption – by putting in subsurface piping and drainage beds, and even a cistern, the equivalent of another cesspool.

VJ: For wash water and the kitchen sink, and the water around the pool.

HJ: When the pool was built I put drains around the pool, two rings around the immediate coping, and that was fine for the normal situation...

VJ: But we haven't had normal weather either, it is too hot and dry or too wet.

HJ: In any event, we are intimately familiar with storm water and erosion control on an individual property. And the trick is for the individual homeowner as much as possible to affect such control measures on his or her property without creating a worse problem for his neighbors. And that is basically what we've done. I've got sheet water coming down the swale, which hits a detention and diversion wall, that swings it around and converts it again to sheet flow down the rest of the property maintaining a flow that doesn't erode and create another cut. But we had two storms last week, both of which would have destroyed my pool. And it's pretty sad to come down here in the morning and look and see a sea of mud in your back yard, where something as beautiful as that pool is. Not to talk about the basement. So there's a lot that can be down on the property.

But again that doesn't solve the whole situation. Because as we go east from here, you go to the Jug Hollow Basin, which you are part

There was a small development south of us, the DeSanno property that abutted both Country Club Road and Jug Hollow, to the stem of Oakwood Lane. And it significantly increased problems to the east, to the Jug Hollow Creek because of uncontrolled storm water and another on the corner of Jug Hollow and Oakwood Lane

And Jug Hollow Road there really hasn't been any significant development since the late 70's and that, I believe was a four or five lot development.

VJ: Well, along Jug Hollow Road a few things....Marge Haines had built a house, she was a realtor...

HJ: There are individual homes being built, now known as 'fill in's, that must be provided with storm water and erosion control measures

As you come down Jug Hollow from Country Club, the lower portion of it has historical significance. Now if it has historical significance, those houses have been there since the 1800s and some probably before.

VJ: Helen Debus lived down by the gas station on Valley Forge Road, the house behind the green house, but her family has been in the township...she grew up here...she had worked for years at the post office...she would be another source....

HJ: She grew up in that area (lower end of Jug Hollow). Probably that area, aside from the single individual estates, is probably the most significant historical area in the township.

NL: And why is that?

HJ: Because it was adjacent to the village of Valley Forge. It was a community, and has been a community for a long, long time. I had seen a map in the Chester County Historical Society 15-20 years ago which showed existing houses in the late 1700s, and that is the sort of thing that the Historical Commission should get in to. I wanted to do it, but I have gotten too old and worn down, and what little commitments I have today take up so much of my time, that I can't find time to do that. That sort of thing interests me.

NL: Me, too,

HJ: Did you know the original name for Oakwood Lane was Irish Lane?

NL: Actually I did, I interviewed Helen McAleer and she called it that. She was my first interview; you are my second.

VJ: She is another one who has been here awhile.

HJ: She is another source of information, particularly about that area. I can only tell you in more general terms. She can tell you in more specific terms. I don't know if her family...

VJ: I don't know if it was her family or not, but all the kids and Jeanne is older than Edmund, so she has been here more than 50 years.

HJ: She is a fount of history. That is one of the advantages I have right now. I don't have total recall, but I do have a good functioning head. I guess we have to make the right turn on Oakwood Lane. Again, the first development on Oakwood Lane was the Valley Forge Mountain area, off of Paul Lemen Drive. Then Continental Circle was 10-15 years later.

That (Valley Forge Mountain) developed in the late 50s, early 60s, soon after we moved here.

VJ: We moved in November of '59, so it started soon after.

HJ: If we would have had in place at that time the zoning ordinance that we do today, and had the will – and that's a big thing – to enforce it, Valley Forge Mountain would not look like it does today.

NL: Tell me.

HJ: Because of drainage. It's all extremely steep slope area. There were drainage problems there that were not always recognized when individual plots were laid out and developed.

VJ: And that road (Paul Lemen Drive) that comes down, that the school bus travels on every day, would never have been built like that.

HJ: It would have been a switchback Road, more so than it is now. The other thing is that the top of the mountain abuts Tredyffrin Township, and that portion was built later. So the only access to Valley Forge Mountain at that time was Horseshoe Trail, and Horseshoe Trail was, and is, a private lane. The only reason that it worked at that time was that the Nike site was active at that time.

NL: Can you talk a little bit about the Nike Site?

HJ: I don't really know much about it, except that it dawned on me one day, "Hey, there's a Nike site on top of my head! Do I get a discount on taxes?" No. The Nike site was part of the Air Defense Command facilities around the Philadelphia region designed to detect and destroy incoming enemy aircraft. The system was made obsolete with the advent of intercontinental ballistic missiles. The base was deactivated in the 1960's or 70's and the property eventually sold to the University of Pennsylvania which used some of the facilities in a very limited fashion. Then, in the 1990's the property was sold to a private developer which led to the building of nine homes in accordance with the provisions of the sub division and zoning ordinances. Because of certain deficiencies in implementing storm water and erosion measures, the area has not been accepted for dedication by the Township.

VJ: We didn't feel threatened by that. We felt very safe by that. Those fellows maintained hill going down to...Diamond Rock...the military took care of that so they could get up and down and that saved many an accident.

HJ: Really a safely valve for Valley Forge Mountain. It's a private lane today. (Horseshoe Trail). It's maintained by and for the residents. School buses have no right to use it. They can void their insurance coverage by putting a vehicle on a private lane. So, Valley Forge Mountain would not have existed as it is today, if our zoning ordinance, even the zoning ordinance of 1975 had been in affect, and properly administered. There are problems that exist up there that haunt everybody. Residents and others. And eventually the township as a whole may have to pay for that.

NL: Are you talking about the water problem?

HJ: The stormwater problem. That brings us down Paul Lemen Drive and to Oakwood Lane, and Continental Drive which was developed about ten years after the Valley Forge Mountain area and, because of steep slopes, faces some of the same problems as does the earlier development.

The next development to the east was Freedom View.

(interruption, deer running by property...)

HJ: I originally put the fence up about 20 years ago, not because of the deer, but because we had dogs and little children and it provided a safe area for them. They (the deer) don't come over the fence. They could do it very easily – but they don't do it because of the dog. He couldn't hurt anything, but they don't do it because of the noise.

NL: Freedom View....

HJ: That was another bitterly contested fight, because of the inadequacy of storm water and erosion control measures involving Oakwood Lane. It was built despite there opposition of some of the Supervisors. There were some bitter battles about that. I'll just leave it at that. It was approved and it went through.

That takes us down to Valley Forge Village, which is essentially unchanged in 50 years except for the office buildings on Davis Road.

VJ: Well, the park bought the piece of property opposite the gas station, and they own the ground the post office is on and on down.

HJ: That doesn't mean there weren't challenges....there were challenges.

VJ: Yes. Pasquale wanted to build a hotel and motel on the ground opposite the gas station.

HJ: In any event...

NL: Valley Forge Village...

HJ: There had been challenges to the integrity of the open area, and they have been beaten down by the Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission. I broke my chain of thought...

NL: Valley Forge Village...beaten down...Board of Supervisors.

HJ: We come west on route 23. Freedoms Foundation there was at least one historic house in there. I don't recall when Freedoms Foundation was built, it had to be the late 50s, early 60s. It was a very active concern for a number of years. I understand there is financial difficulty now. We may open up a challenge to this area here...

NL: This is a '71 map, is this right?

HJ: There are a few houses along here, along route 23; the only thing significant that is going along here, is, well the Girl Scouts. Then we come to Powderhorn Knoll, which was built in the late 60s. Again, when Powderhorn Knoll was built, there were limited storm water and erosion measures that we put into effect. But prior to Powderhorn Knoll, there was nothing but individual homes of pretty long vintage.

NL: What's the history of the G-Lodge?

HJ: The G-Lodge has been there as long as we have. I don't know whether Bill Gordon is alive or not. Yes, he is, but he sold it. It had been a service station before, but then he built the G-Lodge itself. Did they build the G-Lodge in the 60s, Ginny, or was it there all the time?

VJ: It was there all the time. We've never eaten there....we had six kids, we didn't go out to eat.

HJ: Anyway, it's been a popular weekend breakfast place. Then we continue west on 23, we reach the development of Spring Lane, which was built in the middle 60s. Again, stormwater and erosion measures minimum. We continue along Valley Forge Road. Aside from individual homes on the north side, not much has happened.

On the south side, though, we have the development of Valley Forge Commons. And that happened in the early 80s. Initially, they wanted to put a strip mall in there.

NL: And you said no?

HJ: Yes. I even got the point of asking, "Where the hell were these people coming from?" They wanted to put in specialty cheese shops and all these gaudy little things that sound great on paper, but don't do anything. So they pulled those plans.

