

This interview with Al (Nitch) Gielow took place at his residence on September 29, 1978. The interviewer was John Brennan.

JB: Mr. Gielow, where were you born?

AG: I was born in Chicago on June the 28th, 1893.

JB: What year did you come to Michigan City?

AG: Approximately at the turn of the century.

JB: Was there a reason that your parents moved to Michigan City?

AG: That I couldn't tell you. I don't believe it was employment because later on my Dad was a carpenter and foreman over at the old Haskell-Barker car company.

JB: What sort of wages was he paid back in those days?

AG: Well, I couldn't tell exactly what my dad was being paid, probably two dollars a day.

JB: Was that a good wage then?

AG: People wouldn't believe today that he was being paid that much, but it wasn't good wages because they could hardly support their family. Usually the mothers of the family would take in washing, or go to the Reliance Manufacturing Company and work there.

JB: What side of town were you living on?

AG: At that time we were living on the West side, West Tenth St.

JB: Did you grow up on the West side?

AG: No, I did not. I just have a faint recollection of living on the West side. And later on, the first thing I can remember is when we lived on the East side on Cloud Street. It extended to the cemetery, just one block east of Cleveland Ave.

JB: Do you remember much of your boyhood years on the East side?

AG: Oh yes, we were just like anyone else. There was many young children my same age living there, and we played various games. We'd also play baseball, and that was the beginning--cause I liked baseball as a result of playing it over there with boys my own age.

JB: Was it an ethnic neighborhood you lived in?

AG: It was mostly populated by Polish people.

JB: That's when you first developed an interest in baseball?

AG: That is when I became interested in baseball.

JB: What position did you start out at?

AG: I immediately turned out to be a pitcher, and I pitched throughout my entire life, although I was a good hitter, and this was rather unusual. But I was such a good hitter at pitcher that they would put me at times at the clean up position.

JB: Did you play baseball in grade school?

AG: No. We had no grade schools' in either St John's or the St Paul's school.

JB: Did you go on to high school?

AG: No. When I was a...thirteen years old I was inflicted with typhoid fever, which is a very ravaging disease. I lingered on for a very long time with a hundred and five fever. When I come back again to normalcy I couldn't remember half of the past, of what I had before. I was confirmed all alone on a Sunday morning in St Paul's church with Reverend Wickemeyer, who was the minister at the time.

JB: Did you get a job after you left grade school.

AG: Yes. I took a position with the Ford and Johnson Company. I was marking for a band saw there, and I was making seven and a half cents an hour. We in those days, we worked six days a week, ten hours a day.

JB: I don't suppose there were any unions then?

AG: No. If we asked for a raise, we got fired.

JB: That was a furniture making factory.

AG: That was the Ford and Johnson Furniture making factory. Later on, Karpen took it over from them.

JB: How long did you work there?

AG: I must have worked there about a year.

JB: After you quit there, what did you do?

AG: I went to the Pullman Company; that was called Haskell-Barker at the time. I worked in the bolt department. We threaded bolts. I bettered myself then. I got thirteen and a half cents an hour.

JB: How old were you then?

AG: I would say about fifteen.

JB: Would the money you earned go back to help support the family?

AG: Yes. We'd give the folks the majority of our wages, as a matter of fact. They'd give us what they thought we needed.

JB: Were you playing baseball during the summers at that time?

AG: Well, I played during the summer, and we would just choose teams and so forth, and so on. We played in that manner. I become somewhat better in playing than the people my age, and finally I was contacted by Peter Mutch. He was head of a ball club. It was called Doll's Park. I recall the first game I pitched for them. I received two dollars for it. And in those days, automobiles were at a premium, and bicycles was very few, so we went by train to New Buffalo in the morning. We left here at eight-o'clock, and arrived there in a very short time because it was only a distance of ten miles. Then we ate our lunch there, and our dinner in the evening, and we had to wait until about eight thirty that evening to get a train back to Michigan City. That was my first venture in being a semi-pro baseball player, receiving the two dollars.

