

John Vail T-4-88 Recollections of his father William Vail

Transcribed by Jan Van Ausdal 8/19/03.

Interviewer: What kind of recollections can you tell us about your father?

Vail: Well, my father was not a—of course he was born in 1875—and for walking around town or just in conversation, would talk about things like Tannery Hill which is the hill on Franklin Street—what I'm trying to say, what do they call it now--Riley Hill? Well, just the one up from the old Scholl's place, (unintelligible) now. Well, of course, we would ask him about that. At one time there was a tannery there. Of course, one of the things, being involved in banking, all of the Vails have been connected with banking ever since my grandfather founded the First National Bank like, it was in 1873.

Interviewer: That was in Michigan City?

Vail: Yes. That was the first bank and that was down where, well it was at Second and Franklin. But Second Street doesn't really exist any more, and it was the building before Mark Norman's Cafeteria. Of course, that building doesn't exist any more. Apparently when some records were brought over from LaPorte, apparently some cash or whatever—they had a hole in the floor and all night long, there was somebody up there with a shotgun guarding the vault, because they didn't have any protection at that time. And although Michigan City was very lucky in bank robberies when my father was connected with the bank, they have since had a robbery of the Eastgate Branch. My brother was the manager out there. But that was the first, I guess really the only bank robbery in Michigan City. Because, as the policeman said, it was really very easy to close off Michigan City. There are really only three ways to get out, unless they would go out by boat north where they really couldn't cover. And whether the robbers knew or sensed this or not, I don't know. But the story I'm going to tell is that my parents were very close mouthed in some ways, and it didn't come out till some years later during the moratorium when Roosevelt closed the banks, I think it was 1933, my father called a meeting of all the banks in Michigan City. And at that time, there were five banks: The National, The Merchants Bank, The Peoples Trust & Savings (which is down where The First Federal is now, in that same building), and The Citizens Bank, of course, and The (what they call) The Trust & Savings. My uncle was president of that. My dad got all of these men together. Everybody was very nervous because some of the Chicago banks were in trouble. And the story was that we were all shunted off to bed.. I would have been about eleven at that time. Any way, we were put in the background so that we wouldn't know what was going on and just might say something at school the next day like "All the bankers were out" and cause a panic. But of course, that did not happen in Michigan City and my father was a very conservative man and, I feel , a very good banker. But I remember my mother recounting the fact that The First National Bank had moved up quite a bit, of course that was the Fortune 500 of the banks, and that was and how proud she was that the bank had moved up and become a very strong bank and was respected. My father was very respected as a banker. And so ...

Interviewer: When did your father get his start in banking? From his father's

Vail: Yes, he didn't come into the bank directly. He went to Renssaler Polytechnic for one year with the idea of becoming an engineer. And he had a

very good, practical engineering background. I remember Rev. Ford who was city engineer back in the '60's and back in the '50's and even in the '40's under both Republican and Democrat administrations commented on how my father had a very good, solid grounding in the engineering, and it seemed to make a lot of sense to Ford and Ford respected him for that. But he came back to Michigan City. I really don't know why he didn't go on with his engineering. Whether he just wanted to be back in Michigan City or what. But it went on for a while and I don't know just what the time frame is here, Bruce, but he was either in charge of or worked at the Tecumseh Facing Mills which operated inside the Michigan City State Prison in Michigan City. And I remember he used to talk about how some of the knitting machines worked. And I guess facing was just making knitted linings, I suppose. I never really asked about this. Linings for jackets or that sort of thing. I can remember having kind of knitted linings. Or that sort of thing. They called it The Tecumseh Facing Mill. And he was in charge of that for a while. I remember he used to talk about how some of the machines worked. And then he went into the bank, and I guess started at the bottom or he was the cashier for a while. But I remember him recounting—this would probably be back in the first decade, probably before World War I or during that era. Now the bank had moved to the corner of Fourth and Franklin. Now wait a minute. No, it might have been Michigan and Franklin. I don't know whether they were at Michigan and Franklin or Fourth and Franklin. But any way, it was before they went into the present building where the present bank is located in the middle of the 500 block. And that was in 1925, I believe that bank building was built then. But he told about the number of Syrians and Lebanese people that came to Michigan City to work in the foundries, particularly at the Haskell and Barker Car Works, which is now Pullman, of course, or was Pullman when it was here. And they seemed to be able to take the heat a lot better, because when they were relining these furnaces, they had to go in before they were completely cool in there. It was hot working there. In fact, 150 or 120 degrees in there. And any way, that's how these people from Lebanon or Syria came here. And that's how we got a really large of that ethnic population. But my dad told of the number of drafts that he would send to Beirut for them when they would come over without a family or even without their wives, and would send money back to the old country. But of course that happened with a lot of ethnic groups. But my dad particularly remembers sending them to Beirut.