And eventually they came up with plans for The Commons. We considered that proposal. So I said, "OK, have you guys done anything like this before?" And they said, "Yes, they had done that before. On the north side of Wilmington". I was familiar with the area. So I went down and looked at it. We looked at the complex off on route 202, below Naamans Road. We saw this little office complex there, which is essentially The Commons as it is today. And the area was designated neighborhood commercial, we couldn't really hold it out. And if we going to have something, we wanted to have something that looked reasonable. So we went along, and we have Valley Forge Commons. Rather than a strip mall.

VJ: I think it looks better.

HJ: It looks better in that it is not intrusive. With The Commons, we tried to implement stricter storm water control. For political reasons, it didn't quite happen as it would today. There are minor problems in there, but nothing that is really significant.

VJ: You know the county takes longer than the township for realizing there are problems that come from building. We first had the stuff about doing Country Club Road. We all knew the problems that we going to develop. But after the fact, then the county comes in with their landscape plan. I think today, we are still not a member because they left us hanging. All of the stuff about developing Valley Forge Mountain and Fernleigh, the Woods at Valley Forge could have been alleviated, and was alleviated by the lower courts, but the State Supreme Court mandated ...

HJ: In any event, we still have troubles with courts....

VJ: They are bending over backwards to protect the money makers. That is very obvious today. All you have to do to look at today's business section...

HJ: I don't want to get into the politics of you Democrats...

(laughter....)

HJ: Democrats or Republicans, I had to put that in... We are one of the most vocal couples of the township...

VJ: It's a joke that we cancel each other... I'm not so sure that we cancel each other...

HJ: You don't, but it's a matter of principal to me that local politics should have no relationship to the major parties.

VJ: It almost affected his getting elected the last time. The first time they couldn't believe that he wasn't a Democrat. There has only been one Democratic supervisor elected in this township, and that was seven years ago, quite by accident. They didn't like the Republican, so....

HJ: Now you are getting political history. I want to come back to Valley Forge Road, east into Phoenixville, until we come to Moore Hall.

NL: Can you go back for one second? The corner of route 23 and Pawlings Road, there is a little thatched roof business there...

VJ: The man who put the thatched roof on was young Pennypacker, from Pennypacker florist. He was trying to make it look Irish, I think. That was done in the 80s. The house on the corner was a residence.

HJ: We had trouble with the building code on that. I don't recall what had to be done. It is very picturesque, but it wasn't always a thatched roof.

Now we come to the Bull Tavern which has its own history, and I don't want to get into that. Near that is the veterinarian, Dr. Stearly. You should get all the information you need from Jay Stearly, chairman of the Historical Commission.

NL: And that was a Sears home, I understand.

HJ: I'm sorry?

NL: Jay Stearly said that was a Sears home – Sears and Roebuck.

HL: And that was Dr. Stearly .

I have to digress and go back to Valley Forge Road. Whether this is good or bad, I'll put it in. On the Southeast corner of Country Club Road and Valley Forge Road, the large mansion back in there. And a significant piece of ground. ...

VJ: Weeks was the owner.

HL: A proposal came in to convert that area into the administrative offices of the West Company.

NL: The West Company?

HJ: The West Company. The West Company was a firm that was extremely active in Phoenixville. It was profitable. I think they made accessories to the drug company. Needles, vials, containers. They are now located down in Lionville.

Gordon Drive. Before they moved, young... Mr. West, an acquaintance, had proposed to move his administrative headquarters to that corner with provisions to prevent expansion into manufacturing. He wanted to build administrative headquarters on the corner. I favored the deal. I was beaten down. The Pottstown Mercury featured all the opposing viewpoints including allegations that a certain member of the Board was guilty of some nefarious acts. Despite the fact that the West Company won a legal battle upholding the right to build on the property, Mr. West, and his board decided that because of the unfavorable publicity generated they would look elsewhere.

As a result we got Weyhill, which is a nice residential development. We continue to Country Club Road there, because on the right hand side...wasn't that the original Meadows?

VJ: No, Valley Forge Meadows...the very first break of the two acre lots of farm land. He (the builder) came in before Eddie bought his house. And we kept hoping Eddie could buy in there. No, he was married in '74. It was in the late 70's.

HJ: Anyway, Dogwood Estates, and what we call the original Meadows, which were next door to it, were built in the 70s.

VJ: It was during part of your term. The Meadows were first put in before Dogwood.

HJ: The Meadows was developed before Dogwood. But we were active in the process, and it turned out to be a very nice development. The Dogwood Estates were next, and it was in the late 70s, early 80s, late 70s. and it was the first development that I recall that incorporated lot averaging, which resulted in the open space along Country Club Road. And internally, there is another open space which is basically wet lands. It's pretty close to it.

NL: What is lot averaging?

HJ: Lot averaging is where there is a requirement for 40,000 square foot lots, and you might have a 40 acre plot. That amounts to 40 houses. But realistically, because of infrastructure requirements, you can't build on 40 one acre lots. So we put that together to make, maybe 3/4 acre lots, and provide the Township with open space in the development. And that was Dogwood. That led to a proposed development thatI'm going over my hour....I talk too much....

NL: I need to stop soon, too...

HJ: Well, we'll stop in a moment....That led to another proposed development, the Jones property off of Maisfield Road, that was approved in the late 1970s, it was approved, but never built on. And that was basically.....

(Tape runs out)

3rd interview (final revision) - October 22, 2004

Herman and Virginia John

Interviewed by Nancy Loane

Transcribed by Nancy Loane

NL: Good morning, this is Nancy Loane. Today I will be conducting an interview with Herman and Virginia John as part of the Oral History Project of the Historical Commission of Schuylkill Township. Today is Friday, October 22, 2004.

HJ: Here is a copy of the 1955 zoning map, which is historical background. As far as I know, the Township didn't have the darn thing. I gave them my copy. What it shows is what the boundaries were in 1955 and up until the annexation, and I don't recall what

date that was. This shows that the Township extended all the way to Township Line Road as it does now along Pothouse Road all the way down Township Line. Right in here is a little bit of French Creek. And it went all the way down to the Schuylkill. It looped to a point somewhere near River's Edge. That's the development right in here.

This area here is all in Phoenixville - Township Line Road up to the Loop and up behind iron company property.

If you look at the other map – this is 1987 – from Township Line to Route 23, at the Mary Snowden Bridge – this little triangle is still in Schuylkill – and it comes down here, crosses Nutt Road, comes across and zig zags around and back around to Township Line Road.

NL: Is this little section in here still part of Schuylkill Township?

HJ: It is part of Schuylkill Township. There is a little part of Nutt Road - you know where the Giant Market is? – well there is just a little bit of it that is in Schuylkill. This is creating some complications, as any development that goes on here has to be coordinated between Phoenixville and Schuylkill Township. And that is the location of the proposed Super Wawa. It includes property in both municipalities near the intersection of Route 23 and Route 113.

NL: Why is this part of Schuylkill Township?

HJ: Because those people did not choose to be annexed. They did not want to be part of Phoenixville.

NL: Did each one of these sections get to vote separately as to whether they wanted to be part of Schuylkill Township or Phoenixville?

HJ: I don't know the details of that. It was before my time on the Commission. It should be in the Township records someplace.

NL: What is the time frame here?

HJ: Early 1970s. A part of Phoenixville cuts across Township Line Road. If you come down Pothouse Road from Township Line Road, there's that little road that cuts across to the shopping center where Ginardi's is, that is in the borough. The other side is part of the Township.

The only industrial area left is this portion down here – on the other side of the railroad down from the new Meadows. This is the McAvoy Brick Company, and that is industrial

This was originally high density zoning – the Meadows. I don't recall the details of the original plan that came in for this area, but the density was significantly higher than what the Meadows is today. We arrived at modifications to permit the development as it is

today. It is a highly desirable area. People were camping out prior to opening up the second phase of the development. I am not sure whether it was a real deal or a publicity play. We never found out. It was an effective sales pitch. Those houses have increased in value considerably over the past few years. That indicates the desirability of the development.

The other side of the railroad track is industrial. It extends from Pawlings Road westward to, and including, the water company.

This area was later modified to industrial/light industry. I don't recall specifically why.

On this side of South Second Avenue, these are all residences. The north side is a farm. The area abutting the water company has a couple of small industrial shops.

Ok – how far did we get the last time?

NL: We were at the Maisfield development.

HJ: Maisfield. I was about ready to go back out. The next development was Spring Lane development which extends both north and south of Nutt Road. The G Lodge was already in existence as a service station.