JB: What kind of team did Doll's Park have?

AG: It was a semi-professional team and we were started out as an independent team. It was called the Roeskeville Cubs at first, and then finally ....they played ball right where the Eastport tavern is today; that's where the field was. We played there two years, then we joined the inter-city league. There was four teams in the inter-city league. There was the KACs, and the Cardinals. The Canada White Sox, and the Doll's Park team. We played them...Back in 1913 the league built a ball park back in the grove of Doll's Park. We played our first games in 1913. I recall throwing out the first ball in the game. We didn't have anybody, a celebrity, so I threw the first ball when the game started. There was no other. We played a doubleheader--there was four teams--we played a doubleheader each Sunday afternoon, and I remember we had a man here which many people here today can recall. We called him Peanut John, and his name was John Cheronos. One afternoon our game went fifteen innings, and the next game that followed us went thirteen innings. I remember Peanut John coming over to me and laughing, saying, he was an Italian, or a Greek, I don't know which, but anyway he said, "Ha ha, twenty-eight innings, and all for fifteen cents." That was the charge for a ballgame at that time.

JB: Who would sponsor the teams?

AG: Pete Mutch sponsored the team. He had a tavern over there, or a saloon, what we called a saloon in those days. He'd have picnics. There was picnic grounds there. There was an open dance floor there, and then later, in 1914, he built the Doll's Park pavilion. Then later on, in the thirties, the Golden Clads, Michigan City, played softball under lights at Doll's Park. It was the first lights in Michigan City to play softball under. Later on, and during 1914 we played--the pavilion was built in 1914--we also played indoor baseball, in the pavilion.

JB: How large was the pavilion?

AG: I couldn't tell you exactly. To across the street.

JB: About a hundred yards?

AG: A hundred yards or so. The bases in between were very short, you see. We had ten men on the team, instead of nine. We had two shortstops, the right and left shortstop. The right shortstop was the added attraction.

JB: Was there much interest in baseball in Michigan City, in the early 1900s?

AG: In the 1900s. Why I can recall when we had about, I would say, offhand, eighteen teams, and they were all uniformed.

JB: Within Michigan City?

AG: Within Michigan City, all uniformed. And during that time we didn't have enough fields to play on. The only commercial field that we had was over on the West side, which was called Donnelly Field. The Yukons played on it. They had a small diamond in Canada, where kind of a grove was, and there was pine trees over there, and they played ball with us so they could play ball over there. And then over in Eastport, as we left Cleveland Avenue and went west, there was a hill there, and over that hill, there was three diamonds there. They were all open, of course. I mean all that was open. Then there was another diamond right back of Marsh school, and the thing was entirely built of sand. We even played on that, the uniformed teams, cause they had no other place to go to play. Every diamond was used a second or third time in order for the fellas to play on a Sunday.

JB: The men must have been a little bit more active in those days to have so many teams.

AG: They had nothing else to do in those days, about swimming and so forth, and night games. There was, like I say, not any bicycles to use up our time. We'd go pick berries and stuff like that during the week and so forth. And when we were in the intercity league, we practiced every night. We come out and practiced at night.

JB: Would large crowds show up for your Sunday games?

AG: Yes, we had great crowds, and so did the St. Joe Golden Clads softball team. They had to turn them away right along. They played two nights a week.

JB: Who were the St. Joe Golden Clads?

AG: They was a local team and they come from the St. Joe Lodge, which is there on Franklin St. The St. Joe Golden Clads.

JB: Besides Pete Mutch on the East side, who else would sponsor the teams?

AG: Well, the Arndt's tavern, they sponsored the Canada White Sox, and a fella by the name of Fred Kriesal, he sponsored the Cardinals. On the West side, I believe it was George Geister. That was the KACs. They bought their uniforms and so forth, and baseballs, and various equipment. Now, prior to this time, and I can recall it, we played baseball where there were no masks, and no shin guards, or gloves to put on when you bat, or helmets. The catcher stood back of the catcher, and if it was hit or missed, or thrown and went back of the batter, they'd get it on the first bounce, back in those days.

