

RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH HARRY SCHNIEBER

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

DOMINGO DUARTE

Jessica Ardis: This begins an interview with Harry Schnieber on April 29, 2004, in Belvidere, New Jersey, with Jessica Ardis and ...

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak ...

Danielle Campbell: ... and Danielle Campbell.

SH: Mr. Schnieber, thank you so much for taking time this morning to sit down with us and talk to us about your life experiences. To begin with, could you state for the tape where and when you were born?

Harry Schnieber: I was born January 20, 1914, in Belleville, New Jersey.

SH: Belleville?

HS: Yes.

SH: Can you tell us about your father?

HS: He worked for Public Service in Essex Generating Station. [He] worked there until he retired. Then, he came up here [Belvidere] to live.

SH: What year was that?

HS: He retired, I think, 1960.

SH: Where had he grown up?

HS: I think in the Vailsburg[section] in Newark, I guess, a number of places, also, Asbury Park and so on.

SH: Where was your mom born and raised?

HS: My mother was born in Unionville, New York, just above the Jersey state line. They moved down to Newark in the 1880s, I believe. My grandfather drove a horse car. They wanted farmers that could handle horses to do [it]. So, he went down there and took a job. That's how they got down there.

SH: Could you explain for the tape what a horse car is?

HS: Well, it's like a bus with a team of horses hooked on the front to pull [it] along the track.

SH: Just like before the trolley car.

HS: Yes. Then, he became a motorman on the trolley car when they became electrified. He

didn't live too long. He died in 1917. I can guess, from memory, I was a three-year-old.

SH: How did your mother and father meet?

HS: I don't know.

SH: Was it probably because of Newark?

HS: They never told me.

SH: Did you have other brothers and sisters?

HS: No. I was the only one.

SH: You were born in Belleville because your father was working there?

HS: Yes. Well, he worked for Cooper Chemical Company at that time, I believe. He spent most of his years in Public Service.

SH: Did you have other extended family members around, aunts, uncles and cousins?

HS: I had one aunt that lived in Newark, also. There was only just my mother and my aunt. My father had several sisters, but they're all over in Florida and I never saw too much of them.

SH: Where did you go to grade school?

HS: Belleville, and high school.

SH: What year did you graduate from high school?

HS: '32.

SH: What are your memories of the Depression?

HS: Oh, it was rough. I had some jobs. I worked for two dollars a week, every afternoon after school and all day Saturday, until nine o'clock at night.

SH: What were you doing?

HS: I was a clerk in a grocery store. I was an order boy. I got a dollar-and-a-half a week for that.

SH: Can you explain what an order boy is?

HS: He just goes around and delivers people's groceries. He gets, maybe, a ten-cent tip.

SH: Did you have any kind of conveyance to carry the groceries?

HS: [I had] a little express wagon that I pulled.

SH: Can you describe what your high school was like? What were your major interests?

HS: Well, as I remember, I had one teacher, got mad at me one day, told me I was too dumb to graduate, she says. Had me up [at] the blackboard, trying to figure out quadratic equations, and I couldn't figure out what the heck she was talking about. She had no patience and she slammed her book down saying, "You're dumb. You can't graduate." My wife says she was right, because it took me forty-two years to get out of high school. [Editor's Note: Harry Schnieber taught in high school for forty-two years.]

SH: Are there any other remembrances of high school that you have?

HS: I guess this is general. I don't know, is there anything special? I know [that] very few people graduated from high school in those days. I think our class started with over three hundred and I think one hundred thirty seven graduated.

SH: Was that because they had to go to work?

HS: A lot of it, yes. It was tough.

SH: What about your father's job? Was he able to keep working?

HS: Yes. One thing about that company, they didn't drop anybody. They cut wages. He got about twenty-nine dollars a week. That's what we had to live on.

SH: Did your mom do any extra work at all?

HS: No, no. She never did anything like that.

SH: Were there any extracurricular activities that you were involved in when you were in high school?

HS: Not an awful lot that I can remember.

SH: Were you a Boy Scout?

HS: Yes, I belonged to that for quite a few years.

SH: Did you get to go to camp or do anything like that?

HS: Oh, yes, yes. I became Scoutmaster of the troop that I started in for one year after my senior

year in college. Then, I took a job teaching in Pemberton, New Jersey. I was Scoutmaster there, and then, I went to Lambertville for two years and I was Scoutmaster there. Then, I came up here [Belvidere] and I was Scoutmaster here for eight years. So, I had plenty of experience with the Boy Scouts.