Going west on 23, we come to the Valley Forge Commons East, Valley Forge Professional Offices and then the Valley Forge Commons West. Next is the hair salon and the Environmental Standards building. Valley Forge Pizza, My Favorite Muffin and the other small shops were developed in mid 1990s.

NL: Yes. We moved here 7 years ago, in 1997, and they were just opening up.

HJ: That puts it in the proper time frame. We go across the road and there is the Bull Tavern, which has its own history, and I don't need to go into that. To the east of the Bull Tavern was a large section of land which constituted about half of the McAvoy tract, which was zoned about 50% APO2, which was apartment/professional and which was really intended for high density dwellings, under the ordinance defining APO 2. North of the Meadows, on the other side of the railroad tracks, is an area occupied by the McAvoy company and a farm.

NL: Is McAvoy a functioning company?

HJ: I think so. Incidentally, the sewer authority is located between the farm and Pawlings Road.

NL: What is the advantage or disadvantage to the township changing from APO2, which you said is high density, to lower density, which is what the Meadows complex is?

HJ: Mainly traffic. We felt that one of the big considerations is that single family homes on relatively large plots would generate less traffic than 8 units to an acre.. You get one unit to one acre instead of 8 units to $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre. That significantly reduced the traffic impact. The Meadows is a picturesque area, really. I can recall taking the original Open Space Committee for a drive down McAvoy Lane, which is the original private lane, and they were astounded how picturesque it is because of the views off to the north.

There was an historical study made and an environmental impact study made of the area. We managed to save one huge old tree, at cost to the developer. Right in the middle of the development. There are I believe three or four individual lots internal to the Meadows development owned by individual McAvoy family members or people who were there prior to the development. They stayed right there.

Now here is something very, very interesting to me. This island in the Schuylkill River – it's an oblong strip of ground consisting of about 25 acres in the middle of the river but is definitely in a flood plane. The majority of the time it is exposed. It is flooded only under flooding conditions. It had been used by hunters and fisherman. There are still remains of old fishing shacks and hunting homes. I have been on that island. What troubles me is that, despite the fact that it is located within the boundaries of Chester County, I believe the title to that land right now belongs to the National Lands Trust. And they are paying taxes to Montgomery County.

NL: No.

HJ: I can't get anybody interested in 25 acres of open space as part of the inventory of Schuylkill Township. And it will never be anything but open space.

NL: Here it is on our Schuylkill Township map.

HJ: I've gone back to very, very old maps – maps to the 1700s – but at some time the McAvoy's transferred ownership of that land to an industrial firm that had its basic plant in Montgomery County. And it fell through the cracks. I did know when that happened but I never found out why. I traced the deeds of that property and found that it eventually listed with a property that was over there in Montgomery County.

NL: Fascinating. That's one of the little details of the township....

HJ: It's a historical detail that I seem to be the sole possessor of, and I'm interested in. I think you would cause a lot of confusion down at the Chester County Court House if somebody really looked at it. The legal status of it...it really means nothing to Chester County or Schuylkill Township for tax purposes, as I would think the taxes would be minimal. It's not a huge piece of ground. We are always complaining that Schuylkill Township does not have open space. Well, there is 25 acres of open space right there, in addition to the open space that constitutes part of Valley Forge National Historical Park. That is a sizable piece of open space and recreational space in the township.

I believe all of this is included in our Open Space Plan that was published about 1990.

Let's come back to route 23, and we continue west. There is the Bull Tavern, then there is the Stearly property. Then we come a piece of property that comes to the water company that extends back to the Schuylkill River where they have the treatment lagoons.

Then we come to the Moore Hall property which has many historic implications. The Moore Hall farm was zoned APO1, which was another apartment, professional office district. Nobody ever came in with that type of development there. A developer came in with a proposal consisting of mixed single family homes and a trailer park for the northern portion of the tract which was zoned for light industrial. We negotiated the trailers out of there. We had to make some changes and limits to the zoning ordinance to permit the building of single family homes on both portions of the tract. Again, the aim was to reduce traffic implications to a minimum. By right, if they had forced it, they could have gotten 4 units to an acre and a trailer park back here....

NL: ...because the zoning was such...

NJ: ...because the zoning would allow it. We had some hard headed supervisors who refused to let that happen.

NL: Are there any advantages to the township if, say, apartments or 4 units per acre would go in, as far as taxes are concerned?

HJ: I have never really done any study of that. I would think that it would depend on the evaluation, the assessment evaluation. It might be assessed at a much lower rate than single family homes. They would generate more traffic by the concentration of people.

The argument about schools really does not hold, unless they were high rise apartments. It is a rather strange thing, that all the development that we have had in Schuylkill Township in the last 15 years has had minimal impact on the Phoenixville Area Schools.

NL: That is a little strange.

HJ: One reason is that the people who come into these homes already have their children in private schools or send them there. I believe Schuylkill Township has the highest percentage of private school children in Chester County.

You can verify that with Dr. David Noyes, of the School District.

NL: The expense to the school district is that they must be bused.

HJ: That is the major expense. The township does not pay tuition. That is a take-away from the property tax. How much I don't know. I don't know the dollar value of that. When I worked for the school district I did demographic studies that prove what I am saying about the number of private school attendees.

The percentage of children in private schools is greater than in East Pikeland and Phoenixville. That is just a statistical thing that is not known by the general population.

NL: Do you have any idea of the average age of the population here in Schuylkill Township?

HJ: I have it some place. That's in the 2000 census. It's on the website. It's under the Chester County website. I did print out a study that I did several years ago of the type of population in the various sections of the township that is broken down by general date of construction.

The real reason so many single family homes were built here is that the public demanded it. They wanted single family homes. They didn't want to move to apartments. Building a development of homes is generated by the developer, and his sales forecast.

NL: But over here you said that the developer came in with trailers...

HJ: That was a ploy. That was a negotiation tool. They wanted something else. As far as I was concerned it was not a reality.

NL: Did the same developer build there?

HJ: Yes, they did. She said I was the meanest supervisor she had ever met. But we got along just fine. I forgot what her name was. Right now I forget the name of the company. She is no longer associated with the company. The Meadows development and Moorehall sold out right away. They couldn't build them fast enough. The demand was great.

The same thing happened to – not so much with Valley Forge Woods, as they were priced higher – but the same thing happened with Fernleigh. There was an extreme demand. I knew the builder personally, he had gone to school with my kids. I said to him, "Jimmy, you didn't really expect this, did you?"

He said, "No, if I had known this was going to happen I would have tried to get more in here. " They went fast. And the value of those townhouses has appreciated considerably. I have the records of property transferred, and I have the old records, and I can compare what the old house sold for and what they are selling for now. There were a few people in Valley Forge Woods who lost money, but they were people who bought high and then immediately had to sell the house, probably because they were under pressure because of job transfer or job termination or something, but they had to turn over the house real quick. That was about the only reason they lost money.

So that brings us back to the borough line, almost. When we come to Corner Stores, there are a few old shops in that area. We go north of White Horse Road, west on South Second Avenue. Most of this consists of older – 1950s and older – housing. Across the side of South Second Avenue, was an active farm. The property is still there. I don't

know if he intends to farm it or not. There is one open lot, which had been approved for a four lot subdivision. It meets zoning requirements. The only reason that it hasn't been built today is that there are some negotiations concerning storm water disposal.

NK: Your favorite topic.

HJ: One of my favorite topics. In years past, there was a ditch on either side of South Second Avenue that provided for drainage. On the south side, residents eventually filled in that ditch, so there is no place for storm water to flow except across and along the road. The township is deciding whether or not to put in storm sewers in that area, and that may tie in with the approved development.

Come back out to the south side of South Second Avenue. There was a large development – Rossiter Development – that extended from Route 23 to South Second Avenue. It was developed in the middle 1960s with on-site sewage. On-site sewage failed. So we had all kinds of problems. Wilbourne Acres, Evergreen Acres and this area had failing septic systems. Hepatitis here and hepatitis there, in the late 60s, early 70s. That resulted in the formation of the sewer authority that services basically these areas and the newer developments with the exception of the developments on Valley Park Road. .

(other side of tape)

When the Valley Forge Sewer Authority was originally authorized, Schuylkill Township became the host township, and serviced areas within Schuylkill Township, East Pikeland Township and Charlestown Township. All these areas had sewage problems. When the Sewer Authority was built, it had a considerable excess capacity. Today the Authority operates near capacity most of the time. In times they go over capacity. Most of the violations that they are cited for occur because of ground water infiltration. How it all gets there, I don't know. When it rains, it rains.