JB: Was there an umpire?

AG: We had an umpire, but the umpire would stand back of the pitcher, and one would stand on the bases.

JB: Was the strike zone a little wider in those days?

AG: Well, it was up to the umpire, because we did not live by the rulebook. It was to each his own.

JB: Were the umpires treated with respect back then?

AG: Just like anything else, if one was close, why, both sides wanted it. You could only rule it one way. We'd call him a blind robin.

JB: Did teams come in from out of town to play ball here?

AG: Yes. Teams would come in from out of town to play here. We'd have one open date each month to play an outside team. They'd either come here, or we'd go over there. And then, later on...later on I joined the Michigan City Grays. Pitched for them.

JB: How did they come about?

AG: The Michigan City Grays, they originated on the West side, on Donnelly Field. They originated after the Yukons gave up the field. Then the Michigan City Grays come on in there. And then in 1911 they switched from Donnelly Field to Lakeside Park, which was right over the harbor in Washington Park. It was in 1911.

JB: These were the Grays that switched parks?

AG: The Michigan City Grays, they built a ballpark with the help of the merchants on Franklin St, near the ballpark itself.

JB: Were they also a semi-professional team?

AG: Yes. They were a semi-professional team. There were leading teams here. We had some of the best clubs who could vie with any of the neighboring cities, or we went as far as in Wisconsin and played the great teams over there. And sometimes we had major league team

players engaged at the end of the year when we were playing to see who had the best team for that town, maybe even in that area.

JB: Were there any other teams in the county?

AG: No. At that time, the other teams were ordinary teams, and some were not uniformed. About the only teams were the inter-city teams which I mentioned before. Then Andy Spsychalski, he owned the Michigan City Grays, and for four Sundays straight he got rained out, his debts got great and he didn't know what to do. The Pullman Company had taken over the Haskell-Barker Company, they wanted to put on a team, so they contacted Andy. They said we'll play one game--he was in a hole so much, and asked him if he'd pick up the tab for the, that he had given to have those players come down with no income, because the game was called off. And the Haskell-Barker team, run by Roy Dougharty, and Paige, they agreed to do that. So he stated that we would be the two leading teams, and whoever won the game would take over the park. We played them on a Sunday afternoon, and I recall we beat them seven to nothing. We imported a pitcher from the Cubs which had been suspended from the team.

JB: You brought in a ringer?

AG: Yes. We brought in a ringer; He was Mike Prendergast, and he was one of the great pitchers for the Cubs. He went by the name of Spencer down here, so they couldn't keep track of him. And if I recall, we took over Andy's obligations. From then on we played up until after the first world war, and then it took most of our players from our teams and so forth. That was the beginning of the end for the great semi-pro teams of Michigan City.

JB: Who was the first semi-pro team here?

AG: Well, to my recollection it was the Yukon's, and Orphie Gotto, the man who had the feed store here, was the pitcher for them. His catcher's name was Fred Wilson. And Fred Wilson later on was a barber in town ...but Fred Wilson had played semi-pro ball before that, and a fella by the name of Andy Ladshaw who was with the Cubs for many years was their trainer, and later on went with the Bears, as their trainer, why, he was Orphie Gotto's catcher. They played on the Donnelly field.

JB: What kind of field was Donnelly Field?

AG: It was a grass field, and I couldn't say that the infield was skinned. It was just trodden down by running along it and so forth. They had an enclosed ball park, although, and they had two different stands. They were covered above; they had a roof on them. And they had a big bell, like you had on a streetcar, and they had it there, and the string would come down from the top of the roof there. The string down there. Whenever they'd get a run they'd pull that string and it would start ringing.

JB: How far out were the fences then?

AG: The fences? They were, I would say, 350 in general...maybe the center field fence was a little bit more, because it came to a point.

JB: Were many more hit out of the ball park?