SH: Sounds like it. Where was your favorite place to go camping?

HS: Oh, I guess up here in Camp Pahaquarra, which is no longer there now. It is where the copper mine is just along the Delaware River

SH: On the Delaware.

HS: Yes, that was nice. I spent a lot of time up there. During World War II, we rode up [to the camp] on bicycles. I had a bicycle and you couldn't get gasoline then, so, we went right to work and rode up. It took us two-and-a-half hours to get up there and about an hour-and-a-half to come back, uphill going up.

SH: You mentioned that many of your classmates, because of the hard times, were unable to graduate from high school. How were you able to go to college? Why did you choose Rutgers?

HS: Well, I started the first year at Newark College of Engineering. My father had a cousin who was Edmond Halsey. He was quite a successful civil engineer. He thought because he was, I was going to be. I went one year. I wanted to go to Rutgers to begin with and he told me [that] he didn't want me shoveling cow manure all my life. That's what would happen to me if I went to Rutgers and I talked it over with some neighbors and the minister of the church I went to and they all told me, "If you want to go to Rutgers, then, you go to Rutgers." So, I sort of rebelled and I was there in my second year, third and fourth year.

SH: Was there a teacher at the school in Belleville that encouraged you? How did you know about Rutgers and the programs that you wanted to study?

HS: I guess I read about it. We had no guidance at that time. I didn't bother with it. I can't ever recall a teacher talking to me about things like that, but some of the people I knew were good enough to do it and I did it and I'm glad I did.

SH: In the summers during high school, did you have a job? Did you work?

HS: I had a garden at home and I worked in the store and all our folks were farmers up in Sussex County and Orange County, New York. I spent a lot of time there in the summer, pitching hay and things like that.

SH: Your mother's family had farms up there.

HS: Yes, yes.

SH: Are they still in the family?

HS: No. They're all gone. They all died. The farms have been sold. I don't know who owns them.

JA: I guess your family's farming background made you decide that you wanted to go into agriculture.

HS: I think so.

JA: Was it the experience that you had with that teacher that made you decide to go into education?

HS: No, I don't think so. I just laughed at her. The whole class laughed. There were eighteen boys in the class, just imagine that. You know, that's a very poor thing to tell a student. If somebody doesn't have much self-esteem, it could be really harmful. I would never do that as a teacher.

JA: She certainly taught you a lesson in what not to do as a teacher.

HS: I had a superintendent once, he was a pretty hard fellow to work for and he told me one day, he said, "The trouble with you is, you want the kids to like you. Make them hate you." Well, everybody hated him.

SH: You came to Rutgers in 1932. Can you describe the campus and what your first year was like?

HS: Well, actually, I graduated from high school in '32 and I went to Rutgers in '33, because I went to Newark College of Engineering for a year.

SH: Did you commute from home to the Newark College of Engineering?

HS: I did for two years and got up every morning. I had to leave around six-thirty to get to the eight o'clock class. I went down to Newark and took the train. I remember, the train got in at 7:45. It was always on time, too. That was good. So, downtown, class started at 8:10 and at eight-thirty at the College of Agriculture. So, you had a half-an-hour to walk up there and I did that many times. Senior year, I was able to get a room for working. ... [Dean] Helyar, I imagine you heard of him, a real fine gentleman, he found rooms for people who didn't have ... much money. We could work so many hours a month to pay for it. I had a room in the dairy farmhouse. Every morning, I had a string of heifers to take care of, clean the gutters, feed them and so forth, before I went to my eight o'clock class. So, we got up early and got the work done. It was a real nice experience and I certainly appreciated it.

SH: Did you do the afternoon milking as well?

HS: No, I didn't do any milking. They had people who did that. There were about six of us who lived in that farmhouse. We all worked in the dairy barn.

SH: Do you remember any of their names?

HS: Yes. Al (Majoska?), Bernie Merworth. Bernie lived down in Easton, Pennsylvania. I don't know whether he's still living or not. I haven't heard from him lately. He lives on Bushkill Drive. He had an upstream farm. Have you heard of it? [Bernie passed away in late October 2004.]

SH: No.