My dad was connected with an incident in which you've got to take a lot of pride in. It's the thing that didn't get into the papers really. Back in the early thirties, Sam Insul was expanding all over the map and buying into utilities and was a great promoter. And he saw Michigan City as a target area. And apparently—and I never got this real straight. I won't put the people in the record here, but there was apparently somebody who was going to try to sell out The Michigan City Water Department at quite a reasonable price, to Sam Insul. And my dad and, I think it was Mr. Stockwell, who was Red Stockwell's father and Chet Glidden. The three of them got an injunction and stopped the sale. Some of the people were really mad. And the street price, as I remember, was \$231,000. that they were going to sell The Water Department for. And as a result of that, Martin Krieger got wind of it and somebody bragged to Martin Krieger how much money they were gonna make in this sale. And Martin Krieger, as you know, was a very straitlaced guy, and was in the legislature at the time. This would have been around 1930 or in there somewhere, I suppose. And he got wind of it and they weren't gonna let this happen. And as a result of that, a legislation was drafted that a city like Michigan City (a third class city or whatever it was) to set up a kind of water company, not based on tax revenue, but revenues that are produced by

the utility itself. A lot of people still don't realize that they're not paying taxes when they—that the water department is not a tax-supported thing. They're self-sufficient. Okay, and then as a result of that, my dad became the first president of this water board, under this new law. And I think it was about 1931. Then they wanted someone to run it and Philroy C. Gale, Sr., the project engineer on the generating station. And that was finished around, I suppose, in 1929 or '30, right in that area. And we were coming into the Depression, and I think he could not find work. And I think he might have been with Storn and Webster that built that. And, as a result, they got a very good man, Philroy Gale, Sr. I became very good friends with his son and with the Gales, too. He lived in Long Beach. And he was the first. Well, the point is that they could not afford a person like that except that there was no work in the Depression. During the Depression, there was no work like that and Mr. Gale was around Michigan City, I think, until about 1937 when he moved to Saginaw, Michigan, and his son along with him, My very, very best friend at the time, Philroy, Junior. So that's how the water department got started and is presently set up. The old water department, as I'm sure the records show, is right over here, a couple blocks from here, at the old Hays Corporation. They had a tank up on top of the hill there and it was just pumped—of course, it was not filtered and I don't think it was treated in any way. In fact, it might have been taken (this is something I really shouldn't get into, because I don't know that much about it). But when they built this facility down at the present place, it was expanded to capacity and the quality of the water (my dad would take us down there and tell us about how the flock (?) was created by aluminate sulfate, I believe) and we got to crawl down into the clear well and we were only twelve or thirteen years old then and it was quite an experience to see that thing grow and, of course, my dad was very interested in it.

As a banker, of course—bankers are supposed to be lousy creatures and they get a reputation for being very tight-fisted and that sort of thing—but it's interesting. One time I was in 8<sup>th</sup> Street Café and George Trask ( who passed away two or three years ago) again, I was in 8<sup>th</sup> Street Café and George Trask had a dent in the dry cleaning or laundry business and he told me one time (unsolicited, we were just talking about my dad) and he said that "A banker can refuse money and make you mad, but he can refuse and make you eventually very happy." And he told the story about the obvious kind of sharpie who had come down from Chicago and he was gonna get the contract for all the laundry at the Golfmar (?) Hotel, which was out in Grand Beach before it burned down, I think about 1934. I think it was around that area. Grand Beach was a big—they had ski, they had a toboggan run out there, they had ski meets out there. It was quite a spot for people from Chicago. And it was a big hotel, a big project. And George Trask came in and said, "Why don't you loan me and this new partner of mine some money? Because we're gonna get this contract and we're gonna make a lot of money. And I'll do the cleaning and he'll do the sales work out there." And he said, "George, " and apparently my father didn't investigate it or maybe knew the guy's stripes and he said, "George, I'll loan you money, but I won't loan the both of you money." And it queered the deal. And, six months later, the guy—you know, he'd gone over the hill and he was just using (unintelligible) And, my dad sensed it, knew it, and George said, "The best thing you could ever have done for me." To keep him out of there, because he would have dragged George down and all his money with him. So that's kind of the other side of my father's perhaps conservative or hardnosed nature. Actually, many people have come up to me on the street and said, "Oh boy, your dad sure got us out of a hole or when we needed money," and, of course, going through the Depression when a lot of