AG: Not too many in those days, because we had a dead ball. We'd a dead ball which today they call the wooden ball. So there wasn't many of them hit, and besides we used to use a spit ball, the emery ball.

JB: What is an emery ball?

AG: The emery ball was a ball that hit back of the stands, or anything like that, and it was scuffed. And if you would take that and you would, uh, you couldn't place your fingers over the scuff, because it wouldn't break. However, if you put it on top, or on the bottom, or in the front it would be a hard time telling which way it was breaking. It was the most terrific breaking ball there was, and the next was the spit ball.

JB: What did the spit ball do?

AG: The spit ball, the spit ball was used, we used elm bark. We chewed it. Elm bark. The elm bark was by the center of the strawberry box. We'd get the sticks and put them in our mouth, and the saliva was just great. Now we had to place the saliva in between the seams of the ball, because a spit ball didn't revolve. Whenever you used one over the seams, the spit ball would twirl, your baseball would twirl in other words. Then we had the shine ball. Now Cy Cotty was from the Chicago White Sox was the first to use it. He would take the ball, the new ball, and he'd put paraffin on the front of his trousers, and he would take that ball, just that one spot, and rub it, and that spot would shine just like a mirror. And when that ball come in and spun, it would just make the hitters eyes blink when it come in there. It was the same as using years ago, people will know, the oldsters will, that they used tobacco juice, and spotted the ball up with tobacco juice, and that had the same, but not as bad as the shiner ball from the ....

JB: Which one was harder to hit?

AG: The emery ball was a faster breaking ball than any of them.

JB: Like a slider?

AG: No. It was a sharp breaking ball, a very sharp breaking ball. We take a pitcher with the Cubs today throwing that fork ball that they call. He uses it between the index finger and the middle finger...gets it between there. Now to throw it that way you must be blessed with long fingers, or you couldn't have control. The gentleman pitching for the Cubs he just has marvelous control. But he's like anyone else when they are wild, but the majority of the time...and that ball would drop, just like off from a table. And the spit ball...Naw they would say to me, he told me, "If it was such a great ball, why didn't they permit it in the major leagues? Why didn't a lot more of them use it?" Well, it was for the simple reason that they couldn't control it. No matter how good a breaking ball you got, if you can't control it, you can't play in any league.

JB: How many pitches did you have then? Curve? Changeup? Slider?

AG: Well, we never talked about ....we had the changeup. It was used very seldom. We thought they would fight they would hit it out of the park. But it wasn't, which we learned later, when we got out of baseball. However, we called it--the ball come up there--I guess we called that the "outdrop", in those days, and the ball would come up there, and just shot outward, to a right handed hitter. It was called the "outcurve", and the ball that was thrown; it was side arm, it broke into the batter. They called that the "inshoot". That's what they called the pitches in those days. There was no such thing as the calls they have today.

JB: Did any local players go on to play professional ball?

AG: Well, there was some of us that had a chance, but I don't believe any great fellas, any great ball players come out of ....went into the major league. Uh, Frank Nespo, he played minor league ball, and Frank Arndt and I--Frank was a pitcher too, and I had a chance to go with Indianapolis. But the pay was so low that we could make more by freelancing someplace else. Because they only payed about three hundred dollars a month, playing every day. Also, in South Bend, we had the South Bend team in the Central league.

JB: Did you ever earn your living by playing baseball?

AG: Oh yes. Half of the time I made my living by playing baseball. They had a great league in Chicago, a Midwest league. And Rusty Sullivan he went with the White Sox. We both went over to pitch for the St. Michaels, in South Chicago. And both of us got eight hundred dollars a month pitching for them.

JB: How long did your career last?

AG: I pitched ball for about twenty-five years, constantly. Want to hear a joke?

JB: Sure.

AG: The fellas said that they had watched me pitch, and so forth, and I told him, "I just got a call from the Hall of Fame" and I said, "They want to put me in the Hall of Fame." Now they told me that Babe Ruth and some of them great guys that played ball, they never was the pitcher I was, and they said that nobody will ever compete with the record I had. So anyway, I pitched for twenty five years and never won a game.