For a number of years, we have had severe odor problems. The Sewer Authority is located right here – north of the railroad, and northwest of Pawling Road. When the Powderhorn Knoll was built, they were the closest concentration of homes to the sewer plant. They were very, very active in trying to generate some interest on the part of the Sewer Authority to control the odor. The people in Montgomery County, directly across from the Sewer Authority, to the north and east because the prevailing winds come this way, have also attended numerous meetings with the Sewer Authority to do something about the stink.

NL: And did they do something?

HJ: They have upgraded the quality of their treatment and they have lessened the number of complaints considerably, but they are days when it still stinks. But I have to say for them that the same thing happens over here – on South Second Avenue and North White

Horse Road. The Phoenixville Sewage Plant is right here. Upwind from the plant right here. These people have lived there for so long....

NL: They put clothes pins on their noses....

HJ: Those two areas are affected by the proximity of the sewer plants. Valley Forge Sewer Authority and the Phoenixville Sewage System. For a number of years, The Valley Forge Sewer Authority has been involved in trying to get permission to upgrade – to increase the rated capacity of the plant. They have consistently run into opposition from certain residents from the township. Because Schuylkill Township is the actual recipient of the sewage from eight communities, residents of Schuylkill Township have opposed expansion of the plant. The five partner townships in essence are willing to underwrite the expense of the expansion. It's a political football that gets kicked around quite a bit.

I have to admit some activity along that line myself. I am a member of the Joint Sewer Board, which represents the three founding townships and the five partner townships that control the authorization of financing of capital expenditures for proposed expansion. I have passed a minority vote on a number of occasions. But it still will come down not to what happens locally, but what happens statewide. The Department of Environmental Protection, now the DER - Department of Environmental Resources – will decide whether the Valley Forge Sewage Authority will expand.

My personal opinion, and this is not shared by many people, is that the goal of storm water and erosion control should be on-site water absorption, and there is no greater tool for on-site water absorption than a properly functioning, on site, sewer system. Instead of taking water out of the ground, processing it through the house, and sending it down to the Sewer Authority and sending it down the Schuylkill River, a properly functioning sewage system puts it right back into the ground so it regenerates the water supply. And I qualify that by *properly operating*. Most systems do not operate properly.

Anyway that's a bit of personal philosophy, and I don't mind getting into this.

We've pretty much covered the periphery of the township. On the eastern and southerly portion of the borough are older areas. As I said, the Knob Hill or Beacon Hill area is one of the first ones outside of this immediate area.

One of the next ones was the St. John's Circle which is just behind the Schuylkill School. Another development extended from Anderson Avenue north to Nutt Road, to the west of south White Horse Road. This is another 1960s and 1970s development that had some severe sewage problems. These areas are all served by the Sewer Authority.

And that basically covered development in Schuylkill Township. I may have missed a few things. One thing I wanted to add, if I hadn't mentioned it before. A reading and analysis of the official Schuylkill Township Open Space Plan should be conducted by some member of the Historical Commission. A lot of work was done by the original

Open Space Committee which included historical features of the township. It is unfortunate that complete records do not exist. I have records, but they are not complete.

NL:: When was this done?

HJ: 1990-1992. The two years that I was out of office I was extremely active in this Open Space Committee. The chairperson of the committee no longer lives in the township but she is in the area. I don't know what records she retained.

NL: Is her name on the report?

HJ: Her name is Olga Karkalas. And she lives out near Elverson. She is in the phone book.

Another of my favorite topics – on the south side of Valley Park Road, opposite the driveway into the Pasquale property, which will be the new Valley Park development – Pickering Farms - there was a pond of several acres in area. It was a real environmental asset to the township. The owner of the property – before it became the Pasquale property - was Joseph Ewing, a prominent Philadelphia lawyer who was an active historical preservationist, real environmental nut. One of the real tree huggers. He maintained that pond beautifully. He had swans there. Resident swans. And it was also used by geese. Aside from being a scenic asset it served as an important storm water retention basin for a large portion of the township. In the late 1980s the dam that caused the formation of the pond was breached by a falling tree or some natural problem and the pond drained and was never restored. The present Board of Supervisors is actively engaged in trying to restore that pond.

NL: Who owns that property now?

HJ: It will be owned by one of the properties that will be developed south of Valley Park Road. There is some sort of agreement between the developers of that property and Schuylkill Township and the pond.

NL: I vaguely remember hearing about that at one of the Historical Commission meetings. The commission was just getting started when negotiations for that property were finishing up.

HJ: I don't know the details. I have to admit that I was instrumental in beating on them to get something going.

Ginny, (Mrs. John) we are talking about the Ewing Pond. You ought to have a few positive comments to make about the Ewing Pond.

VJ: In the winter I skated on it and when it wasn't frozen, ducks and swans were there. It was safer to ice skate on it than on the Pickering. It usually did not have running water under it.

HJ: People would go there and park by the side of the road just to see it. Mr. Ewing could control the level of the water.

VJ: That's where Mr. Ewing hurt himself. He was our age, then. His children were all grown. One of the sons was his namesake and an attorney himself and a supervisor in Easttown Township or one of the Whitelands.

HJ: In any event I have an extreme interest in the preservation of that pond. Not that I will get anything from it. It controls the water and it's a natural retention basin. They can't build on that land because it's wetlands. They did try but we put a stop to that real fast. There are reeds and stuff there and it is a perfect wetlands today. It should be kept as a pond, as a retention basin for this drainage area.

It starts right here – it shows on the 1975 map - this stream flows through Valley Forge Woods and back of Fernleigh, and crosses the road in front of Anderson Farms on the right hand side. There is another stream that doesn't show here that rises back on Country Club Road and drains down through the Pasquale property. Across from the cemetery. That is where the little bridge is that leads into the Pasquale property, which will be Pickering Farms development. That is another feeder. That would not be affected by the pond.

VJ: Where Lee Ledbetter put his garage (north side of Valley Park Road) – if he would have put his garage back he would have been floating away. The zoning board wanted him to move it back from the road, but he couldn't do it. That was ridiculous to think that he could move it back.

HJ: He followed every conceivable recommendation, got every approval from the township, from the DEP, from the army engineers, on that garage, he didn't miss a beat.

Same thing on the work that we did here. We got every permit. I insisted on a personal visit by the engineer to inspect my pool site, but he wasn't going to come out.

The other night when they had the presentation from the Phoenixville Area Regional Planning Commission, I brought that up. The problems that we have today - traffic is a very definite problem and right up there with it is water retention and erosion control - is because of the lack of planning and poor supervision in the years past.

That is not happening today. We control what comes down off of Diamond Rock Road or Valley Forge Mountain. I asked the engineers or consultants working with the Regional Planning Commission to include a recommendation for an education program for private property owners, helping them to affect on-site water control rather than running to the municipality to say, "Hey, the water is flowing down the hill and you have got to stop it." The township could do something, if they chose to do it, if they had the money. This would mean we would have to build 47 retention basins – and where are we going to build them? On private property!

VJ: Where would the water empty out into?

HJ: Storm sewers would have to be constructed. But to make it manageable, you have to have retention basins for control – you don't control the amount of flow, you control the rate. That's a misleading feature.

VJ: All this planning after the fact seems ridiculous, when we had asked West Chester long before they had dreamed up anything about landscape, we had asked the courts to please let us enforce our zoning....

HJ: That's all...

VJ: I know, that is all water under the dam, but it goes all the way back to that. Now that the horse is out of the barn, everybody...

HJ: Anyway, Chester County has been remiss in helping the municipalities in one way or another. I believe that it was some time in the 1970s when the state authorized funding to define the existing drainage areas – like the Valley Creek, Pickering Creek, French Creek, Jug Hollow. To find these, so the municipalities could generate ordinances to affect control. I know that in the late 1980s when I brought this up before the supervisors, we went to try to get funding to begin a program to at least plan for storm water control on a township-wide basis. Not on a development basis – we can take care of those. Because Chester County had not met their requirements with the state, the municipalities in Chester County were not eligible for funding.

They are trying to do something now with this local Phoenixville Area Planning Commission. Whether anything comes to pass, I do not know. At least they have done more than was done before with the Chester County Regional Planning Commission.

NL: Is this the survey that we got about planning a while ago?

HJ: This is the survey that was put out a few weeks ago; you got it in the mail. I did ask about the response rate. They said that they were gratified by the returns.

VJ: Who filled it out here?

HJ: It was a fold over card, and it had our address on it. It sat here for several days and I sent it in.

VJ: I didn't fill it out because I thought there was no point to it. It was similar to the Homestead Act thing that we filled out for the school district. There is no point to it because they are not going to do anything.

HJ: Well, effectively, there is not going to be any reduction in taxes.

VJ: They are going to put in an income tax to reduce our school tax. That's not a reduction.

