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Boshka, J M Oral History Interview: Longtime Residents of Macatawa Park

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INTERVIEW WITH J.M. BOSHKA

Joe- Can I have your name and current address, please?

JM- Yes, the initials are JM and the last name is Boshka, B-O-S-H-K-A. And the address here is 2310 South Shore Drive. This is actually Bay Road along here according to the old plat. It was never legally changed, if you look at the plat map it's Bay Road, but everybody calls it South Shore Drive because it's a continuation. But they do differentiate, where Point West is. That's Bay Road, they still call it Bay Road there. Bay Road originally went to the ship yard.

Joe- What years do you recall being at Macatawa?

JM- Well we came here in 1912, and I was about four years old then. So until I started working, well I was a way at school for four years, but I was here until 1930 continuously, and then from '34 on. I always came back weekends. My folks lived here. This was their house, and so I was here from there on I would say.

Joe- When you arrived here in 1912 was it as a permanent or a summer residence?

JM- My father was the lighthouse keeper, and we were transferred here from Plum Island, which is an island between Green Bay and Lake Michigan. So we lived in the lighthouse

dwelling on the government land along the channel. The house is gone now, it was torn down. But he was keeper there twenty-eight years, so we lived there for twenty-eight years.

Joe- What do you recall about the old lighthouse?

JM- The keeper that was here before then, Van Regenmorter, was light keeper for quite a long time. I think some of that may be in the archives, there were newspaper articles about it. But in 1907 they built the breakwaters out here. Up until that time there were no breakwaters, so the big seas went right over the piers. So there was just a lighthouse and it stood on legs to raise it up so the waves could go underneath it. Well in 1907 they built the breakwaters, and they built a steam fog signal there. Well the steam was too much for him, the old keeper didn't want any part of it (laughs), so he retired. So there were several other keepers here on a short term basis until we were transferred here in 1912. My dad liked it here and he stayed here.

Joe- What did your father do as lighthouse keeper?

JM- Well he had two assistants. He had seven lights to take care of. The main light here, which is called a watched light, that had to burn at all times, that was in the big red lighthouse. The two breakwater lights were called unwatched lights, and if something happened to

them in a storm, and they went out then they had to be lit at the first opportunity; they were acetylene gas, and they had gas tanks out there. Then he had three lights on Lake Macatawa, kerosene lights. And they had to go there twice a week and fill the tanks, as they burned night and day. Then he had one light at Saugatuck to take care of; that was acetylene gas. So they'd go down there a couple times a month to see that everything was alright, change the tanks, and so on. At that time the lighthouse service was not part of the Coast Guard; it was completely separate. The lighthouse was under the Department of Commerce and the Coast Guard of course was under the Treasury Department. And it was kind of odd, we'd be going by the lookout tower where the Coast Guard stood watch, and they'd holler down "Well one of these days were gonna be doing that, and we'll have the controls right up here and we'll turn on the light and turn it off." Well we thought it was something that would never happen, but it did happen (laughs). One of Roosevelt's economy measures was to unite the Coast Guard and the lighthouse and so they were put in the same establishment.

Joe- What do you recall about living in the lighthouse dwelling?

JM- Well the inspectors came four times a year. The lighthouse establishment had two tenders, they were steam boats

one hundred and eighty feet long. And they carried supplies to the lighthouses all over Lake Michigan. And the inspectors, the superintendent and the assistant superintendent each made two inspections a year of all the lighthouses, and they would come on the lighthouse tenders. And so of course usually we'd see them coming out on the lake, or the previous lighthouse keeper would call up and say "The inspector's on his way," (laughs). So of course right away everybody's busy getting everything in ship shape; but usually we didn't have to do too much, my dad kept a pretty good place here, in fact he got the efficiency pennant one year for the most improvements in the district. When we first came here there was no lawn, no grass, no cement sidewalks, just a house sitting in the sand. It was a big house, it was a nine room house - two stories. But he improved it, he got the government to pay for black dirt to be hauled in, and they came and put in concrete sidewalks, and they improved the buildings, so by the time we left here it was a nice place to live - well even before then. Along about 1933-34 they electrified the fog signal. Before then we had two steam boilers out there. It was a steam fog signal, and when it got foggy one had to go out and fire the boilers to make steam. So they electrified it in, 1933-34. They took the tower away, the original

tower that stood by itself on its own feet out there, and they built the present tower on top of the building; they needed that first tower in south Chicago (laughs); they put it down there in south Chicago harbor. They ran a cable from Ottawa Beach, there was Consumers Power electricity available at Ottawa Beach, so they ran a cable under the channel, 440 volt cable, and they put in electric compressors out there, and they put in a compressed air horn, it was called a Cunningham Horn - pretty good blast too, people complained about it a little. It was quite an improvement. Well then we had the controls in the basement of the house, and you could start up the fog signal and turn on the lights without even going out on the pier. Then they cut it down to one assistant, and so that's the way it continued until it was joined with the Coast Guard. And when it was joined, my dad retired and bought this house.

Joe- How would you describe Macatawa at the furthest point back in your memory?