HS: It's gone now. I guess Pfizer [Pharmaceuticals], more or less, put him out of business with their air pollution. It affected his cows.

SH: Really?

HS: Yes. So, I haven't heard any more from him.

SH: Those were the guys in your room at Rutgers?

HS: Yes, they roomed there.

SH: Who was your favorite professor?

HS: Well, to tell you the truth, I thought a lot of all of them. I think we had an extremely good faculty there and they were such nice people, you know, the way they treated you, especially Professor Helyar. He had a course called "General Agriculture." It was more on how to live, what's right and what's wrong, and it was agriculture. He was a man that you had to respect. He didn't take any nonsense. He was strict, but he was fair. Everybody thought a lot of him.

SH: How often did you get over to the Rutgers College campus, the main campus?

HS: Oh, every day. I had most of my classes there.

SH: Did you? Okay.

HS: Only had some of them [that] were at the Ag College.

SH: Can you talk about that? What were the courses?

HS: Well, we had "Zoology" and "Botany," "Bacteriology," "Economics" and "History." All those things were on the main campus.

SH: Did you have a course that you liked the best?

HS: I was interested in all of them I think. I liked the History [class], “American Economic History.” We had a very good professor there.

SH: Who taught your “American Economic History” course?

HS: It’s slipped me. Maybe I’ll think of it, Professor Thompson. I had another Professor Thompson who was a poultry professor. ... He was a great guy, too. He, every lecture, started off with some funny story. The one day, Johnny Deschu fell asleep in his class and it’s about three o’clock in the afternoon. The professor said to leave him there. At five o’clock, he went up and woke him up.

SH: Did you have any time for socializing?

HS: They had a few things there. They had dances, occasionally, and things of that type. They had a course on folk dancing; I went to that, square dancing, that sort of thing.

SH: Did you have any interaction with the women at NJC?

HS: No, not particularly. I didn’t have any financial backing.

SH: When you were living on campus, did you have to go to chapel?

HS: Not if I went home. I went to church there. We had to go to chapel during the week, whether you were a commuter or not.

SH: Really?

HS: If you didn’t, you lost four credits.

SH: Really?

HS: You’re allowed four cuts and they went up and down the aisle, taking attendance, and you had an assigned seat. You had to be there. The Dean would get up and he was a minister. He had a regular service and he’d preach a little sermon to us.

SH: Was this Dean Metzger or Dean Edwards?

HS: Metzger. He was a very fine gentleman and Dr. Clothier was, too. He was the President. There were only twelve hundred people in the whole University when I went there.

SH: Did you have to participate in freshman initiation? You were never a freshman, so, you did not have to go through initiation or anything.

HS: No. I never belonged to any fraternity, except Alpha Zeta and Kappa Phi Kappa. They

were honorary.

SH: Were they agricultural?

HS: Yes, Alpha Zeta was. The other was education.

JA: Did you participate in any extracurricular activities, clubs or organizations?

HS: Yes. I belonged to the Agriculture Club and Alpha Zeta.

SH: Do you remember any of the people that were brought in to lecture to the students as part of chapel?

HS: They had Admiral Byrd there one time.

SH: Did they?

HS: Yes.

SH: Had he just finished an expedition?

HS: It was after he'd been in the South Pole. He gave a lecture. There were a number of them there. That was very good. I appreciated the last year, being able to be there.

SH: Did your father finally accept the fact that you were going to go to the Ag School?

HS: Oh, yes. He gave up on it.

SH: How often did you go home in your senior year? Were you pretty busy?

HS: Maybe half the time.

DE: When you went out on Friday nights, what did you do in New Brunswick socially, outside of school?

HS: Maybe go to the movies or something. I don't recall. I didn't have a car, so, I didn't do any traveling.

SH: What about the football games?

HS: Yes, I went to them, too.

SH: How was the team then?

HS: I guess about like it is now. One time, Dr. Clothier gave a talk and he said, "On this

hollowed ground, the first football game in America was played between Rutgers and Princeton, and Rutgers won,” and somebody in the back hollered out, “They haven’t won since.”

SH: What are your fondest memories of Rutgers as a student?

HS: Oh, I don’t know, taking the various courses and so on.

SH: Were there any incidents or stories that you would like to tell us about that you remember?

HS: I guess I’ve already told you a couple of them. I don’t recall.

DE: Are you familiar with the Helyar House that they have now?