HJ: This one is supposed to be funded by gambling taxes, not by other income. The last one was a grab bag of taxes.

VJ: They said something about a school district income tax, in order to reduce the property tax. Nothing came of it.

NL: One other point about the conversation last session. I'm still not sure about the butcher property and the florist property on Route 23 – where the thatched roof is now.

HJ: It was all the butcher property. He owned property on both sides of the road. An individual came into the old house, right next to the thatched house (corner of Route 23 and Pawlings Road) and started an upholstery shop. When the Pennypackers (florist) went out of the thatched roof building, the upholsterer took over both buildings.

VJ: The upholsterer had been down here in Valley Forge, next to the gas station.

HJ: That's how it came about. The property across the road eventually wound up as a hairdresser and the shops. There was a nursery where Valley Forge Commons West is now. Where Mailboxes, Etc. is was part of the plant nursery - Bussells. I forget if it was "Bu" or "Bi." But I believe it was "Bu." Joanne Brown or Sandy Momyer would know more about that. Joanne is about my age, Sandy is a bit younger but she knows the area. If I remember correctly, she was born in the house that is the club house that belongs to the Meadowbrook Country Club – Joanne was. Now she lives in the first house in Schuylkill Township on Nutt Road, next to the driveway to the Acme.

VJ: It's close to the road and it says "The Browns." Her husband was a doctor.

HJ: The reason that Joanne and I are fairly close is that, although she was born and raised here, she moved out to Uniontown, PA, where I was born and raised. Her husband was a doctor out there. She wanted to come home. She moved back here, in 1959, I believe it was. Just about the time we moved into Schuylkill Township they moved back into Phoenixville. I didn't know her then.

VJ: She loves to play cards. She loves to play bridge. They two of them used to go back and play duplicate bridge. They would play at different places. I think one of the places they used to play was at the Y when it was in town. They had two or three boys.

HJ: Anyway, you have a historic document there – the 1955 zoning map.

NL: Does the township have one of these also?

HJ: Yes, they have one.

VJ: It has the rules and regulations of the time. And that is what this house was built under.

HJ: Somebody on the Historical Commission should have what is available on the website, having to do with the historic buildings in the township. They are not in any kind of chronological order. I would recommend that the historical commission get aerial photographs of Schuylkill Township dating back to, I believe, 1960 that are available from the Chester County Planning Commission. If not the Chester County Planning Commission, then the Chester County Historical Society has them. One or the other. And if you just bear with me for just a minute I will show you one, so you can see why the Historical Commission should have them.

NL: Look at this! This is the 1960 Chester County Planning Commission aerial map.

HJ: I have to look at this a minute to see what this is. I have to orient myself. There is a series of these maps that fit together. This is #2. This is Pawlings Road... This is the railroad.... This is the water company....This is McAvoy Brick. Here's the bridge. The sewer plant should be in here. This is the water plant.....

Here is another map. They go together. This is Pawlings Road...This is the sewer plant. This is the island I was talking about.

This is a Pickering Reservoir. There is to be a green-way along here. The property immediately adjacent to the reservoir is for the most part owned by the water company. I think there are one or two places where it is owned by a property owner. This is route 23. This is Spring Lane along here.

This would be Valley Forge Commons West and Valley Forge Commons East. There were three individual properties here that were built out by the same outfit and made into Valley Forge Professional Offices. So this is a relative commercial district right through here. Right across from the intersection of Pawlings Road and Route 23.

This is Stearly's property, next to the Bull Tavern.

In any event, this is where the Moorehall development went in. This is farm land and fairly steep.....

End of tape.

Interview #4 (final revision) - December 30, 2004

Herman John

Interviewed by Nancy Loane

Transcribed by Nancy Loane

HJ: If I remember correctly we finished up at the Moorehall development. Now that leaves us down there at the corner at Valley Forge Road and Whitehorse Road.

To the north of Whitehorse Road across from the Moorehall development property there were, and are, a number of older homes that were probably built in the 30s and 40s. They are on north Whitehouse Road, and then going west on South Second Avenue, which is at the end of Whitehorse Road, there are a number of houses, a couple of them are duplexes, that date back to the 20s.

There is one scheduled development to go in on a piece of open ground in that area that I believe is for 4 houses. The developer and township are having a real problem with the problem of storm water. For years in an area like this drainage in area like this was a ditch along the side of the road. That was it. To my recollection on South Second Avenue there had been ditches on the side of the road. It's a relatively flat piece of ground that led to drainage problems anyway. The drainage was affected by a ditch on the south side and another ditch on the north side that were inner connected so the water on the south side flowed to the north side and then down through a farmer's field. The ditch on the south side has been filled in by the residences and landscapers, so it is not useful. The water ponds on South Second Avenue and creates a hazard in the winter time – ice. So if a development goes in on the east end of that piece of ground the township wants to make sure drainage is taken care of. This is causing a problem because there are no drainage easements to take the water from South Second Avenue over to the Schuylkill River.

NL: What do you mean by that? What is a drainage easement?

HJ: An easement is an agreement between the property owner and the municipality, the township in this case, that recognizes there is a drainage situation there – whether it is a ditch, a swale, or actually an installed storm water point – and permits the township to inspect that and make sure it is installed properly. In Schuylkill Township, on private property in most cases that I know, the easement does not convey to the township the right or responsibility to maintain the easement.

NL: Who would maintain? The property owner?

HJ: The property owner, or in the case of a development, the homeowners association. This is the policy on this township, and one that I don't disagree with. I know that it could land on somebody's head without them not even knowing about it. If there is a problem, the township could go in and say, "Go fix it," to the property owner. In many cases that is a startling revelation that it is their responsibility. I feel badly about it, and the supervisors feel bad about it in certain cases, but we have maintained the policy that I know of goes back to the late 70s, that says if a problem exists on private property, the property owner must take care of it. The township will not spend taxpayer money on private property. That is the basic premise. The township will not spend taxpayer money on private property. That has been challenged a couple of times. But so far it has held up in court.

NL: It seems to me at one time we talked about Valley Forge Mountain, and you said there may be...

HJ: That's a recognition of the problem in general. The township has been willing, or appears to be willing at this time, to study the situation and come up with possible solutions to lessen the problem. I am not sure, but I think I said at the time that it would involve many, many dollars – millions of dollars. But the township has not determined where that money is coming from. For instance, let's suppose, just suppose, that the solution in a particular case is to construct a storm water basin. There is a possibility the township would provide certain engineering services and supplies like piping and such to help the property. To tell the property owner that you've got to put a basin in your yard and actually destroy the usefulness of your back yard or your front yard – that is going to cause a lot of problems. On the other hand, the people over in Wilbourne Acres or Evergreen Acres don't want to spend money to fix the Valley Forge Mountain's problems.

That's the dilemma. It is one of the real problems facing the township. I know that I pointed it out publicly in 1989 when I was leaving my first two terms of office. It was the major problem facing the township, outside of traffic, which is not something that we have real control of.

NL: So we have the developer with four homes coming in....

HJ: And he's trying to get some sort of agreement set up that will be agreeable to the property owner and the township that is the best solution. I don't know when that will be settled. I don't know when it will be settled. That's a live issue. That's the only new development that involves ground very close to Phoenixville.

Another possibly is the Meadowbrook Golf Course. It's a possibility. It's privately owned – people can sell their property. If it is sold, I see two possible buyers. The school district, for what ever plans they may have. It's adjacent to the school property on the north side. Or a private developer. And you know what a private developer is going to do – put homes in there. I don't believe the zoning is the same on the south side of Pothouse Road, so there is the possibility that he would get more dense development in there. As I recall, that is about the only two pieces of open ground that really abuts the borough. There are other areas in future years that may be subject to gentrification – that is rebuilding. We see a few examples – isolated examples – of that in the township. As housing gets older and older and deteriorates, yet the population pressure increases, the idea of taking older houses and razing them and building new houses becomes more popular and practically economically. So, that is a possibility, but that it not here yet, except in a few cases.

The rest of the area that abuts Phoenixville on the east side along Whitehorse Road that is south of Valley Forge Road was built in probably three phases. A few houses there are rather old. Those are basically along Valley Forge Road. As you get back into Kleyona Avenue, I think, but I am not sure, that most of that was built in the 1950s. To the east of

Clyona Avenue, that was built up in the 60s and 70s in probably three different developments. I don't recall the names of the developers.

Here's where I get a little confused as to whether I included it before. This area drains basically down across Pothouse Road through the Y property, or east with a lot of the water accumulated into Mill Creek that runs across south Whitehouse Road. Then it goes across a little street named Mill Road into the Pickering Reservoir. The problem with that particular area is that a portion of Phoenixville also drains into that. We have had isolated instances of very heaving flooding along Mill Creek. It's potentially a problem.