JM- Well at that time the place was more public than it is now, because there were more people coming and going, more transient people. Now it's semi-private. Except for Point West, everything is private; private property privately owned. But at that time there were several so-called little parks in Macatawa Park, which were for

recreational purposes; they had picnic tables in them, and one even had restrooms in it. And people came in by the Chicago passenger boat, there was a boat a day in here. And they came from Grand Rapids on the Interurban, so there were quite a few Grand Rapids people who owned cottages out here. And across the lake was the Ottawa Beach Hotel, which was a four-hundred room hotel, good sized one. And there were three ferry boats running in here, so there was a lot of traffic back and forth. Jenison Park was the amusement park; they had a figure eight, a merry-go-round, and concessions there - even a shooting gallery - all sorts of gaming concessions, there was a dance hall there. And the Macatawa Hotel had a ballroom in it, and they usually had an orchestra here that stayed at the hotel in the summer. They gave the orchestra room and board for playing in the dining room during the dinner hour, and playing in the evening for the dances. So when I got older, we danced there at the old hotel. It was more free, more open, more people then. And there were eighteen places of business in the park then, starting with the garage here, it's torn down now. Where that big concrete slab is out here, there were two parking garages that belonged to the resort company. In those days they didn't allow anyone to drive up over the hills, those

were walks - walks and lanes. If you wanted to go to your cottage, you had to stop at the Macatawa Garage, pick up a chauffeur and he'd go up with you, and bring your car back and put it in the garage. There were no parking lots up in the hills, and there was a chain across the walk at Griswold Walk and a chain across Maksaba Trail. That was to avoid congestion really, it was a good thing, otherwise it would have been an awful mess. Well after the fires, so many cottages had burned, then the people in the hills bought vacant lots and created parking lots for their cars, and so then it became possible to let them drive up there. I think that was an improvement, because before you walked. That was one thing about the park, everybody had to walk. There was no parking lot behind the motel like there is now, that was all sand in there. You had to park either in front of the hotel or down here, and most of the cottagers kept their cars here in the Macatawa garage. So you walked from your cottage down here and didn't think anything of it. And that was a good thing in a way. We had to walk from the channel all the way down here. After the Interurban quit running, there was a bus that ran for a while and then that quit, so then everybody had to buy a car for transportation.

Joe- What things do you recall from your childhood at Macatawa?

JM- We worked here in the park, that was the big thing to find a summer job. And so I did about everything, I worked at the Soda Fountain. After the first World War we had a shooting gallery, a guy put up a shooting gallery here against the sand dune. And he had white-washed bottles on it. So I used to work for him summers, white-washing the bottles and carrying them up the hill. He had signs up there with nails partly driven in the top edge, and you'd put the bottle upside-down on the nail. And on the signs were all the different cities around here - Grand Rapids, Holland, Zeeland. So the people shooting would call out, "Over the Z in Zeeland!" and blast it. It was quit popular, it ran for three years. And then the other thing was the incline railway that ran up the hill. We used to ride up in the cars, it was a nickel to ride up there. And sometimes we'd sneak up the back way from the Lake Michigan side. If there was a good crowd there you could sneak up there and crawl underneath the fence; they had slides and they had swings and all sorts of things for kids to play on. So we used to sneak in there. We got caught one time, the guy kicked us out (laughs).

Joe- You mentioned the Interurban Railway. What do you recall about that?

JM- Yes, the Interurban ran in here. They had a car every hour from Grand Rapids, all summer long, and then they had

what they called a boat train. The Chicago boat would leave Holland and then it would stop at the Macatawa Dock, which was an eight-hundred foot dock that ran out into the bay with a "T" on the end of it. They'd stop there. So that enabled the people from Grand Rapids to leave a little later on the Interurban and come down here and catch the boat at Macatawa a half hour after it had left Holland. And so the boat train was quite popular. The long dock was quite a curiosity. But the storms and the ice, see it was eight-hundred feet long out there, and it was deep out in the channel, so that thing was kind of wiggly (laughs). One year the ice was real bad, and when you get the wind on the ice it exerts tremendous force and the whole field of ice begins to move. And so it pushed part of the dock over. So they did away with it. In the mean time the Interurban company built a dock where the Yacht club is now. That was called the Interurban Pier. The Interurban built it mainly, so they could have their own dock out here. Then the Interurban company got into a racket with owner of the resort company. He wanted concession money from them for the privilege of running in here. They didn't want to pay it, so they came down here on a Sunday morning with about a hundred men - on Sunday so he couldn't get an injunction against them - and they tore up the tracks from where

Point West is all the way to the Yacht Club . . . in one day, boy they really worked. So then for two years, we had to walk from the channel to the Yacht Club. And in the mean time they were haggling about what they were going to do. Well they finally came to an agreement, and they built the Interurban station right in front of the house here. The old concrete platform was here until last year when Eldean finally had it torn out and fixed it the way it is now. The building was just across the road, an "L" shaped building and it had a ticket stand in it. And like every place of business here sold chewing gum, Cracker Jacks, and some of them sold ice cream. It seemed to be a standard commodity out here for the summer.

Joe- What was a ride on the Interurban like?

Jm- Real nice. They were big cars, sixty passenger cars, some of them were fifty-five. But they were big cars. Double trucks under them, eight wheel cars, four axles. And in the winter time they were heated, hot-water heated. Real comfortable. It was great. See Macatawa as a resort was really way ahead of its time. It was ahead of anything along this lake shore. They had their own electric light plant here. They generated their own electricity for the hotel, the dining room, the cottagers. They had their own water system, supplied park water. They had their own sewer system. Every

cottage was hooked to the park sewer system. So the park derived a revenue from the water and the light. They bought electricity. First they generated it, then later they bought it from consumers wholesale and retailed it to the cottagers for their own use. So at that point they were way ahead of their time. There was a building that stood right here called the powerhouse, and that's where they generated the electric power. They had a big steam engine in there, and a dynamo. I can remember the dynamo, they weren't using it anymore then in my earliest recollection which is about 1915-16, but it all stood there, it was still there. And we used to go in there and marvel at the size of that steam engine - big horizontal steam engine. They had good transportation, they had all the facilities. So the resort grew, it just grew tremendously. And as I said, no other place could compete with it even. It was amazing. Now about 1907 to 1909, a new management company took over. The cottage owners united together and bought the park from the previous operators; and they concreted all the drives. Up until then all the drives were wooden plank, and they were deteriorating and so on, so they concreted all the drives. That was all done by hand. That cement was hauled in here with teams of horses and the gravel was hauled in, up in the hills, and they

mixed the concrete in a great big mortar box and laid it. It was all done by hand; you couldn't afford to do it that way now (laughs).