HS: Yes. That came about from these rooms that we had and they built that later on. Part of the Alumni Foundation money goes to that. I’ve given towards that sometimes; sometimes to the Phil Alampi Scholarship. You know Phil Alampi?

SH: I do not.

HS: He was in college the same time I was. ... He was an Ag teacher for ten years in Woodstown, and then, he went on the radio in New York for ten years and had a farm program. I took my students down there a number of times. After that, Phil became Secretary of Agriculture for the State and he had that for twenty-six years, until he retired. He was a great fellow, a real go-getter. They have a scholarship in his honor. The FFA [Future Farmers of America] has one, Rutgers has one, too, but he was very outstanding.

SH: When you were in high school, were you part of FFA?

HS: They didn’t have it. See, FFA didn’t start until after 1928.

SH: Okay, I did not know that.

HS: Agricultural education started with the Smith-Hughes Act in 1917, but there were organizations. There was the Future Farmers of Virginia and several around the country, but the FFA was formed in Kansas City in 1928 and they held a convention there every year, up until about three years ago, and then, they moved to Louisville, Kentucky. Kansas City wasn’t big enough anymore. I went to Kansas City fourteen times with students. We went up to Blairstown to get on the train and, the next afternoon, we’d be in Kansas City, forty-nine dollars round trip.

SH: Oh, my Lord. It seems unbelievable now.

HS: We sat up all night, but it was nice. The whole state went together, you know. You got to know people, but we had a lot of great experiences out there. I heard several presidents speak. President Truman used to come. He lived out there in Independence, [Missouri], and, right next door, that Truman Library was really something to see. I went there one time and Mr. Truman

was speaking one day at the convention. A bunch of kids sat up in the balcony, yakking away. They weren't paying any attention. He stopped his talk. He said, "Look, when I'm speaking, I expect you to be quiet." Boy, you could hear a pin drop in that place, with twenty thousand people in there, but that was Harry Truman.

JA: When you were a student at Rutgers, did they celebrate Agricultural Field Day?

HS: Yes.

JA: Last Saturday, April 26th, was the anniversary.

HS: Same one.

JA: Have you gone back and visited?

HS: Not lately. I don't get down there too much. My wife doesn't like to drive down there and I've given up driving. I had one eye go bad here. I just don't trust myself.

SH: When you were at Rutgers, being a land grant college, it had mandatory ROTC. Did you participate in ROTC?

HS: No, I didn't, because of my eyesight. I took phys ed. You could take either one.

SH: Do you remember who spoke at the graduation?

HS: No, I don't. I know we had a nice luncheon.

SH: That is probably what these guys will remember when they graduate next month. I guess Danielle will not graduate next month. She is a junior.

HS: What are you taking?

DC: I am a history major and I am in the Graduate School of Education.

JA: I am also a history major and I am a music minor.

HS: Music?

JA: Yes, history and music.

SH: Can you tell us about your career then after you graduated from Rutgers in 1936. You talked a bit about going to teach.

HS: I went down to Pemberton, New Jersey, and taught biology. I went down there looking for a job teaching agriculture. My classmate Walter Cobb was selected. There were three of us who

went down and they were looking for a Scoutmaster and the superintendent wanted to know if I wanted to teach biology. Well, in '36, if somebody offered you a job, you took it. You didn't argue. I got twelve hundred dollars a year and I went down there for a year. I enjoyed it, but I didn't want to stay there. To tell you the truth, I missed the hills. I don't like the flat country. So, I looked around. Blairstown was looking for an Ag teacher and so was Lambertville. I was offered both of them. I decided to go to Lambertville. They paid a little more. Blairstown offered me 1440 dollars for twelve months. That was the same as I was getting at Pemberton. I got 1650 dollars at Lambertville and I stayed there two years. Then, they opened up the program here at Belvidere and I applied for it. I went around several interviews there. They got stuck with me.

SH: What year did you come to Belvidere?

HS: '39, August 1st.

SH: When did you meet Mrs. Schnieber?

HS: Oh, golly, when she was about thirteen years old.

DC: How old were you?

HS: I'm ninety right now.

DC: I meant at the time when you met her.

HS: Nineteen, I guess.

DC: How did you meet?

HS: Sunday school picnic. I knew her thirteen years before I got married. We sort of drifted apart, you know. I went away to teach and she went to work.