Oh, on the east side of south Whitehorse Road adjacent to the Pickering Reservoir are a couple of large pieces of property that we know are being subjected to development pressure. They won't exacerbate the drainage problem because that should be taken care of directly into the Pickering. The water company, I guess they call themselves Aqua now, I have a little problem with the name – they were Philly Suburban for so many years – watch very closely these plans for any development abutting the reservoir. It affects their resources. I think with the type of engineering services we have today, that would be taken care of before it becomes a major problem, as far as storm water is concerned.

Some time ago, at the request of the supervisors, I did a projection on the ultimate build-up population of Schuylkill Township. It is somewhere between 11,500 to 13,000 people, which is really under the control of the Board of Supervisors at the time that the property is developed. We can't really predict whether or not this will become a really heavily residential area, on the order of what has happened to the east of here, near Philadelphia, where not just townhouses and condos are built but we begin to build apartment houses. This could happen, I am not saying that it will. My projections are based on conditions today, or a couple of years ago when I did this study – on the zoning at that time. If the zoning changes – who knows?

Which brings me to the major reason why I wanted to talk to you today.

The Board of Supervisors has begun a review of the planning that is required under the State Municipal Code. The state requires of second class townships that they have a comprehensive plan, a subdivision ordinance, and a zoning ordinance. The Board of Supervisors and the Planning Commission, whose responsibility it is, is involved in reviewing the comprehensive plan. Now, the way I describe it is the comprehensive plan is a philosophical document that lays out the basic thinking out of the township government at the particular time that the plan is promulgated. It's supposed to reflect the views the views of the township as to where they would like to build in the future.

There are some things that I would like to highlight, particularly that I know that I, and other long time residences, and I think new residences, want to see in the township in the future. We know that development cannot be stopped. To date, we have basically converted a farming and open spaced community into something that isn't a farming community. I really don't know personally of any active farms in the township. I know areas that were farmed up until a few years ago. There may be a piece of open ground

down near South Second Avenue – one that isn't directly involved in that 4 piece development . The old owner died, and I don't know if his son is going to farm that piece of ground.

We have the horse farm – what was the horse farm. That is open ground. We don't know what his plans are for the future. We talked several times about the Thompson Dairy. He had basically a farm and he raised cattle there. He raised his own dairy there. But that went down the tube and it is now a golf course, which didn't totally break my heart. That was a much more desirable use than what I know what Gilbert Thompson could have built there and would have liked to build there to realize the return on his property. But the reality is that the golf course is owned by a number of brothers, so when the times comes and things don't go too well, someone is going to want to cash in. So whether it is destined to remain a golf course out into the future we have no way of knowing.

NL: Is this the Meadowbrook Golf Course?

HJ: No, I think he calls it Pickering Valley. It's on South Whitehorse Road, abuts Charlestown township on the south and faces the White Horse farms on the east. It's just over here a quarter of a mile.

In any event, I've used an expression that I like to see – something that I call rural residential. To me this includes a combination of open space and housing, as opposed to just suburban residential or residential. I like the rural residential - whether or not that will include in the comprehensive plan I don't know – because it means something specific to me.

NL: Which is?

HJ: As I said, a residential area that promotes the preservation of open space. It does not encourage high density residential usage. Many people disagree with that. Some of them, of course, are large property owners; they would like to maximize the return on their property. Other people who haven't thought it out...

Let me ask you! Why did you move to Schuylkill Township?

NL: One of the reasons we moved here is because it is very pretty – very green, rolling countryside, lots of little farms here and there, or what look to be little farms....

HJ: That's it...you got it. To me that is rural residential.

I know I mentioned this before – I took a group who were working on this (the comprehensive plan) on a tour of the township one day. I opened a bunch of eyes. They were amazed. They didn't realize that there were little places like this that had matured over the years and were not destructive to open space - that blended into open space. The area along Oakwood Lane , and Valley Forge Mountain, and down on Creek Road – there are a number of these township roads that are described as scenic routes.

One of the arguments that was used in getting the layout that we have over in Pickering Glen – that's the Showalter property across from Meadowbrook – was to get the houses back off the road. And why? I said when I drive east on Pothouse Road, I see the mountain over here. To me, that is a scenic vista. You put the houses up against the road and I won't see that.

That comes back to the open space plan, which was published in December of 1992, but was actually worked on in '91. It was edited by a number of people who were not on the committee, and then published in '92. This was a result of the open space committee, which was founded as the predecessor to the environmental advisory committee. I think we recommended in here that a body similar to the environmental advisory committee be formed. This was a comprehensive study of the township listing the historical resources as they were seen at that time, and the scenic resources and the environmental resources. This was accomplished almost simultaneously with the drawing up of the comprehensive plan. So these two went hand in hand.

This (the open space plan) is more of a historical document and an inventory than the comprehensive plan and indicates how we might go about preserving the good features that are listed in the open space and recreation plan. I know that the supervisors have asked - both the Environmental Committee and the Historical Committee – to provide input into the comprehensive plan, because the comprehensive plan ...

NL: Did you say the Historical Commission, too?

HJ: Yes. That's what I like about computers...you put in a word and press "go to" and...

NL: Computers are wonderful....

HJ: In any event, the open space plan does list an inventory as it existed in 1991-1992 and the comprehensive plan says that we should preserve our historical resources. The comprehensive plan should have a general guideline for preserving the historical districts of the township. The planner that we have working on this indicates that we were somewhat lacking in the current comprehensive plan and that is supposed to be addressed in the review and updating of the comprehensive plan.

NL: You mean that it hadn't been followed?

HJ: It wasn't mentioned in such a way that it presented a plan. The historical changes are here, but in the implementation, there wasn't enough stress placed on how this would take place. And that has to be addressed.

NL: And that normally be part of the comprehensive plan?

HJ: Yes, as far as the philosophical document is concerned.

NL: Do the supervisors go back and look at this comprehensive plan?

HJ: The legal importance of the document is really open to question. It is only a guide, not an ordinance. This is a plan; this is a law. (Points to the planning guide.) Of course the lawyers have a lot of fun of this, and we poor lay people wonder – do we or don't we? They plan word games with us.

I don't have a totally updated edition, and I'm not as up to date on the provisions that I would be if I would be an active supervisor. I just haven't done it. We have provisions for historical districts, and there are certain rules that apply. These have been brought into play to an extent, to the later developments. Initially no one paid too much attention. But over the years the adherence to the ordinances have become much more stringent. I know that for a fact because I have been most intimately involved with that change.

NL: Is that because the developers are becoming more aggressive with what they want?

HJ: No, it's becoming the supervisors are becoming more and more aware of what the implementation, or lack of implementation, results in. When these storm water problems, or other problems, happen, we begin to ask ourselves – "How did that happen?" It was really because we didn't totally insist on adherence to the ordinances. That was our fault. We didn't insist the engineers representing the township adhere to these things.

Today they do, to a much greater extent. As time goes on, even supervisors learn. Particularly when they are in office for more than a single term. By the end of the single term, you begin to understand what's going on. That's learning term in the beginning is pretty steep. Most of us are not civil engineers. We may be good engineers, we may be good lawyers, we may be good administrators, or just good people, but we don't know. We have to learn. The problem is, to an extent, we have a learning curve or a learning situation that is not a normal curve. This supervisor comes in and he starts his curve. Two years later another supervisor comes in and starts his, and on the line, as long as supervisors change. At any given time, the supervisors may not have the same level of appreciation for what is going on.

The zoning ordinance is the most specific document. It's the one that has the most control over what happens in an area. The subdivision and land ordinance basically applies to developers. But in individual cases it can apply to an individual property owner, if he wants to do something beyond the zoning ordinance, the subdivision ordinance, or the provisions of the subdivision ordinance, comes into play in telling him in what he can do. If you want to build a house on a sloping piece of ground, how is that storm water to be handled? The zoning ordinance doesn't necessarily tell you. But the subdivision ordinance has more specific guidelines.

Here is where the historical overlay comes in, in the zoning ordinance. This should be reviewed completely by the Historical Commission, for recommendations. When the township gets around to working on the zoning ordinance - and it really should be reflected in the subdivision ordinance of the comprehensive plan, the basic philosophy should be contained in the comprehensive plan, that these districts are going to be subject

to a certain level of control. Then the subdivision ordinance can say basically what must happen – that there must be archaeological studies made, that ultimately you must have approval from the state historical commission, that is the way it should progress. Hopefully, that is what we will get. A more specifically delineated procedure to provide guidance to the zoning officer and the township engineer as to what they are permitted to insist on. And they should provide guidance to the board of supervisors as to what they should do. It is all well and good for people to come in and say “this is going to do this for us and that is going to do that for us,” but if the township has no authority, they say, “That’s nice” but nothing will happen.