Joe- Do any particular people stand out in you mind when you think back on your years at Macatawa?

JM- That was another thing, there were a lot of characters here - people who were really characters. Baum, who wrote the Wizard of OZ, had a cottage down here, and he was on several of the boards. They had the control of the park divided up into committees, and he was on a couple of the committees. I know he was on one that controlled all the peddlers coming in. At that time, the vegetable peddlers came in, the ice man came in, grocery man came in, the beer wagon came in - it was before prohibition - and the oil men. All the stoves in the park were either gasoline or kerosene - most of them in the beginning were gasoline stoves, and they were dangerous. So they slowly converted over to kerosene. "New Perfection" was the name of the company that made the stove. At that time Macatawa was practically independent of Holland. They had everything here that they needed. They had a grocery store. They had a bakery - big ovens in it, regular professional baking ovens. They had a doctor here, in the summertime, and it was kind of a part time deal because he was resorting, but he was here in case of

emergency. They had a drugstore here - full line of prescription drugs, you could get anything you needed. They had a hardware store here. They had a chinaware and gift shop. There were two restaurants down here in the park. There was a bowling alley. A pool hall. There was a movie theater - I went to quite a few movies there when we were kids. That was a great thing. It was built just like the big movie theaters with an entrance on either side and the ticket window in the middle, jutting out a little. It was built out over the water. And there were two boat liveries here that rented rowboats to people that wanted to row around the lake. A lot of rowing in those days. Outboards weren't too dependable.

Joe- Did you know Frank Baum?

JM- I didn't know him, no. He left here in 1910. He was here from 1900 to 1910. But they kept his cottage just the way he left it. The people that bought were named Todd, and the son, Stanton Todd, still lives in Grand Rapids; his sister may be alive but I don't know. But they had the cottage after that and it was called "A Sign of the Goose." And the windows were stained glass leaded glass windows - with blue geese set in the windows. There was another fellow called George Ryder. He was a university graduate and he could recite Shakespeare. But I always thought of him as the

world's first hippie. He had long hair - hung down to his shoulders. Now this is back in the teens, you know, the early twenties. Never took a bath, never washed, wore cruddy old clothes sometimes ragged. But if somebody wanted him for an entertainment somewhere or something, then he would get all dressed up - of course he didn't take a bath - and he would recite Shakespeare. Oh boy how he could recite Shakespeare. At the parent and teacher clubs at the schools. There was another man. We had an auditorium up here that they had built. See, originally this place started as a religious community, and so they would have ministers come in - a little like the Chitauqua in New York. And they built an auditorium in the horseshoe up here in the hill that seated 3,000 people, all covered. It was finished in 1892. And so this particular man taught Sunday school up here in the auditorium, and during the week he repaired gasoline and kerosene stoves for the resorters, because they had trouble with them. But they always joked about him, if he couldn't find anything wrong with the stove he carried a few pieces of tin with him and he started drilling holes in a piece of tin to kill time (laughs). So you had to watch him a little. But he was a pretty good guy.

Joe- Do you remember the Macatawa Hotel?

JM- Oh yes. I bellhopped there in 1927. Art Tazelaar worked at

the hotel later for the owner of the park. I'll never forget one time, there were three girls from Chicago that had a room on the fourth floor. Only rooms on the fourth floor had baths. And the reason for that was they were hard to rent because there were no elevators in the hotel, you had to walk up. The other rooms had a public washroom on each floor - I think they had two, one on each side of the hotel. And so these three girls were staying up on the fourth floor. Three other girls came to visit them. So I had to carry the luggage up, and boy they had quite a bit. So I made the first trip with them, took them up to the room. Then I went down and I got another load and I came up. And I just kicked with my toe on the door a little and somebody inside said, "Come on in." So I pushed the door open with my foot and I walked in with the luggage. Well these three girls that had just arrived were changing their clothes to go swimming on the beach and they didn't have a thing on (laughs). One of them jumped and landed on the bed face down, she was hollering, "Go away, go away, go away!!!" One of them ran in the bathroom. Another one ran in the clothes closet and shut the door. The girl who said come in was sitting there reading a magazine; she never batted an eye. She said, "What's the matter with you girls? He's seen worse than that before. Put the bags over

there," (laughs). The way I got the job was kind of funny. They had two bellhops there during the summer and they alternated, except for when it was real busy then you both had to be there at the same time. You alternated shifts, morning, a different one in the afternoon, and then back in the evening; the next day was just the opposite. You got room and board and a dollar a day for bellhopping at the hotel; you were supposed to make the rest of it in tips. Well some people came in and this guy took them up to their room, and so then they wanted more soap in the room. And the room was right at the head of the stairs on the second floor. So he came down, and half way down he turned around and he hollered up, "What kind of soap do you use?" And boy that was too much for the hotel manager (laughs). He fired him on the spot (laughs). So that's when I got the job there.

Joe- What other memories do you have of that job?