savings were cut out, why in many cases, he had to be, I'm sure, hardnosed when people didn't have collateral, they'd come—he talked about doctors, sometimes these young doctors came into Michigan City and, "Oh, come on, give me—I need \$20,000 to set up" and didn't have a thing to their name and no collateral or anything, but, of course, a lot of enthusiasm and he'd just have to say "No." Because it would have actually been almost illegal to do it without any collateral, or the federal examiners would say, "Well, what is the collateral?" So that's just kind of a little sideline there.

My dad knew the county probably as well as anybody, and we used to, every Sunday, get in the family car and go riding out almost as far as Westville or over to LaPorte, and even beyond LaPorte in some cases, to see a cousin or cousins over there, and he would point out different farms and who lived there and I'm sure he had loaned them money (many of the people). And they would come in to Michigan City and he knew them, personally. So I got quite familiar with the--

Interviewer: You were acquainted with the county?

Vail: Yeah. And he would point it out. I think it was his grandfather—maybe it was my grandfather, I should know that. But Walter Vail started the bank. I don't think it would have been Walter Vail's father who owned the stage line between LaPorte and Michigan City. And he would point out the halfway house at the bottom of the long hill that comes down from the summit. Oh, it's about a quarter of a mile north. It's the bend there at the bottom of that long hill. We used to call it—there was a big chestnut grove and Dick Minery (?) lives there now, but it's down the hill from that. But for a long time, there was a little station there, and when the interurban was put through, there was a little station there. And that was—I think it probably stopped at Waterford and stopped at that little spot and there was a little shelter there. Unfortunately, I never rode that interurban. I don't know why. Didn't have enough sense just to jump on it and run over to LaPorte and back. I used to see it. Living on the south side, we'd see it go wisking along and when they finally tore it down, I suppose it was in '32 or '33, we got a lot of good wire and stuff that they just left there. Of course, they pulled up the rails, I believe. But we got spikes and we'd find stuff along the right-of-way and you can still see that right-of-way in some places. But what I started to say was that what they called the relief road, U. S. 20, was to be relief to 12, because 12 went through Michigan City and very close to the lake up in in New Buffalo. They needed a wider road and they wanted a four lane road. This was back probably in '35. And they were going to come down right where is the present Barker Road, right through Bud Ruby's property, but my father and some other people in Michigan City convinced them that they should go farther south where it is presently located. So that's why the bend is out there at Woodland. And it bends south and takes that offset because they just didn't want the highway in that close to what they could see in the future as being a good residential area which, of course, Edgewood is today. Yet if that highway went right by the front of Barker Junior High School, why it would have killed that to a great extent. So he told about getting them to move that far south.

My dad loved to tell about—and sometimes he'd tell us or remind us about it—but there were seventeen mills in Trail Creek, grain mills, and one of the reasons for that is that further west of here they didn't have (until they got down to the Wabash River and down in there), they didn't have the falls of water. And he said they used to come bring wagons of grain from as far as