SH: Did she go to college as well?

HS: No. She worked for Mutual Benefit Life Insurance. We got married in 1946.

SH: You came to Belvidere as the war was starting in Europe. How long was it before you were aware of what was going on in Europe?

HS: I knew right away.

SH: Was it on the radio or in newspapers out here?

HS: Oh, yes, yes. It was in newspapers, radio and wind up telephones.

SH: When you came to Belvidere, where did you live originally?

HS: I boarded with a family by the name of Seguine. They had several schoolteachers at 40 Parker Street. Earl Hoyt lives there now, one of my students.

SH: Had you started dating Mrs. Schnieber at that point?

HS: No, not until later.

SH: When the school year would end in Belvidere, would you go back to Belleville?

HS: No. I stayed here, because my contract was [for] twelve months.

SH: What did an Ag teacher do during the summer months, when school was out?

HS: The students have supervised Ag experience on the farms or projects of various kinds. It was my job to go around in the summertime and check, see what they're doing and, also, there was a lot of getting ready for the next school year. I kept busy. I had two weeks vacation.

SH: What did you do with your two weeks vacation?

HS: Travel, probably. I used to take the students on trips before I was married, even after I was married. We'd get two or three carloads together. One year, we went to Iowa; cost us about thirteen dollars apiece for ten days. That includes gasoline and everything. We camped. The things we did, we'd probably get arrested now. We used to pull off to the side of the road, get the sleeping bags out, get out the portable stove and cook our meals. Then, another year, we went down South, went to Alabama. We went through the Smokey Mountains and all through there. In another year, the year the war started, we went to Florida. I had an aunt who lived down there and she moved out of her house and went across the street with a neighbor and we moved in and we took her every place we went. She called us her nine sons.

SH: When you were going on these trips, were you looking at other agricultural areas?

HS: Yes, we visited FFA chapters and that was nice, and then, another time, we went up to Gaspé Bay Peninsula. I remember, we stayed overnight in a schoolyard in Limestone, Maine. That was quite an experience and, another time we went just up to Maine and back. Then, after the war started, we had to give that up, because [of] fuel [rationing] and so on. I did take the kids down to New York one time in 1943 and we stayed at the Hotel New Yorker. I think it was four dollars a night and we went to Coney Island. We went to Jones Beach, went to the docks, watched them unload fruits and vegetables and took a trip up the Hudson on a Day Line [ferry] and we had a real nice time. These were large excursion boats.

SH: Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was attacked?

HS: Yes, I was sitting home in the living room. I was visiting my folks that weekend.

SH: What was the reaction in your home?

HS: Well, I don't remember exactly. They weren't too happy about it, I'll tell you that.

DC: How did you hear about it?

HS: On the radio.

SH: Did you have a car at that point to come back to Belvidere?

HS: Oh, yes. They didn't set the gasoline [rationing] down for maybe a couple of months. Then, things began to get tight.

SH: Did you have any students who were anxious to enlist or leave school the next day?

HS: I don't remember.

DC: Could you describe what life on the home front was like?

HS: We had a lot of things going. I belonged to a fire company. They organized an extra fire company. We ran a canning center for food. We canned twenty-one thousand cans in the Ag building.

SH: Here at Belvidere?

HS: Yes, and we used tin cans. We had machines to seal with. We had quite an operation going there. That went on until after the war, until people got freezers and things. We had a lot of experiences then. There was one time when the schools were closed for two weeks because [the] snow was so bad. They couldn't keep the roads plowed. People came in; they brought sides of beef in and hogs and we made scrapple, sausage, canned meat and canned soup.

SH: You did all this in the school.

HS: Yes, right in the Ag building. I've got a picture of the old Ag building there. It no longer exists.

SH: You talked about meat and scrapple. Did you also can vegetables and fruit as well?

HS: Yes.

SH: Where was this sent or sold?

HS: Oh, we'd go down [to] South Jersey to buy blueberries and things like that. Of course, around here, there were lots of apples and peaches. We'd buy them from farmers and can them.

We had pressure cookers. You could do a pretty good job, you know, stuff getting spoiled. We bought the cans from Mr. (Albertson?) up in Hope. He had a canning factory there. It's up in back of the mill. I think the building is still there and we were able to get cans from him for that. I remember, one time, in the winter, we went up to Montague. They had a canning center up there and I went up to borrow some cans. Boy, when I arrived, the snowdrifts were about twelve feet deep. They come right down off the roof on to the road. I had [snow] chains; we used chains, then, on our cars. I had a '41 Ford and I went up there. I think it was all day going up there and back, just to get some tin cans.