JM- Another funny thing happened. One of the duties was to call the girls - the waitresses and the chamber maid. And they stayed in a building separate from the hotel called the Wreck. And it was a whole series of compartments, a long hall with compartments on each side. And there were built in bunks, it was almost like on board a boat with those built in bunks (laughs). So they told me I had to call the girls

every morning at seven o'clock and to be sure to get them up so they aren't late. So the first morning I went over there and I pushed the door open and I walked in. And I hollered, "Seven o'clock girls!!!" And you never heard such screaming and pandemonium in your life - big uproar. They said, "Get out of here!" Later the manager told me, "You're not supposed to go in there. There's a stick right alongside the door. You take that stick and beat on the door," (laughs). I tell you these resort hotels . . . (laughs).

Joe- What do you remember about the Mac Hotel?

JM- It was a hundred room hotel. And then it had a twenty-five room annex, which was the original hotel before the big hotel was built. And the dining room was in the annex, it had been in the small hotel so they just left it there, which made it nice. They advertised "No Smell of Cooking Food in the Hotel." So you walked across the walk when it was time to go to the dining room. And it was nice. A lot of the cottagers ate in the dining room down too; they'd come down for dinner, and the hotel had an orchestra during dinner. People came from all around, St. Louis, Chicago, wherever it was hot in the summer they'd come up here. But the Chicago boat made it a real nice deal. The family would come up and they'd rent a cottage for a month. Then the husband would take the boat in Chicago on Friday night,

go to bed, wake up Saturday morning and he'd be here. He'd be here until Sunday night. Sunday night he'd go in and get on the boat and go to bed. Monday morning he'd be in Chicago. And so many of them did that. The family would be up here all summer and the husbands would commute back and forth. And then when they got their vacation they'd be up here for a couple of weeks. Some of them still do it if they don't live too far away, only now they drive by car. I've got one family up here that I rent a cottage to, the husband comes from Peoria, Illinois, comes up here every weekend - quite a drive.

Joe- What was it like inside the hotel?

JM- It was all plastered inside. It was a nice hotel, not like a lot of the summer resort hotels where they're unfinished inside. It was all plastered, all the rooms were plastered. Later on, in the late '20s, they put running water in every room in the hotel, and toilets in every room in the hotel. That was a big project, because you couldn't get in the walls very well with them being all plastered. So they did it by running the pipes around the verandas outside and painted it so it hardly showed. And that gave them access to every room from outside the hotel. It was an improvement. It was a nice hotel. The Ottawa Beach Hotel wasn't quite as nice, part of it was finished inside and part

of it wasn't. The Macatawa Hotel had a hundred rooms in the hotel and twenty-five in the annex. The Bay View Hotel held about twenty five people - I think they had about fifteen rooms. And then the Grand Hotel was a little bigger; that was about a forty or fifty room hotel. That was unfinished inside, that was really a resort hotel. Almost primitive, except they had running water in it.

Joe- What would you say was the relationship between the cottagers and the hotel throughout the years?

JM- The resort company and the cottagers always had problems it seemed. The cottagers wanted everything free. They wanted free use of the sidewalks. The resort company owned everything - they even owned the sidewalks. Originally, the resort company did not sell lots, they leased them. You could get a ninety-nine year lease or you could get a fifty year lease. So you could build a cottage on it but when the fifty years was up you had to negotiate another lease or you were in trouble. But gradually over time the resort company sold the property off so that by the twenties most of the cottage owners owned their lots. There was still, up until a few years ago, a place on the channel where the cottage did not stand on its own lot. And the woman sued the owner of the land because he told her to get the cottage off - he wanted the lot so he told her to

move the cottage, but there's no place to move it to. So she brought suit against him and she claimed adverse possession, and by golly she won. She got the lot herself, so he lost the whole works (laughs). But anyway they gradually sold them off. But there was always friction between them. The cottage owners, a lot of them, came up here to live as cheap as they could. And the days were long, so they didn't burn very much electricity. In fact, my dad used to do emergency electrical work around the park here - they'd blow a fuse or something and they'd call him over. We went down to one place and they had an old-fashioned knife switch on the wall. You could have it on one side or you could throw it to the other. One side was the living room light, one side was the dining room light - you could not turn them both on at the same time. So my dad said to the lady, "Wouldn't you like to have that changed so you can have both lights on at the same time?" And she said, "Yes, I would." So he changed it, he put in two switches, modern for that time, in place of the old knife switch. Boy the next day the old man was down there beating on our door and he said, "Captain, I want that switch put back there. You don't need two lights on at the same time." So my dad had to go back there and put that old switch back on the wall (laughs). That's how cheap some of them

were (laughs)! Well the resort company decided that the light system wasn't bringing in enough revenue, they were losing money on it. So under the Utilities Commission rules, you could charge a minimum charge - they had never done it here. So the next summer the resort company notified all the cottage owners there'd be a ten dollar minimum charge. Well their bills ran maybe a dollar or a dollar and a half a month. So here they've got to fork out ten dollars for electricity, plus two dollars for street lights - he charged them for that too. So that was twelve dollars a year. Well boy there was a big uproar about that, but they couldn't do anything about it, it was legal. So from then on the cottage owners paid twelve dollars a year whether they used electricity or not. But there were a lot of suits. The owner of the park at that time, Swan Miller, was an attorney, he didn't practice in Michigan, he was from California. But he had Diekema, Cross, and Ten Cate here as his attorneys, and he very seldom lost. Of course he didn't go into a suit unless he was pretty sure of winning. The only suit he really lost that cost him money was the collapse of the lakefront walk. They put in a double-width concrete walk, and concrete sheet piling all the way from Interlake Walk clear to the south end of the park. And that really cost a piece of change - Perrys up on the