JB: Did you win that first game In New Buffalo?

AG: I think we lost it. I think we lost the game. They were much older fellas than we were. We were just a young team, and I believe we got beat four to two, or something like that the score was.

JB: Were the Michigan City Zorns another semi-pro team?

AG: Yeah. Yeah. I have a picture of them here someplace. It was in the evening news. They were backed by the Zorn Brewery Company. They had quite a team. And they had a pitcher, he was colored. They called him Snowball. He pitched for them before Crphie Gotto. He was a very good pitcher as I understand. I was just a kid and I used to crawl under the fence. They had a wooden fence there. We'd take a shovel with us if they filled it up again. We would take a shovel and dig a hole under there, and crawl in under there, oh, good suit and all.

JB: Were the rules different at all back then?

AG: There were always nine men. A baseball nine, they'd say, in those days.

JB: What would you say the biggest differences were in the rules?

AG: In that day, a foul ball was not called a strike. It was not called a strike, and you didn't have to catch a third strike in those days. That was back there at the turn of the century. We would change our clothes at home way back at the infancy of baseball; we would put on our uniform at home, and then go home with it again because there was no facilities in changing clothes.

JB: Was the game a little livelier then? Was it more competitive?

AG: Oh yeah. They'd be fighting in the grand stands. Fights would break out every once in a while. They'd have a few bucks bet on the game. We did not have any running water there, so we had what we called a "waterboy". I remember when I was first pitching for Doll's Park, that we had a well-known boy from Michigan City who was our mascot. His name was Pat Mathias.

JB: Sounds familiar.

AG: Yes. Well, his brother, and they called him Matt, his name was Clarence, he and Orphie Gotto were the founders of Long Beach. They called him Matt, and we called him Dotty. He played second base for the Doll's Park team.

JB: When did baseball start to decline in Michigan City?

AG: Baseball started declining after they tore down Doll's Park. That would have been about in 1940. Then what we did was, we took over Ames field. They were just building it then. And after Ames Field was readied for baseball and that. They didn't play softball on it at the time, why the Doll's Park went on the skids. There was hardly any ball playing being played over there. Mrs. Mutch--her husband had died--she was the owner, and would not let anybody go in there because she didn't have any insurance, and so forth. The gates were locked and closed. And then we started the Michigan City Cubs, which was one, probably could be compared with the Haskell-Barker team. The fellas started from shoestring....they took over the ballpark, and after they took over the ballpark--the right field fence was not put up at Ames Field. So they got together with mayor Parker, and they put up that right field fence at Ames Field. And they had the South Shore bring in them lights, the big long metal poles, and so forth. In order for them to get started they would pay the fees and so forth, for the ball park. They sold three tickets for fifty cents. You could see three games for fifty cents. And they were playing great teams, semi-pro teams.

Eventually, we had such a good team in Michigan City, through the efforts of Cy Shroeder, that the American Association clubs were beaten by us. The Chicago Cubs were beaten five to two from the Michigan City Cubs.

JB: What year was that?

AG: These were in the mid-forties. Started in about 1941 and went up to about 1950. They disbanded on account of the city itself, because after a while we got new councilmen and stuff. They put pressure on them. They wanted to raise the rent on it, and lights and so forth. They wanted passes for the ball park, and even a little divvy from it because it was making big money because it drew tremendously. That's the way Cy Schroeder explained it to me ...and those who know Cy Schroeder know that it's true.

JB: Would the big league talent scouts come to Michigan City?

AG: Oh yes. They come many times. There were many scouts that I knew and I used to sit along side of them. They used to have them come down here, and have baseball schools. And that was advertised in the paper ...see, they all come down here, because we had a wonderful ball park here, and that's where they wanted to come, where they had good facilities, and so forth. During my time ....when I come back in 1937--I went back to Chicago in the twenties, and then I come back in 1937--I took over Doll's Park, and I had baseball schools and so forth. It got so large the kids couldn't put their bicycles up against the fence any more. I'd get baseballs from... I had three dozen when I come here from being head coach of the Chicago Sports Association; I brought them over here. I got baseballs from Hemp Fedder, who was our mayor at the time. We had a lot of baseball games in those days with the youngsters. After the schools we'd have baseball.