Joliet here, and what time, I'm sorry I can't say what periods. But I expect it was into the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when he might have still seen them. But whether his father told him about this or he saw them, I don't know. But he talked about the plank road, which Michigan Boulevard was at one time. And they would be on this road; I imagine Roeske Mills because it was down lower was one of the bigger mills. And whether they were waiting to have their corn ground there into flour, I don't know. But he said they counted it and the wagons were two miles long in season. And, of course, we've seen a little of that here with the Cargill Elevator, about ten or twelve years ago and the grain trucks would come in here, of course not to get it ground, but to store it. So then this was, at one time, quite a grain center. Again, I don't know whether my father actually experienced these or whether he was told about them. Cause I don't know when—I think it was the Lake Erie and Western Railroad—Dude Calvert could straighten me out on that pretty good, I'm sure. But it used to come right down the middle of Union Boulevard there, Union Street, in Canada. And it stopped; it did not cross the harbor. That was the end of it there. But my dad tells about the women getting so incensed with the cinders blackening their laundry that they just wanted that plain out of there. They wanted that railroad out of there. Well, I guess they finally got their way because it isn't—it ain't there no more. But that's one of the reasons that street is so wide. And, incidentally, I feel it makes such a much better access to Michigan City from off of 12. There are plans now to maybe do that. But it is a hundred foot right-of-way. And, of course, it's a double divided thing. But there was a railroad down the middle of that. And the women got out and laid down on the tracks. That was the only way they could stop these big behemoths, the locomotives, from comin' in to town. And, as they say, it seems like they got their way. But I guess they actually all got together and had a lie-in or something on the railroad tracks. Where I lived, out at Maple and Coolspring, south of there, there was old Edgewood, there were some houses out in there that were built in the twenties and early thirties. But east of the present Maple Street in Edgewood, there were no houses until you got out almost to where Concord is now or out beyond there. And there was a big woods, Nelson's Woods, there. Right across the street from us. And back behind there—we never saw it in our day, but we saw the bones of the old slaughterhouse that was back there. And it was just out in the country in those days. They closed it down, probably before I was born because it looked like pretty old bones. But we'd go digging in the sand out there and we'd find some pretty big bones. And, as young kids, we were quite excited about it and my dad thought that's where the old slaughterhouse was. But that would be about where the present Edgewood School is. My dad talked about the first airport and first golf course being just east of—I beg your pardon--west of where the present Greenwood Cemetery is. That was all open in there. Whether that's Sanborn's second division or Sanborn's division, but there's a Sanborn Street in there, commemorating who owned that land. But I think the first airplane (my dad said) that landed in Michigan City landed in there. It was apparently just open ground. And they did have the first golf course there. I don't know how long it lasted. But then they (my father and other men) decided that they oughta have a golf course in Michigan City. So they got the land for Pottawatomie Golf Course. And, initially, that was nine holes. And it wasn't made into eighteen holes until back in the early '60's I guess. But my dad talked about, when they were grading for some of the greens and some of the approaches, about finding arrowheads and, of course, that was just contiguous, that whole area in Pottawatomie over to the Pottawatomie Springs was the camping ground or the meeting place for the Pottawatomie Indians, which, I'm sure, has been documented in other accounts. But he said there just were an awful lot of arrowheads around there and whether they were the Indians had contests or what. But that was a great Indian spot there,

which was borne out by the fact that they found so many arrowheads there. Then my father became the first president of Pottawatomie Country Club and, in his younger days, he was quite active in the club and played golf. But, I don't know, during and after the Depression when we were growing up, why he didn't play golf as much. But, as kids, we would go out there to the family parties. My grandfather and my grandmother (who I never knew—I never knew either of them). My grandfather died running for the trolley car—he got a heart attack running for the trolley car at Franklin and Coolspring, which used to come out there. And they saw him running down, and whether he died on the spot or something or whether—my dad always said he just shouldn't have been running that hard. But...

They were friends with the Barkers in those days, of course. They were a kind of high society and my dad told—it probably would have been Catherine Barker, Catherine Barker Hickox, a great benefactor in Michigan City, of them coming out to visit my folks—my grandparents, I beg your pardon, and my dad sort of being (well he told about how fascinated Catherine was with this toy he had). And we saw the toy; it was some metal horses and the kind of things that pranced along and she was quite fascinated with that and apparently it kept her quiet for a while. So they were glad to have little Willie around, my dad, to entertain Catherine. And the point being that they were good friends and the statuery of The Three Muses which has now been returned to The Barker Mansion—it's in white marble—that was given to my—was that my, well that was given to Mom and Dad, wasn't it? That statuery. Yeah, given to my mother and father by the Barkers as a wedding present. They were married in 1909, I think. And they lived—my father died (?) and my grandfather, Walter Vail, died, as I've explained, and his widow continued living in the house on Coolspring and Maple. And my parents lived there, too. But, you know, two women in the (unintelligible)