hill chipped in on it, and the resort company chipped in on it, and some of the cottagers chipped in on it. It cost around fifty thousand dollars at that time. It was beautiful, pipe rail along the outer edge. If you go up Griswold Walk to where it comes down to Lake Michigan there's a concrete walk and sea wall, that is part of the original walk - the pipe rail is gone and the deck has been replaced - but that's the way it used to be, it ran the whole length of the park. It was really something when it was finished. Well the concrete sheeting was fourteen feet long and about fourteen or fifteen inches wide, and they were tongue and groove so they jettted them in one at a time. So fourteen feet gave them about seven feet above the lake bottom and seven feet below; well seven feet isn't much in Lake Michigan. We got high water one year and the sand washed out in the tongue and groove in a lot of places and undermined the sidewalk. One day a couple was walking along the sidewalk and it tumbled in. It killed one of them and hurt the other one real bad. Well Miller lost that lawsuit. But he had some others here. They had restrictions on the amount of sprinkling the cottagers could do. One was using too much water. He was from Grand Rapids. So Miller cut his lights off which was a lot easier than cutting the water off (laughs). So of course the cottagers sued

Miller for cutting his lights off, and he was mad at Miller then. There was a tree branch leaning on his roof so he called a guy up there and had the tree cut down. But the tree stood on resort company property, so Miller sued him for the loss of the tree, and of course he won. He won and it cost the old boy some money. Then there was a case down here. A man named Bill Wye owned three cottages on the east end of Interlake Walk. And he rented two of them and he lived in one himself. He had married the daughter of the lady who ran the Macatawa Hotel, Mrs. Ryder. So he was actually her son in law. He got into a racket with Miller. He had nice green lawns out there and he sprinkled a lot. And he got into a racket with Miller so they were going back and forth; finally one spring two team-loads of cement blocks appeared on the scene and they began to lay cement blocks in front of these three cottages. And of course the ground sloped down so as they went along the wall got higher and higher. It was only a couple of blocks high at the west end but it was about eight or nine blocks high at the other. Of course Bill Wye got all excited, "What's going on here, what's going on?" He ran down to the park company office and Miller said, "Well Bill I'm gonna put up an annex to the hotel here in front of your three cottages." Of course Bill Wye ran down and got

an injunction against him, a temporary injunction restraining him from building the annex. Miller turned around and sued Wye for the revenue that he lost because the annex wasn't completed in time for the resort season. And he won. And he broke Bill Wye. Bill Wye ended up with nothing. The court decided it was all hotel property there and if Miller wanted to build an annex there was no reason why he couldn't. Well that wall stood there for, well I guess Den Uyl tore it down when he bought the park. So that wall stood there for twenty five years. But the thing of it was Miller never planned to build an annex there. That whole thing was just a bait.

Joe- What sort of things do you remember about the social atmosphere of the cottages?

JM- The beach was the main thing. They came here to swim and stay cool and they spent a lot of time on the beach. But they also went fishing. Many of them had boats here. There was a row of boat houses along the shore, and the boat houses were on leased lots so the cottagers owned the boat houses but not the land. But they kept their boats in the boathouses, and they'd go fishing up the lake or fishing out on the big lake. Then for evening recreation, beginning down where Point West is now, there was a long, low, one story building that had a whole bunch of concessions in it. There was

a corner lunchroom right on the corner facing this way. And there was a barber shop in the east leg. Then on the other leg there was a pool hall, a bowling alley, and a plumbing shop. There was an ice cream factory too, they made ice cream out here for Macatawa, Ottawa Beach, and Jenison Park. And we used to go down there and when the guy lifted the dasher out of the freezer he'd hang it up on a big hook. And so we'd gather around and we'd slick that ice cream off and oh boy that was good. It was soft, then they put the ice cream in the containers and packed it and let it freeze solid. This was more of a mixer to get it mixed. The proprietor delivered the ice cream with a row boat. He'd take it over to Ottawa Beach and Jenison Park. The place was practically independent, as I said, we had everything here that you needed to keep a summer resort going. The bowling alley was not the usual bowling alley. This was called "Box Ball." The alleys were a little narrower and were not as long. And instead of pins there were five paddles made out of wood and they stuck down and were padded and hinged in the middle. So when the ball hit the paddles you could knock two of them down at once. You got three balls and you had to get all five. If you got five of them down with three balls that was a strike. There was no spare. But they kept score just like in the bowling

alleys. And they had five alleys in there and boy they used to be pretty busy evenings. A lot of the cottagers would come down to bowl. Up at the top, all the way around the room they had all the high scores posted with people's names on them. They'd print it out a letter at a time so you could read it from the floor. And that was a big thing if you could get your name put up there with a score. And those things were there for years and years until finally they tore the building down. Then Den Uyl moved the bowling alleys over to a building behind where the soda fountain stood - the old bakery, they took the ovens out. They put the bowling alley in there and they had all these posters of the high scores that dated back to the teens. I don't know whatever happened to those things. Den Uyl had the building torn down. It would be interesting even if they had just saved a few.

Joe- Do you recall a boardwalk that ran down to the channel just from a point just east of the front of the Macatawa Hotel?

JM- You know I've heard people call various walks the boardwalk and they even today call them the boardwalk. I don't know what they were talking about because as I say everything was concrete. The only boardwalk that existed at that time went along these concessions which were over the water, and this walk was over the water.

The corner lunchroom was over the water. The movie theater was built over the water on pilings. So this boardwalk which ran along the front - faced the shore not the lake - and it was wide. That was the boardwalk, and that's the only boardwalk I know of. Now before they concreted the lake front and the walks, as I told you earlier, up in the hills the drives were wood, but they didn't call them the boardwalk. I don't know how this term boardwalk originated. Here they say well we've got a cottage down on the boardwalk, well there's no boardwalk (laughs).