JB: Would you say that today's little leagues here are the offspring of the baseball schools.

AG: It was the offspring because after the teachings we'd have 'em play. I would stand them in line, by their height, and then pick them for the teams. We couldn't go by age, so we went by size. We would pick the teams and then they'd play. And then we had the News Dispatch, we had the photographers there; I would show them how to slide, all the different things: how to slide into a base. Their leads, and so forth. How the pitchers got off the mound. The catchers, that when they stood back there and was catching, not to leave their hand open when they was catching....to close their hand until the ball hit the catcher's mitt, and then cover it. I said the reason for that was that a catcher if he held his hand straight open, it would split his fingernails and so forth. We taught them. There's only one way to play baseball, and that's the right way. Some fella in Chicago, when I was teaching--you know when I was head coach of the Chicago Sports Association, they had a big piece in the Daily News--he said, "Gielow was trying to teach the kids major league baseball, when he should be teaching them sandlot ball." I didn't pay any attention to it until later on when some more pieces come in, and then I went over to the sports editor of the Daily News and I says--he says, "I expected you." So, I went in there and I told him, I said, "Now whoever said that I should be teaching them sandlot baseball." I says, "What is sandlot baseball?" I said, "It must be the wrong way." I says, "There's only one way to play baseball... that's major league baseball, because in major league baseball is the easiest to play. Because whenever you see a major league team, they're graceful there. But the guys who go

through a lot of motions to pick up a ball, and so forth, and play their position wrong. Nobody there to coach 'em. I said, "That's what I would call sandlot ball." And I said, "I would like to say this to the writer, or writers of the column, Do you teach a kid when he goes to school to spell wrong?"

JB: Did they play night games out at Doll's Park when you were there?

AG: Not night baseball ever...night softball. Only by the Golden Clads.

JB: Who were the Michigan City Wonders?

AG: The Wonders were...that was Pete's last team over there. The Wonders was a bunch of colored fellas, of has-beeners, and some of them played with the American Giants, and some with Peter's Union Giants, and the Leland Giants. They were all colored teams that weren't good enough for them anymore. So they come over from South Bend to Pete, and he took them over as the Michigan City Wonders.

JB: Hardball team?

AG: Yeah. May I tell you this? Did you ever buy a hardball rulebook?

JB: A baseball rule book?

AG: Did you ever buy a hardball rule book?

JB: Not that I recall.

AG: Well then ...say baseball. We do not say hardball. Only softball players say hardball.

JB: Well, I'm more of a hardball player. (Laughter)

JB: Baseball.

AG: Baseball, because we people in baseball never say hardball.

JB: I was thinking they're playing more softball these days.

AG: That's where hardball originated, when softball come in...and softball come in from indoor baseball. The Doll's Park team, we had such a great team over there, that we played the Lions from South Bend, and they had a great team, and they hadn't been beaten for three years. We played them a three game series and beat them two out of three. This was the Doll's Park indoor team. We had a pitcher. His hand was crippled. His name was Jim Nippons and they called him the 'Holy Terror' of Indiana. And with his fingers like that, he had a natural drop ball that they could hardly hit. He was a great. He was great.

JB: Leaving baseball for a minute: what other activities would go on out at Doll's Park?

AG: Well, Doll's Park .... We had picnics over there in the grove, and then we had the merchants' picnic. That was a banner picnic every year. Anybody could have robbed am home in town, because they were all out at Doll's Park. Everybody was out there; it was a great picnic. They gave things away for races and stuff, that today you wouldn't have enough money to buy at a grocery store: big hams and everything for the races. And in the evening, Walter Crum--he was the head of an electrical appliance company here in town--he showed silent moving pictures out in the grove there, out in the ball field across from Doll's Park ...where the center is today. We'd start playing on Sunday outside. As I said before, where the Eastport tavern stands. Walter Crum, incidentally, run the Lyric theatre at the corner of Seventh and Franklin. I don't know who this will be run, and who will hear it, but it was very few that will remember, but if they go down to the library, I am sure, that they will pick up some of these names.