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--a hard feeling. This is my grandmother who was quite a strong willed woman, apparently, and really overbuilt out there. She apparently was kind of a—well, she liked to impress people and my mother wasn't too much impressed with her. And my mother just kind of pulled up stakes for a while. And just said, "It's me or her," and but the house, of course, was—it was hard to tear it down because it was a big landmark. It did come down in about, I guess that must have been about 1970. It's probably been down seven years. And there were seven acres. It was a combination farm in those days. There were only two houses on Coolspring. The old Misner house, which was two doors away, was older. And then Robert Grafton lived down on the corner of Tilden and Coolspring. But it was a big house and, of course, as kids, we had a great time and there were three floors and in the attic there were these passages under the slant of the roof. Part of it was finished off and then there'd be what we called secret passages and, of course, all the neighborhood kids loved it. And we had enough room up in the attic to have a pool table up there and we had a big basement that we could even skate in, and did on many occasions. It was at a long hall and then rooms at both ends and the house had a telephone, which many of those houses built in that era. There were facilities that were a stack of closets you might say that were to have been made into—there was supposed to be an elevator in there. It was never put in. And just that we could see where it was intended to go. But there was even a phone out in the barn and it was a barn. We had an old

carriage when we were kids. It had the, I suppose, kerosene or acetylene lights on it and we kids would get it out and the bigger kids would pull us around in the neighborhood, all through old Edgewood. And in those days, the roads were sand and we had to get up and stand on the spokes. We'd walk the spokes and do our daily dozen and we could walk it through the sand. That way, we had a lot of leverage. And we kids would kind of steer the thing and when we got older, we were able to help push. But that was great sport, of course. And then we'd shove it back in the barn. And there was a hayloft. And when I was very small, we had a cow and there was a pasture and there were seven acres in the—when I was very small, there was a little stream flowing across that. And that drained from Edgewood back from about the area where the present Barker Junior High School is. That area back in there, and it circled around, came down, part of it was in the pike, but then there was a pond next to where Andy Gill used to live and then Mike Budak owned the house for a while and Jack Winski owned it. Right next to that, there was a pond; now there's a house there. But we used to skate on that and play on that and fall through the ice in there. But that thing went under Coolspring Avenue and went across Oak Street about where Oak and Beverly Court cross. And then it angled over to a catch basin at the rear of the property and then it went all the way—it was buried over to what we called Sullivan's Woods where Cleveland Avenue, the Gardena Playground is now. And back over in there and then it emptied out in the—went into what is Chaney Run which is all covered up now, unfortunately, I'll say. Because we had a lot of fun saining(?) minnows and we'd get a little gar(?) station, there were crabs in there. It was great. A great place, and, of course, we had—I think it was seventeen apple trees in an orchard there and we had cherries and pears and things like that. So, Saturdays it was a mecca for the kids in the neighborhood. There was a grape arbor that we could climb up on. And, in season, there'd be ten or twelve kids up there, all eating grapes. And they were there and my mother took a few and made grape jelly and grape jam, but it was pretty much smorgasbord for anybody who wanted to come over. And my dad made a clay tennis court there for us back in the early thirties. Many of the older kids—my older brother, Bob's friends would come over there and play tennis and there was quite a spot on a summer afternoon. And I remember Ed Johnson and John Tuttle—people like that—Genevieve Kriesel (?), Genevieve Bonfield—they were, it was a great game. To play tennis over there.

Interviewer: Well, you were talking about your father and sometimes the fact that he'd have to refuse loans to people. How would you categorize your father as a man? Would you say that that was a good type of quality for a banker to have or was he a kind man or hard or?

Vail: Well, my father was a, he was not unkind. He was a good banker. A banker has got to say no, you know. He'd talk a little bit, and he didn't ever talk directly to us kids—I had three older brothers. One, my older brother, Walter, died in 1941. There are three of us now. He was, I guess you would say, a typical banker. He was very conservative and, as I say, many people told how he got them started in business. Or, just like anything else, you have to apply certain principles to the way you do business. He did not have a lot of close friends. In fact, he was inclined to be more autocratic and not a loner exactly, but he was active and he started one of the first, he was president of the Chamber of Commerce. I don't know whether he was the first one but he was one of the men that helped get Walter Greenbaum here in the 1920's when Michigan City was really on the skids. And he had a respect for Walter Greenbaum's abilities as an organizer. For what he did for Michigan City. He—I don't know whether you could say aloof—that isn't really a good

word to describe him. Just a man who—he was not a back slapper. He was the complete opposite of a back slapper. He could not be "one of the boys." He lived by a pretty Puritanical ethic of honor and this sort of thing. I think that was a very important word to him. And, I think in his own defense, that he—I'm not defending him necessarily, but there was a serious embezzlement in the bank many years ago. I never knew anything about it until someone else happened to mention it one time and I was going to high school at that time. And I never knew anything about it.