Joe- Do you recall there ever being a boardwalk on pilings along the Lake Michigan lakefront?

JM- Yes. That's right, we used to ride a bicycle along there. You could ride from one end of the park to the other. See when the high water came it washed out underneath there. And this boardwalk stood on pilings. And gee you could wizz on a bike in spring and fall when nobody was here. Boy you could really buzz down there (laughs). That was kind of fun (laughs). That was there until even after they concreted it, because when the concrete washed out they replaced some of that with wooden walk, but they never put the pipe railing up.

Joe- Sounds like there was a pretty consistent problem with beach erosion.

JM- They had a terrific problem with beach erosion. In the book

about Macatawa by Don Van Reken are pictures that show where it's washed out along there, and you can see the wooden walk. And if you had a series of bad storms in the fall or the spring the walk would collapse and the cottage owners would have to rebuild the walk. So they'd do it. Because at that time the Post Office was down where Point West is now and everybody came along the lakefront to get the mail, so you had to have a means of getting down there. And rather than walk through the hills, the people along the lakefront all walked down the lakefront, up Grove Walk and Michigan Walk to the post office. So it was really a necessity. And it would be nice if they'd do it again but it doesn't look like they're ever going to.

Joe- Do you recall the ferry service that used to run on Black Lake?

JM- Yes, in 1930 and '31 I ran one of the ferry boats for the summer. They ran from Macatawa, to Ottawa Beach, to Jenison Park. And they also ran a ferry to Waukazoo; there was a hotel at Waukazoo so they had the Waukazoo ferry, called the "Tescarora." And the big ferry boat across here was the "Skidoo." And all that did was run back and forth between Macatawa and Ottawa Beach. But then when the Interurban Company built the Interurban pier in 1915, they put in a ferry boat called the "Ottawa." And that met all the Interurbans and took

passengers over to the Ottawa Beach Hotel. And so every car that came in stopped at the Interurban pier and let out anybody that wanted to go to Ottawa Beach; the ferry boat was waiting to take them across. That was a pretty good size ferry boat. Then in the thirties the ferry boat was smaller, it was just under thirty feet. It could hold about eighteen to twenty passengers, I guess. I ran that in '30 and '31 when Jesieks were operating the ferry; the resort company had sold all the ferry rights to Jesieks, and they were operating the ferry boat. We still carried a lot of people. The big Grand Rapids companies would have their annual picnics in Jenison Park because it was the amusement park. So there sometimes would be seven or eight hundred people come down here from Grand Rapids for the annual picnic. Well they overflowed all along the shore to see what was here, and there was a lot of coming and going. And a lot of money changed hands. That brought money in.

Joe- Do you recall any of the major fires that struck Macatawa?

JM- Sure do. The first fire was on the North end of the park, I think it was about eleven o'clock on a Sunday morning. The Coast Guards at that time had a lookout tower out on the beach, and they had a man on watch there twenty four hours a day. And they had a bell on the outside of the tower with a rope going inside, a big ship's

bell. And they'd ring the time on that, they'd ring ships time on it. Which really confused the resorters because they weren't familiar with ships time and they couldn't figure it out (laughs). That morning, all of the sudden that bell began to ring, and ring and ring and ring. So we knew right away something was wrong, usually they rang it if somebody fell off the pier or a boat tipped over in the lake. I ran down towards the lookout tower and then I saw people running down the lakefront from the pier - the fishermen that had been fishing there were running that way. Gee here's a big column of smoke going up and I said, "Oh my gosh a cottage is on fire." Well, when I got down there the fire was still only in one room of the cottage, and all the smoke and fire was coming out of the window - it was a back room. They had a hose stretched out there. They could have put it out. But the hydrant had pipe thread and the hose of course was hose thread and they couldn't put them together. There's an adapter made for that, but the adapters were on a hose cart in the back of the hotel, and nobody ever thought about it. They stretched the hose out there and said, "Well there's nothing we can do." And so they waited for the Holland Fire Department. By the time the Holland Fire Department got there the second cottage was afire already. The wind was southwest and it was blowing

pretty hard. It went right down the line, took the whole works. About thirty two or thirty three cottages went. In fact, they were afraid our house on the channel was going to go. And it just happened the light house supply boat was in here - they were laying over at the Jenison Park dock - the Captain had been down here so he said to my dad, "I think I better bring the tender down here." So they did. It came down and they ran a hose out and boy they wet down our roofs and the buildings. The Coast Guard Station was on fire several times. See the big embers were blowing over. And several of the cottages on the channel were on fire. I think the house Art Tazelaar's family was living in caught fire - they were up on the roof there with water. That was quite a time. Then the second fire was the Grand Hotel, that was clear on the south end. The first fire took off the north end of the park, and the second fire started way at the south end of the park at Grand Ave. They were getting the hotel ready for summer - it was early in the spring. The water wasn't turned on yet. And they were burning rubbish in the fireplace and the hotel had a wood shingled roof on it. So of course the embers fell on the roof and set the wood shingles on fire, and there wasn't a ladder down there that would reach up three stories. There was nothing they could do. So the