NL: Why in Schuylkill Township did it take awhile for the Historical Commission to be established?

HJ: Why did it take so long? I can’t really say. It is my recollection that there was an historical commission in the 1970s that did nothing. And – we tried – so what. I think somewhere in the recommendations of the open space plan it did recommend the formation of the historical commission of some kind. I am not as familiar with this as I should be. To some extent, this was recognized, but to get people ... I’m trying to back up into how the Historical Commission got formed this time. It was the result...

End of tape.....

HJ: The formation of the Historical Commission came up at the initiation of the development of the Potter’s Pond development. That is on Pothouse Road and supposedly had a hospital on it during the Revolutionary War and graves. I think it was discovered at that time that the Board of Supervisors was really floundering when it came to enforcing any controls concerning historical items. We had to rely basically on the state – the state signed off on it.

I think that some of the people who were involved in that, and the Environmental Advisory Committee – that is what it came out of – the Environmental Advisory Committee – Steve Kunz and his people – began pushing for the Historical Commission. The Board of Supervisors sat on it for a long time. I know, because I was an intermediary between the two groups. I was asked on a number of occasions as to why the supervisors weren’t moving any faster, but I really couldn’t answer that. But eventually, it got pushed out into the open. We got people – and I was surprised with this – pleasantly – we got people to volunteer to serve on the committee. When you get twelve people to commit themselves to do something, and most of them stay with it, that is amazing to me.

In the formation of the open space plan, we had as many as 20 members. The actual work was done by 2 or 3 people, and they weren’t necessarily in the same camp. There were only 3 or 4 people who actually pushed this thing through.

On the comprehensive plan, the initial work was done quite a bit before the open space plan, but the engineers at that time, as far as I know, were using this as a cash cow to

charge off billable hours every month or so. So we finally took it away from the people who were supposed to be doing it and gave it to the Chester County Planning Commission. They helped us formulate this comprehensive plan. There were only 3 or 4 people involved in that. I was involved in it; Jack Claffey from the planning commission was involved in it. There were several people from the planning commission and a carry over from the open space committee that were conscientious about coming to these meetings. This went on for several years. We were meeting once a month. We did have developers come in to get their input.

I recall one development who was vehement about a proposal I had to refuse to permit the removal of top soil from the township. For a matter of fact, normally when a developer comes in he strips the top soil. He takes out the trash trees, the shrubbery, everything else, strips the top soil off, makes a huge pile of top soil, and sells it. When the people start buying houses, they find that the grass won't grow. It doesn't grow too well in clay or stone. The top soil has gone away.

I know the president of one company really got angry at me about that. I said., "Hey, wait a minute. We are going on the basis that we are going to protect the environmental resources of the township. To me, one of the most important resources is the top soil." You take the top soil away, and it takes a lot of work, many years, to overcome the fact that the top soil is gone. It's like cutting the 50 year old trees down. To me there is no difference. Since then, we have on occasion permitted a developer to sell his top soil to another developer for use in the township.

But it is supposed to stay in the township. I won't guarantee that 100%. But we put a lot of pressure on that.

NL: How do you insure that happens? What do you do to make sure that happens?

HJ: In the large developments, we have practically resident inspectors. We have inspectors from Gilmore Associates touring...

NL; This is a private company you hire?

HJ: No, no, it's part of the engineering firm. They're not 100% perfect. I have finagled my way into becoming somewhat of a consultant to the township. Sometimes I describe myself as the quality control manager for the engineers. I don't have any authority, but I have input. I have found in the past, the engineers, despite the best intentions in the world, didn't enforce certain things. As a result of that, we were having problems, particularly in the Valley Forge Woods development. As a result of that, I go out with the supervisor of the inspectors one a week, and we tour the township. If there is anything to point out, I point it out to him. Or question.

If I see trucks rolling down the road with a load of top soil, I ask! I don't ask the truck driver. I call Gilmore and ask, "What's going on? Is that top soil or is that fill?" They know...

NL: That Big Brother is watching...

HJ: That Big Brother - that pain in the butt - is watching.

NL: Ok, so you see the developer moving the topsoil off – what recourse do you have?

HJ: I have none. My title is “mud manager.” This came about because, when I was a supervisor and we were really getting into the tightening up of the enforcement of the rules, I had a complaint one day. A guy in a new \$35,000 BMW or something spun out on Valley Park Road. He didn’t damage his car, but he immediately called and began to raise the devil. He was right. There was a glaze or dirt, of mud, on the road, and you get a drizzle and it’s like ice. With a speed limit of 40-45 miles an hour, if a rabbit runs out or something and you hit the brakes – zing.

We had continuing problems in the initiating of the Valley Forge Woods project. I would insist on the subcontractor cleaning the wheels of the trucks before they went out into the road. One day, another supervisor and I were driving out to look at other township buildings – this was when we were planning our township building. So we started out down the road. What is this glaze on Valley Park Road? I went right down to township hall, called the engineering firm, and told them – “that’s it.” It took the builder more than a week to get going again after we shut them down. That hurts. That’s money for the developer. It’s the one thing they understand. But hit them where it hurts. Somebody has to answer to Bob Toll, who answers to the Board of Directors, as to what is going on here. Why are these expenses going up? Now we’ve got to do something. It’s happened twice and a third time afterwards.

Even Anderson Farms was shut down, because of failure to enforce the working hour rules.

NL: The working hour rules?

HJ: Uh-huh. Before anything the involves a subdivision ordinance starts, there is what is called a pre-construction meeting with the developer and the major contractors. We have come up with a formal list of rules. These are the rules. You will adhere to these rules. Mud on the road is one of them! There are a number of rules. And they all relate to the subdivision ordinance. One of the rules was – for several years it was not backed up by an ordinance, but eventually it was – we have certain hours that you are permitted to work. You are permitted to work 7 am or sunrise, which ever comes later, to 7 pm, or sunset, whichever comes earlier. You are not permitted to work on Saturday or Sunday without notifying the township. The reason for that is that we have neighbors.

If somebody started to build a development behind your house, down toward Valley Park Road – and there is a piece or two of property there where somebody might, in fact there might be a small development being planned now – and the bulldozer operator decides he

wants to start at 5 o'clock in the morning in the summer and bulldoze, you can hear it all over.

NL: You can hear it all over. It booms.

HJ: I know that I sit here on Saturday and Sunday and say, "Where does that noise come from?" It could be coming from as far away as the river. That is the reason for that.

NL: Is that true for a single home being built, too? We have a house coming up on Oakwood now.

HL: You have a house on Oakwood now. He is doing a good job. He has a clean site. It is well protected. We get there once a week. We had to lean him a few times in the beginning. We didn't cite him or anything – we just told him, what about this and what about that? We don't running water going down the hill. What is the result of this? Well, there are two results. The house becomes very expensive. And 10,20,30 years from now the supervisors won't have any problems, because it has been done right. That drains down into a sensitive area into the fireplace. That place gets a lot of water.

We've watched that. Probably been there 15-20 times. A lot of people don't know this. Well I do admit that the township pays me for my time. It's not a freebee, although I was doing it before for no charge. It's more formal now. . The engineer recognizes that I'm going along as the quality control manager. They don't like to be criticized any more than anyone else. I am not hesitant about pointing out what I feel is wrong.

I was coming home from grocery shopping the other day when it was raining hard. I decided to go into Anderson Farms and look. And I saw a condition that I didn't like. There was a flood on the road in front of a house that was occupied. That raised the level of my observation. When the houses are just being built, I don't worry about about mud or dirt – internally. Out on the highway, yes. But when people start moving in, then I start cracking down on the maintenance of the storm water controls on the individual lots. These people in the house are going to start paying taxes. They deserve some representation. And the Board of Supervisors is in favor on it. It is not just the matter of some busy-body sticking his nose in.

NL: Is Schuylkill Township more stringent about these controls than other townships, or is this the normal way of operating?

HJ: I feel we are operating – we have raised the level of control throughout the area. Ten, fifteen years ago, we had the nastiest reputation, and even then we weren't doing too well. As we have increased the pressure on the zoning officer and the engineers to enforce the rules, some of this has gone out to other areas. They are raising their level of confirmation to their ordinances. I see it in places where they don't do it. I drove up into Montgomery County the other day and I saw this streak of mud in the road. It wouldn't fly in Schuylkill Township. This guy is building houses off on the side road. He's got mud spread from that site at least a mile and a half, two miles on the road. I don't know if

they are state roads or township roads. I did say something to my son who is a resident there. If he had the opportunity, he could say something to someone.