JB: Did they have dancing out at Doll's Park?

AG: They had dancing out at Doll's Park, and these picnics would use the dance floor, and they would charge them so much per dance. However, before that the dance hall, the dance place was out in the open. It was made out of wood, on the ground, just raised a little bit. On one end was an elevated bandstand. It could take care of about four musicians. And being that this dance floor was out for all the inclement weather: snows, and the hot summers, and the cold winters and so forth, it finally was raised up like an old washboard. But still they danced on it. And then after the dancing ...it seemed to die out when we had other dancing around town. So then, we started roller skating in the pavilion. I got a hold of Smith, fella by the name of Smith. He had roller skates, and I had the place, so we started in partnership. So then we went for a while, and I got out of it because I was in the tavern business at that time: called the Tivoli Cafe. I got out of it, and I turned it over to my brother Carl. He bought out Granville Smith, and after that, he conducted it himself. It finally got so great, that they had to build an addition onto it, and then finally Mrs. Mutch couldn't stand the noise, after a number of years, couldn't stand the noise from the roll of the roller skates over the surface. She tore the pavilion down.

JB: You mentioned something about the commission form of government in one of your articles.

AG: Yes. The commission form of government. In 1916 Mayor Miller took over, and he had been elected before: Fred C. Miller. At the end of his term, they were trying out this commission form of government, the people in town, which they had heard of. So, they formed the commission form of government, and they ran on the ticket to beat the city administration, which consisted of a mayor and councilmen. And they won out. But before they won out--there was no mayor election and so forth--and they were gonna take over. Mayor Miller said it was unconstitutional. That the commission form of Government was unconstitutional. So they filed the papers in the court. While they were waiting for a decision on it, both of the men that run the city sat in back of the desk at the city hall.

JB: Who was behind the commission form of government?

AG: It was most of Michigan City.

JB: How was it different from the mayor and councilmen?

AG: They had a city manager, and then they had five commissioners...and they appointed the city manager. As I recall, he got five thousand dollars a year. That was his pay at that time. They had a number of them. They lasted eight years, and then they went back to the mayorship.

JB: Did it seem to run the town better? Was there less graft because of it?

A0: Well, there seemed to be, but I don't know. I guess the answer of it is that after eight years, the people didn't like it because they voted it out. There was no graft to my knowledge of any kind. They were all well-versed people of Michigan City. None of them were questionable as to their characters in general. They were a fine group.

JB: Could you relate the story of Bill Rizzo?

AG: Oh yes, I'm glad that you asked me that, because that was very tragic. It was on a Sunday night. I was running the Burghouse Cafe, in 1921. All at once I heard, people were hollering and screaming all down Franklin Street, and I ran over there I had found out that Bill Rizzo had been in a tavern--Peanee Berenz's tavern. So they had been drinking freely, moonshine and so forth. He had a girl with him, and as they left on Franklin Street--he was between the alley on the east side, between Michigan and Fourth Street--and as they were leaving she was, the woman in the company of Bill, she was screaming and hollering. And Captain Zimmerman and Officer Spencer come walking along. They grabbed a hold of her and were going to arrest her. Bill Rizzo sand, "No. You're not going to." He said, "Oh yes we are." And he pulled out a gun and shot Captain Zimmerman through the head. I don't recall where he shot Officer Spencer. But he killed them. Both of them were lying dead there on the sidewalk. Then he commanded a car ...a fella come along. The fella's name was Billy Kutch. He said, "Drive over to Frank Arndts. He knew Bill because he also was a bridge tender for the railroad company. He noticed that he was not rational. He commanded his car and told him to take it over to Frank Arndt's. He knew Frank and he asked him for another gun, and he was waving his own. Frank tried to settle him down, but he couldn't, and Frank couldn't give him no gun, and so he shot him through the leg. But prior to this time, Billy Kutch...when he went in there, Billy Kutch left his car, took the keys out of his own car and ran away as fast as he could. And when Bill returned with his gun, got in the car, and was going to go away with it, found there was no keys in the car, so he took his gun and shot himself through the head, and killed himself.