Holland Fire Department got out there. But by the time they got out there the hotel was well under way. And they ran down Grand Avenue to the lake, but they couldn't get water. They couldn't get near enough to the water. So they had to go back. They had over a thousand feet of hose laid. I think they got water from down where Maksaba Trail comes down to Lake Macatawa. But by that time fifty-three cottages burned before they got it stopped. The way we heard about the fire was we were sitting down at the table and we saw the Coast Guards running and one of them was carrying a fire extinguisher. And my dad said, "You don't suppose there's a fire somewhere?" And then we saw the officer in charge of the Coast Guard coming up our walk. He rapped on our door and he said, "Captain they just called up and said the Grand Hotel is on fire. So I ran out of the house and up on the dune in back of the house. And here I could see this big column of smoke, so then I knew then the Grand Hotel was a goner. It took fifty three cottages with it before they got it stopped. Well the third fire was at night and that fire was set. A judge in Grand Rapids owned it. He hired two men to come down here and set the fire, because he was in financial trouble. Well it was lucky that there wasn't too much wind. But the men couldn't find the cottage. So they stopped at the local real

estate man's house, he rented cottages and so on. They stopped at his place and inquired where this cottage was located (laughs). Of all the stupid things (laughs). So he told them because he didn't know what they wanted. They went down there and they set this igniter. I don't know just how they had it rigged, but they had a time delay on it. They got it rigged and they left. So that night the cottage took off. That was almost where they had stopped the Grand Hotel fire. So this fire went both ways. It went to where the Grand Hotel fire had left off, and it went north until they stopped it at Griswold Walk. They had hose laid up Griswold Walk and down to the lakefront, and they stopped it there. Well the fourth fire, that was another bad deal. The woman was in financial trouble. But they never could prove anything. She built a big fire in the fireplace and then went over to the neighbors to visit (laughs). And a guy and I were fishing out on the pier, and we saw it. We could see people running, and smoke coming out of the house and so we tore over there. And at that time there was a bath house on land. The old bath house which was in the pictures of the Macatawa book had fallen in and was gone. And the resort company built a new bath house on a vacant lot next to the Kemah Cottage, which the owner of the resort company owned. This house that was on

fire was right across the walk from the bath house. So we ran down there and of course I knew Mr. Miller, and so he said, "Young man would you help me? We've got to save this bath house." And he was out there with a garden hose. So we said, "Sure!" So the guy I was fishing with and I got up on the flat roof. But it got too hot there, so we got one of these blinds that enclosed the porch in the wintertime. We took turns, one guy with the garden hose over the edge, wetting down the building facing where the fire was, and the other guy holding the blind in front of him to protect him. And then we'd change off. This time the Park water was on so they didn't have to wait for the Holland Fire Department. And they got their own hose down there. And there was a fire hydrant near-by the fire, and boy they hooked on that and they had a big two-inch stream of water going in that fire. Every once in a while they would swing the hose over and wet the bath house too. And by golly we saved the bath house. It was just across the drive, but we were lucky. Every time a burning ember fell on the roof we'd kick it off. And there was a little wooden coop on the roof I remember, and we kept that wet down. It's surprising what a little water will do in a case like that. But anyway, we saved the bath house. And the caretaker for the resort company held the fire back

until the Holland Fire Department could get out there. And they put two more hoses on and they killed it. But it had burned up two cottages east beyond the one that started it - actually one and a half, the other one was about half-burned. But that's where they stopped it, at Grove Walk there. It burned South to where the earlier fire had been stopped. So the original part of the park is between Grove Walk and Interlake Walk. Those cottages are the original cottages that were built and many of them are over a hundred years old. This house is over a hundred years old too. This house was two houses, and it used to stand on the shore of the lake. And they moved the first one up on this little knob and then they wanted more room so they moved the next one up and they nailed it to this one. So they made one house out of two (laughs). Upstairs you can see where they're put together, and up in the attic of course you can see where the two roofs meet.

Joe- Do you recall any other major fires at Macatawa?

JM- There were small fires, never a big fire. That was the last big fire.

Joe- Did you see the Ottawa Beach Hotel burn?

JM- Yes, I sure did. I was coming home on the Interurban. We got down this side of Central Park and a man came tearing through the car and he said, "Jenison Park is on fire! It's all burning!" So he ran to the back of

the car so he could lean out the door and look alongside the car. So we all ran back there and we're trying to peak out. Well as we got out this way we discovered it wasn't Jenison Park, it just looked like it was. It was across the bay at the Ottawa Beach Hotel. And boy she was going. Luckily the wind was pretty well over the lake. The cinders and embers and everything went over the lake. But it got so hot on our side of the channel that it scorched the paint on the houses along there. They were afraid that it would jump across the channel. It didn't, but it scorched the paint. That was 400 rooms so you can imagine. All built out of pine. It started - well I was coming home on the five-fifteen Interurban - so it started probably quarter to five, maybe four thirty. And by eleven o'clock she was gone.

Joe- Were you at Macatawa during the depression?

JM- Yes. You know on the channel we didn't feel the depression so much because it was all government employees. Where we lived at the channel they were all Coast Guard families and light house people living there. We didn't feel the depression. We always had meat on the table. My dad got a fifteen percent cut in pay, but what's fifteen percent during the depression (laughs)? Boy, when everything went down to maybe one third of what it had been before, even more than that. But we

didn't feel it down there. We had a project - they set up all kinds of WPA projects and PWA projects. So they set up a project to remove the sand that had blown in from the dunes. We had two buildings, a workshop and a coalhouse/fuel building. And the wind had blown the sand against the buildings, so they set up a project to remove the sand from the buildings and dump it down along the pier where it had washed out. So they had a big two-wheel cart built, it took about four men to operate it. And they had about six or eight men on this project. And they shoveled the sand into the cart and then they wheeled the cart down to the channel and dumped it and pulled it back. They got a dollar a day. Thirty dollars a month. And those poor devils, they were store clerks, bank clerks, people not used to work. They had socks on their hands, they couldn't afford gloves. Great big blisters on their hands, but they didn't quit, but they needed the money that bad. I used to watch them. I felt sorry for them.

Joe- Did the park go into a state of decline during the depression?