Interviewer: He wasn't the type to blab?

Vail: No. A thing like that—of course, from a practical standpoint, it wouldn't have been good for the bank to air something like that and I'm sure many things like that are kept quiet today. But I guess the point I'm making is that we never were told those things, you see. I was never taken into his confidence or he'd never get down on our level and talk to us in a man-to-man kind of situation. And yet he was a very respected man. So what else can I say?

Interviewer: When you were talking about the post World War times in the twenties, did your father ever talk about the economic conditions? I know that quite a few people had left the city in those years. It was pretty rough for a while.

Vail: At the time—see I was born in '22—and I was only five years old when Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic, so I don't—he would not have talked to us. I had no interest in economic conditions. The only thing I was interested in was getting out and damming up that stream in the back of the place or watching the hired man milk the cow or something like that. Or when we were gonna go on our next ride. Or go swimming down at my uncle's place in Long Beach. All of these things have come back to me, have come back to me through the accounts of other people. And as I told you about, the experience during Moratorium. We knew nothing about these things. I don't know whether to say we led a sheltered life, but in many ways we did. It was a kids' paradise. I remember one time my mother came home and we had made a—had poured milk on the floor of the kitchen and made a slide. It was a new linoleum and it just slid real well. And I think of that today and my mother would have it all, six or eight of us that were a party to that. And wouldn't have been surprised. But I guess she just said, "Mop it up, and come on now, this isn't what this is for." It was bad weather out and we thought that would be good fun. But we made cider and we made taffy and we made root beer. Oh, God, we got more root beer goin' one year when we discovered that you could get a bottle of that Hire's Root Beer and we had a capping machine. We had a lot of old utensils around. We had a cider press. These things were all sold at auction, the lot of them that we didn't want were sold at auction when the house was broken up. The pool table along with it. I wish I had that now. That pool table came from Bernate(?) Winski who lives now up on the third floor. Rob (can't be the first name but I don't know what he did). The guy didn't need it any more and my dad got a chance to get it. And, of course, when we were in high school, we made use of—we activated the chicken coop and we attached the fence and we even had a couple of horses that Stumpy White just loaned us. Loaned my dad and loaned us for the winter. So he says, "You might as well just have 'em because I'll have to feed them and let the boys feed 'em." Which we did every morning. We had—the stalls were still there in the barn and we had a box stall and for two years, we had horses, in high school, and at that time, we would ride out through Edgewood and get out to



where Rabbi Richter used to live, the first corner south of Coolspring there. It was all open country. Those houses were all built after the war. And this was back in 1938, 1939. So we could ride out to what was the old barn that the Garretson people had and stored hay in it. We could ride out Barker Road, we'd ride out to Woodland, and we'd ride south on Woodland and there wasn't as much traffic on 20. And it was again across 80 and ride at night in the moonlight. It was a great thing to have. And, of course, the apple trees were there. And we didn't spray as often after a while and the apples weren't as good, but I can remember spraying the apple trees. The big pump my dad mixed the stuff up in and he had an old icebox out in the barn and that's where he'd keep all his pesticides. But we'd mix that stuff up and get out and spray the trees.

Interviewer: Was this then continued pretty much through the Depression years? Do you remember if things got worse then?

Vail: The economic situation?

Interviewer: Right.