The last time Great Valley did an expansion to the school, it was a mess over there. It was a mess. Today, it isn't a mess. They are doing another job and it is nothing like it was two or three years ago. And that is – I don't take credit for it – but I say that our level has raised the level in surrounding townships. People say, "We don't see this over in Schuylkill Township. Why do our roads have snow on them? Why can't you clean the roads the way they do it in Schuylkill Township?"

I will take a lot of credit for that one. I laid down the rules when I first became the road supervisor. We are going to do this thing a little differently than they do it in other places. We are going to do it like they do it in Western Pennsylvania where we got more snow. We had hills there, too. The road crews knew what they were doing.

NL: So how did you change it?

HJ: By #1, sitting down and setting down a priority. You have to realize that this area (eastern end of the township) is more critical - not because I live here – but because of the hills. And the western end of the township is not as critical.

NL: It's more flat.

HJ: The first priority – we leave the township building, and go up Clothier Springs Road, into the mountain, down Paul Lemen Road. We actually had it laid out. That is the initial priority. After all, taxpayers support this township. If they don't get to work, we don't get tax money. That is overstating it, of course, but I don't ever want to hear of an accident because we did not take care of our roads. We have kids going to school. I have heard from our bus dispatchers down at the school district that we don't worry too much about Schuylkill Township. We have East Pikeland to be concerned with. I think they have raised their level, too.

Then, in the event of a major storm, we follow the route of priorities, but we cut one lane through. Don't try to make a finished product at first. You have got to cut one lane through every road. I want every resident to be able to get through if they can get out. We need a road for the emergency vehicles – fire, ambulance, police – they have got to be able to get in. A priority in the event we get lots of snow.

I got to the point where I said, ok, we're doing good in that. Now let's get the blade down where it takes the snow off the road. "Well, we're rip up the equipment." I said, "Hey. We are paying you for the equipment. You are not paying, we are paying to plow the roads."

I also don't want the crews to start too early. Except when a major snow is forecast overnight. I want them out by 5 o'clock in the morning to get that initial snow off. Clear the intersections. The intersections are the most critical sections. All this has sort of been

drummed into the crews' heads, and we have basically the same people doing the roads now for at least 20 years.

HJ: I guess I have run myself pretty dry. Except for something that I want to come back to that has been mentioned a couple of times. That is the adherence to the provisions of ordinances of control.

When I was campaigning for election and re-election, people would say to me, "I understand that you are anti-development." I said, "No, I am not anti-development. That doesn't make sense. You are permitted to do certain things under the rules and regulations and that is what you are permitted to do." They said, "Well, how would you put it?"

I call it "disciplined development." By that I don't mean going around with a ruler and cracking people over the knuckles. It's the enforcement of the laws on the books. Not enforce some, and forget some. If he's a good guy, let him go. One of the things I learned very early in my career as a supervisor is that when you started doing favors like that, inevitably, it came back and bit you. Not necessarily that person – it might be that person – or to could be someone else that says, "Why not me?" And they are right. I learned that a long time ago, and it is something that I have tried to maintain. And the few times that I have not followed it as close as I might, sure enough, it came back and bit me.

NL: I talked to one of the supervisors at the Moore Hall party that was held rather recently for Arthur Stewart, the retiring superintendent of Valley Forge National Historical Park. I'm sorry, I don't know the supervisor's name. Anyway, he said that you were the one who encouraged him to become a supervisor...

HJ: That was Lee. Lee Ledbetter.

NL: No, it wasn't Lee. I know Lee. He's the bow tie.

HJ: Well, Norman Vutz, I encouraged him to keep going, because he lends continuity to the board. Ted Ryan – he's almost as old as I am and I sure he won't run again. Udi Patankar I don't really know that well. Lee, yes, I did encourage Lee very very strongly to run in my place. He appeared to understand basically what Norman and I believed in and were coming from. He is much more articulate than I am.

NL: He speaks very well, and gets to the root of the matter, it seems.

HJ: He can shut the needless conversation down when it is necessary. Sometimes I think he rides with it too long, and sometimes, like me, he just talks a lot. But basically he is an asset to the board. He is very active. He took over everything I did, except for the roads. He attends more meetings than I did. He gets along with people better than I do. When he does have a problem, he can get himself out of it, basically. Most of the time.

Where I may tend to be too direct – too abrupt. He is a salesman, and knows how to do it. He does an excellent job. A good talker.

NL: You have left the supervisors in good hands.

HJ: They will have the reorganization meeting next Monday night. The state law is that the board of supervisors of second class townships will reorganize the Monday after New Year's – regardless of what their meeting date is the rest of the year. They meet the first Monday and they have a reorganization of the board. It's been our policy to have the reorganization of the board that Monday night and then to go right into the regular meeting. That is what will happen next Monday. That is spelled out in the state law that controls the governments of second class townships. That is different from what controls the first class townships or towns or boroughs.

Initially, 50 years ago, the boards of supervisors of second class townships were smaller – 3 people. The most important job on the board of supervisors was the road supervisor. He, and he still does in the rural parts of this state, he controls the destiny of the people. Whether they are able to have access to towns, or whatever. He is the one who controls the road crews. Being a road supervisor 100 years was a very important position. He was along with the Justice of Peace in the township in importance – those were two major jobs. It's come down as the rest of regulations have increased.

NL: This is the PA Municipalities Code that you are showing me?

HJ: This is a part of it.

NL: This says you must have a comprehensive plan. And if you don't have one you have three years to get it. This one was done in 92?

HJ: Well, the prior one had been done in '77 or something. As long as you are working on it you get credit. I believe you have this...or at least I referred to this before.

NL: Population history of Schuylkill Township...(reading)

HL: That was written by Dr. Lukacs. He is internationally noted as a historical expert. He has written a number of books on European history. He lives right below the old school house off of Valley Park Road. He was a member of the original historical commission in the 1970s.

NL: I wonder why he isn't on our Historical Commission?

HJ: He is an old as I am.

NL: It says that his wife died in 1970 when her husband was appointed to the planning commission.

HJ: That was his first wife. His second wife died about 2 years ago.

This is an interesting document. These are the people involved initially. As I said, it wound up with just a few doing the work. I said there were 20. Looks like there more than 20.

NL: Barbara Cohen – you hear her name. Isn't she involved in Phoenixville?

HJ: She was the Executive Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce for a number of years.

NL: Edward Heit – I know his wife. Was he one of the supervisors?

HJ: Yes, Ed was a supervisor for 6 years....

NL: Here is you....and Pat Pasquale. ...okay...

To change the subject, what is the population of Schuylkill Township?

HJ: Here's a projection from the Chester County Planning Commission...they came up with 10,356 people. That was for 2010.

NL: What did you say? You said 11,000 – 13,000 people for 2020-2025.

HJ: Yes. That is making use of every square foot of the township, according to the zoning. It is not necessarily a practical projection; it is a theoretical one based on certain criteria.

NL: What is our population now?

HJ: I would suggest it is somewhere between 7,500-8,000. I haven't done anything with it for a couple of years.

NL: And we are talking 11,000-13,000 in 2020.

HJ: We have increased 50% in the last 10-15 years. I have been involved in this quite intimately, particularly when I was involved in the school district, because I was getting the information.

NL: Here is the population census for '99. It's 6,600.

HJ: This is the actual population in '99. We were really in the height of the building. I had done a few years later which showed the population of the township about 7,500. After the completion of the Meadows and Moorehall, the rate of increase has slowed down considerably. We are not building that many houses.

NL: We have Anderson Farms going in, and Pickering Creek. But those are big houses, on big lots.

HJ: In the three active development, there are about 35 units in each one. So that projects out to about 3 people per house. The per unit population of the district is somewhere around 2 ½ people per unit. Again, I have detailed information about that. The heaviest usage of the housing has been in the developments, particularly the Meadows and Valley Forge Woods. Moorehall was less, and the reason for that is that they were classified as a starter house – at \$250,000 per house – but they were younger people. Their birthrate...well, they do not have the kids going into school. You see them wheeling them around now.

The interesting fact, and I think that I have mentioned this before, is that approximately 37% of the school age children in the township went to private school in 2001. That is 1/3 of our school age population.

NL: That is a large percentage.

I'm sorry, but it looks like we are running out on tape here. Thank you so much for sharing your knowledge and insights with me. Both you and your wife, Virginia, have made important contributions to Schuylkill Township. You have truly made a difference.

And, on a personal note, it has been a real joy for me to get to know you even this little bit, Herman.