JM- Yes, somewhat. Cottage rental rates went down by a bit. You could rent a cottage here for fifteen dollars a week, twenty five at the most. But it seemed like the people that had money came anyway. Of course, in those days there was no air conditioning, and St. Louis is one hot

place in the summertime. And so they wanted to get out. And St. Louis is quite a wealthy city. The retired people still came up here. But the hotel suffered. But they made it through the depression. They got through it. They kept the dining room open, although they didn't have an orchestra. But I was going to school in Ann Arbor at the time and a friend of mine wanted a summer job, so I got him a job bellhopping at the hotel there for the summer. They stayed open and they did fairly well. They paid expenses - if you could do that during the depression you were lucky.

Joe- The Macatawa Hotel was torn down in 1956. What are your memories of that event?

JM- Well, Den Uyl wanted a liquor license. The township board wouldn't give him one. And he got into quite a racket with them. Even to the extent where he put in his own slate to run for township office - of course they didn't get elected (laughs). So he finally told them that if they didn't allow him to have a liquor license, he would tear everything down - all the buildings. Well they didn't believe it, they thought he was joking. He wasn't. So they didn't believe him. And by golly one day Capital Wrecking from Grand Rapids came down here and they began to tear the buildings down. They tore everything down - the hotel, the

annex, the stores, the association building which had a lot of the stores in it. Everything. And it was pretty bare in there. After about three years the cottage owners raised I think two thousand dollars to have it landscaped where the hotel had been. So they had it landscaped there and it looked a little better.

Joe- What were your feelings about the hotel being torn down?

JM- I hated to see it go. It fit in the spot so well. It made it beautiful here. And this place doesn't fit the way the other buildings did. Because they were designed to fit the terrain. And coming down the lake in a boat that hotel stood right between two big dunes, and at night it had lights on it up to the peak of the roof. There were two gables facing East and they were all lit up with electric lights, and it was real pretty coming down the lake. And the hotel itself was a nice looking building. I can see in a way why they tore it down. It had to go sometime because it was too old. It was obsolete. And Den Uyl wanted to operate the park year round. And you couldn't do it with that hotel. You couldn't heat it, you would have had an awful time trying to put heat in all those rooms. So he tore it down and then about eight years later they built Point West. And Point West is a beautiful place, but we always felt they made a bad mistake the way it's laid out. The motel should have been on each side of the

restaurant, facing the lake. The parking, which is not premium space, should have been behind. Where the motel is now, that should have been a parking place. And it would have been really something to have the motel fronting right on the lake on each side of the restaurant. But they didn't do it. The architect was used to designing motels for cities where you want everything walled off and the center of the motel is a pool and that's it. It doesn't fit this place. But we're stuck with it. Now the one against the hill that they've built, that's a little more logical. See that was added later. That was a good addition I guess.

Joe- What would you say are the major differences today between what the park is now and what it used to be?

JM- Well, as long as Den Uyl was running the park there was a good relationship between the cottage owners and the owners of the park, because he was a cottage owner himself. He knew what it was like to be on both sides. And Simon really went all out to try to please the cottage owners. And Dick did the same thing. When Dick was running the park he did real well with the cottagers, he kept them happy. He turned over all the drives and the walks, and said if they would maintain it then they could use it. Now this company, Valley Properties that has it now, nobody knows what their trying to do. The tennis club brought suit against

them and got a temporary injunction restraining them from closing the courtsoff. Valley Properties does not have their heart in Macatawa that's for sure. They have no sympathy for this place.

Joe- When you're down here today and you walk around the park and you sit on your porch and look around, what are your memories of the old park?

JM- Of course, you know that old saying is "You can never go back. You can only go ahead." So it will never be like it was at one time, because too many things have changed. The modes of transportation changed, so it will never be like it was. I think eventually this will probably become a year round residential area. It will be a suburb, maybe of Holland. Holland has extended their city limits out here a long way, but they have never been able to get beyond where they are now because the people just won't go for it. Maybe in future times the people will go for it, I don't know. They did get it in the school district. But politically they didn't make it, so I don't know. It's dead compared to what it was in the teens and twenties. It's really dead. But a lot of people like it. Right now they're making it more of a private resort. And I was down on the channel the day before yesterday, and the people down there they're complaining. Kids come out and they ride bicycles right down the little narrow

cement walk that runs along the cottages on the channel there. They ride bicycles down there, ring their bell if anyone's on the walk (laughs). Well again, that's all private property down there. And I can see where it's nicer to have it private. When you come up here for a rest you want a rest. A lot of people come up here for a rest, to get away from all that. So who knows what's best, I don't know. When they remodel a cottage now they put heat in it, they insulate it. Den Uyl finally turned the electrical system over to Consumers. So they operate it now. And you have power year round. So people are coming. Some people stay here all winter. Some sell their house in town and buy a cottage out here, remodel it, go to Florida in the winter, and they're here early spring till late fall - which is an ideal setup for them. So it's changing, it's slowly changing. These were winter houses along here, these were always winter houses. The drayman lived here for years and years. That was another business in the park - the drayman. That was big business bringing in all the steamer trunks from the Chicago boat and taking them up to the cottages. The people would unpack them and then they'd hoist them up in the attic for the summer. Then in the fall you'd have to get them down again. He used to haul a lot of them in here. But there's no drayman anymore, that's

all gone. It's going to turn into a year round place I think eventually. It may be twenty, thirty, forty years away, but it will come. You know Will Rodgers said years and years ago, "Buy real estate. They ain't making the stuff anymore." And that's what's happened here. People have suddenly discovered that property on the water is getting almost non-existent; there's none available, you just can't get your hands on it.