Vail: Well, as you know, the banks did not fail here. People were out of work; Pullman was down. My wife's father was a clerk there. He never lost his job and he was pretty high up along the line. He was a clerk there. But many people were starving. I don't know about starving, but some of them, I guess, were. And there were problems out along Coolspring. They had put a sewer in there. I don't know what year this was, but they had assessed the property and some people had to give it up because they couldn't pay the assessment. This sewer went all the way out, I think, to Jackson Street. The old south side sewer. And, of course, my father had quite a bit of frontage there and it was assessed. But further on out, some of the people that had bought \$200 lots or something, I imagine might have gotten a \$400 assessment or something back in those days. And they just lost those—lost that property. We—of course back in 1935 Walter Greenebaum was responsible for bringing quite a few new industries (Walter Greenebaum of the Chamber of Commerce) quite a few new industries over to Michigan City. And I'm sure the people in Michigan City suffered. But the very fact that none of the banks failed—it could have been a lot worse. We're, by coincidence, on Vail Street. This Case and Walker addition, which we're sitting in here, was laid out by—my dad helped lay it out. And, as I say, he had some engineering and surveying background. I don't know just how much he did, but he was connected with it. And I wish he'd made some of these streets match a little bit better when they came to Vail here. It's Walker Street, the next one down, that doesn't match. But, of course, when you get an angling thing like this, it's kinda hard. We have, incidentally, a silver cup that—what is it? I. W. Case? Decatur Case. I don't know how he's—I don't know how our family came by this little silver cup. And my mother had quite a collection of those, which she gave to my wife. But that's the same Decatur Case who owned this property here and, of course, before that, Marvin Creager had owned a lot of property out beyond this, north of here. And I don't know when this was laid out. This house—when was this house built? 1914 or something in that era. So, it is over 70? Was it in 1909? Well, we've got it in the (unintelligible). I might have looked it up. I think this house was here before the thing was divided possibly. Oh, I don't really know. My grandfather did quite a bit of hunting and my dad told about the marshes down in, the Kankakee Marsh, and of course, my folks came to LaPorte County. They actually first came to LaPorte—Terre Coupe Prairie, which is beyond LaPorte a little bit. Kind of halfway between New Carlisle

and LaPorte. It was an area called Terre Coupe Prairie. Very good farmland, and they were Quakers. Came here from Rahway, New Jersey. And I had a, I guess, a great uncle, Ned Vail, who lived in LaPorte and had a jewelry business over there and built the building which still bears the Vail name on the—it's on the northeast corner of—it's on Lincolnway. It faces on Lincolnway, right on the courthouse corner. A friend of mine showed me a pair of pistols (Bill Westphal who used to live on Ninth Street). The corner block on Ninth Street. His grandfather, I guess, had been sheriff of LaPorte County and he showed me the pistols that had been confiscated, that somebody had used to hold my Great Uncle Ned up. I don't know what happened. They must have captured him because they got the gun. The sheriff came by 'em and Bill Westphal showed them to me one time. If there's any questions you have, I've tried to—

Interviewer: What would you say has been the most significant change in Michigan City, say during your lifetime? Or what do you think the general trends in the city's development have been?

Vail: Well, of course the expansion to the south—the geographical expansion without any great increase in population. I guess we are 39,000 to 40,000 now. But we've only gone from—what was it, 30,000 in the thirties? We've increased a little in population, but a great deal in size. And I guess we might look at some of the negative things. I'm surprised that Michigan City hasn't straightened out its streets—some of the things like that—sooner. We are, I think, a conservative community. A lot of northern Europeans and we're inclined to be—okay, conservative. We haven't made the kinds of moves that I think we should have made. I guess I'm editorializing here rather than telling what has actually happened.

Interviewer: What kind of moves do you think the city should have made? Editorialize, that's okay.

Vail: Well, my dad—when we wanted to get to my uncle's, from Coolspring, out of the Edgewood area, when we wanted to get out to Long Beach, I still say it's the biggest joke goin'. Somehow, Chuck Oberlie—I've tried to lead him around by the hand—that we really haven't solved these problems of getting from Edgewood to even the Michigan City public beach. There are no—until you get to Woodland, which doesn't go any place, it stops at the Nickel Plate tracks. That does not go through. You go up Woodland. You kinda go out to Carroll Avenue. It used to be you couldn't get to Carroll from Coolspring. Now, of course, they've cut that too. But you think of coming down Coolspring to Tilden, coming up Tilden to a bad thing there at Greenwood. You're stopped on a hill. Bad visibility. You come to Tilden and you've gotta angle over a half a block to get onto Poplar. You get to Poplar, you get to Vail Street and the streets do not meet. Poplar is God awful as a street and it ends at the cemetery and it does not meet up with Vail. Maybe my father was more at fault here than I figured, although I don't think that. The Case and Walker addition did not go all the way to Michigan. But anyway, now you're coming along, right here on Vail Street and you go to Springland and you can take Springland out to Karwick. Karwick goes threading along through Long Beach. One of my points is that there should be a—Woodland should go through. You should be able to go to Woodland and go right through to the lake. Or at least to 12. But there was just so much—every four years or so, somebody got a new idea about some little thing and nothing really gets done. When I was on The Planning Commission, we sat here and talked about how we were going to straighten Springland out so it would connect and flow into Eighth Street.