JB: That is quite a story. Do you remember the Chautauqua coming through town?

AG: Yes. I remember the Chautauqua. That's way way back. They had tents and that, and they would come here. From my recollection, I believe they'd be here about a week. It was very educational, but I can't tell you exactly .... it didn't last very long. The Chautauqua. And I certainly can't understand you asking me about that. I never heard that, the Chautauqua, for a long time, or anybody ever to mention it. It's been years and years. We had it coming here. It was an educational body, and I can't tell you in general, what, uh, what...

JB: Did you say something about the circuses at Donnelly Field?

AG: Oh, the circuses would come. Now these circuses would come to Michigan City. And although Michigan City was a very small town, and people note today that these big circuses go into Chicago. They might wonder how Michigan City could support a circus of that type: like the John Robinson, the Ringling Brothers, Adams, Forepaw and Sells. All those large circuses come here. They would come here with sideshows, and they would go to Donnetly Field, where the baseball park was. They would tear down the south end of the field, the fences, because it wasn't large enough. The side facing the prison. They would tear down the fences for the side shows that they had, and they had a lot of other different things. They had many things accompanied by these big circus tents.

JB: What would be in the side shows?

AG: The side shows would be flame throwers and sword eaters, midgets, oh, freaks of various kinds.

JB: Would you attend them as a kid?

AG: Oh, my folks didn't have the money, but I'd sneak in some way. I would attend all circuses because I would carry water for the elephants, because there was no water on the field. They had to carry them from homes, and from pumps, and go over there, and get them to carry water over there. And they also used the water where the ring was, where the horses went around, because that would be real dry, and the dust of it, you know, would be awful for the people there. So we would wetten that down.

JB: Is this the way a lot of local kids would be able to see the circus?

AG: Yes. There was quite a number of them, because it took quite a number, because we had to pump our water, and carry it way over there.

JB: Were they good shows?

AG: Oh yes. They weren't as good as they are today, but just as big. And I remember they had a fella on a bicycle went way up there like that, and did like a loop the loop. He was called 'Diablo'. He would go and say, "Are you ready?" And he'd come down that thing and right the circle without falling off the bicycle, and he'd come out of the end there. And the most of it, a lot of it was clowns, and some acrobats of course, and they had their parade. They'd have their parade in the morning, and then they'd return to the fairgrounds.

JB: A parade down Franklin Street?

AG: Down Franklin Street. They'd have hayracks with clowns turning, you know, doing acrobats, acrobatic stunts and so forth. And every circus that come in town, why, another thing that every circus had was a steam calliope.

JB: What was that?

AG: That was a steam, was called, with whistles on it. Propelled with steam.

JB: Did you mention there being some sort of surf slide down at Washington Park?

AG: Oh yes. It was down in Washington Park there. We also had, not alone the slide, but the regular theatre over there which took place: moving pictures and so forth. Athletic events. And this chute that you're talking about, you climbed up a ladder and went up there. The slide down was bordered by two high boards on the side there, and then below that was wooden rollers. They would go down there with a surface board, and that would go right on down into the lake; down like that and into the lake. It was used an awful lot. They had bath houses. You didn't have to go in behind the bushes and change your whatchamacallits. You could go in any time and engage a room over there. Another thing going back to the circus which I think would be worthwhile. When the circus come here there were thousands people that would attend that from our town. At that time we were only a town of about twenty thousand, but there were thousands of people that would attend it. They kept on coming here, so they made out aright here in Michigan City. here, so they made out aright here in Michigan City.

JB: This is all the tape we have. I'd like to thank you.

AG: You're welcome.