Okay, we're going to buy the property and get it to--and it just doesn't work out. It's a very, very imperfect setup to have a different mayor every four years and then a different planning commission and no overall planning, except perhaps from one man, the city planner. And there just doesn't seem to be any continuity. I took him up one side and down the other for letting out the east side connector. He just had it deadending out there on Hitchcock Street and it was a fiasco. We have no way of getting from Beverly Shores to the south side of Michigan City. Or to the Sinai Temple, for instance. You have to do all these backtracking either along the County Line Road or Hitchcock. You double back, you come get onto Earl Road, and instead of simply bringing Woodlawn Avenue right straight through to Garfield and comin' right over to Franklin Street at the Jewel Tea. Now that's gonna-I know when we get the traffic in the National Lakeshore, that it's gonna be done, but I am appalled how little vision and action has taken place here. My father used to-one of his favorite quotations, "Without vision, the people perish." I don't know that we're gonna perish, but this business of trying to go from our old house there downtown, or I should say, down to Washington Park or Sheridan Beach. You're on Union Boulevard and you're going over to Center Street, or you're going over to Miller Street, and there's just nothing for us to do. And yet we can run south and open up Cleveland Avenue to 20, and we can widen Franklin Street out there, but we really can't get to the lake from the south side of Michigan City. I say "can't," but you can but you're threading around through here-we used to come up to Tilden, to Hobart, I know to Walker Street and go down the hill over there, and go across the bridge, go over E Street to Union Boulevard and then if you take Union over to Center Street, and you cross Center Street and you can do that. A horrible dog laying around Becky's Tavern there. Incidentally go up over Krueger Avenue. Can you imagine Martin Krueger having no more of a testimonial to his name in Michigan City than a little thing about a block long up over the hill there, that's Yankee Slide. It's really shameful. And, of course, having been in politics and on the council, I-incidentally, I didn't even know until Eleanor Schaviek handed me something a couple of years ago, that my grandfather was mayor of Michigan City. Back in, I don't know what year it was. It's just something that had never come up in our family. A braggart my father was not. And my mother either. They just-it's just kind of funny to have these things come to you. In a roundabout way.

Interviewer: What would you say is the single most exciting event in your life?

Vail: In connection with Michigan City?

Interviewer: Well, I remember when we were standing out-I told you about the slaughterhouse. Standing out where the retarded-where The Therapy Center is. Standing up the side of the woods there, where Cleveland Avenue is, and seeing the-coming along the western skyline, seeing the Macon, the dirigible. It was the Akron. To see that cigar come floating along, why we really ran for home. And then when we got home, we could see that it just came over Michigan City. That and being up on top of The Smith Brothers Cough Drop Factory with Joe Bisbee, who was manager then and was a very good friend of my father's and he was a scoutmaster of Troop Three for quite a while and sponsor and good friend. Seeing General Valvo's flight of the twin booned, (?) Italian -Oh, what was the name of the planes? (Unintelligible) I don't know, but there were like twenty-three or twenty-four planes that flew from Italy to The Chicago World's Fair in 1933. And they flew right over Michigan City and then took off across the lake. And they flew rather low, so that was

exciting. I guess anything in the air was—I can remember, incidentally, Joe Bisbee—the first time we heard a plane go over at night. This would have been very early thirties. Oh no, probably late twenties. He said, "There's a plane goin' over." The first plane we had heard at night. And he said, "That's a mail plane." I don't know whether Charles Lindbergh was flying that. I don't think he was flyin' it. He flew the St. Louis, didn't he? And that would have been after his flight a little bit. But I can remember that. And, of course, I also can remember the time that—I guess I'm up in the air. Standing in our living room one night and hearing some planes in the air and hearing a sudden change of sound and realizing the next day that I had heard these two planes collide. And one went—what was it, a Northwest? One plane went—they both got down all right. One went to Benton Harbor and the other went back to Chicago and I don't know.