SH: Who was your market? Who did you sell to?

HS: We didn't sell them. People brought their own material and canned it for their own use.

SH: How did they compensate you?

HS: They just paid for the cans, that was all.

SH: Really?

HS: It was a government program.

SH: What was it called?

HS: Yes, it was financed by the United States Department of Agriculture. We had a lady who was a sixth grade teacher, she ran it for me. I was the supervisor and general fixer. Every time I got ready to go home, somebody would break a can sealer. So, I'd stop and fix that. We had quite a thing. We made up a lot of our equipment ourselves. We had a fellow that worked around the school who was real handy. He could do almost anything and he made the tables and so forth that we used. We had a metal container that we set the cans in to heat them, with a gas burner under it. Then, when they got hot, we'd seal them and put them in the pressure cooker. We could cook eighty-six cans at a time. We had two pressure cookers, so [that] we could do twice that many. It turned out quite well.

SH: Did the government ask you to do this or did you know that it was available?

HS: It came through our agriculture education program from the state. The federal government worked through the states, and then, the state supervisors worked with us.

SH: Did you work this into your curriculum, as a teaching tool?

HS: A little bit. I didn't do a great deal with my students on it. It was mainly for adults.

SH: Since we are talking about government programs, what were your opinions on the programs that Franklin Roosevelt put into effect, the WPA, the CCC, those programs?

HS: Well, they were a great help, I'll tell you that.

SH: Did you, or anyone that you know of, participate in these programs?

HS: [When] I was in college, I was in the National Youth Administration. I could earn fifteen dollars one month and twenty dollars another month. So, I got paid in one window and moved to the next window and paid all my bill. The college was very generous. We didn't have money, they didn't throw us out, finally, got paid up.

SH: What was your job with the NYA?

HS: Well, first year, I did pick and shovel work, turning compost. Compost is a layer of soil, a layer of cow manure, and you've got to mix it. ... Then, I kind of got fancy and got a job with the Ag Economics Department working on farm records, (math?) and so forth. They had these (Merjaner?) machines, I think they're (Mejaner machines?), about this big, a calculator.

SH: Was it about four feet long?

HS: Yes. Oh, they were big things and they'd go, "Clankity, clank, bang," but they'd come up with the answers, anyway.

SH: Was your family in support of Roosevelt?

HS: I don't think so. I can see a lot of good things he did. He really straightened things out because things were in terrible shape.

SH: In your town of Belleville, was your family politically active?

HS: Were they active? Not particularly.

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DC: Were your parents Republican during FDR's Democratic administration?

HS: They were Republicans.

SH: Earlier you talked about how your minister had told you to go ahead and go to school. Were you involved in the church in your youth?

HS: Yes. I was [a member of the] Baptist Church from the time I was five years old, up until I left.

SH: Were there any other programs that you were aware of here in Belvidere that were war related?

HS: I imagine there were. Those were the ones I was involved in.

SH: What about rationing? How did that affect you and the people in this area?

HS: You got two gallons of gas a week. I got more than that, because I had the responsibility of visiting the students and so forth. I think I had what was called a C ration. They had A rations and different classifications. It was pretty hard to get a tire if you needed one. We used a lot of retreads and things like that. You couldn't get a car; there just weren't any. They didn't make any.

SH: You were very lucky to have a 1941 model.

HS: I saw the war was coming. That's why I got it.

SH: How did you see the war coming?

HS: Oh, you could tell as early as '39 that we were going to get mixed up somehow.

JA: How did you feel about that?

HS: Well, I don't like to see anybody get killed, I'll tell you that. It's a terrible thing.

JA: Did you feel we belonged in the war?

HS: The thing was, we were attacked and had to fight back. I'm not so sure about this thing over in Iraq. [Editor's note: Mr. Schnieber is referring to the War in Iraq in 2003.] I don't agree with that one hundred percent.

SH: As your students graduated, were a lot of them going off to the war?

HS: Oh, yes. A lot of them finished in three years and got their diplomas. They gave it to them after three years. Yes, there were a lot of them.

SH: Were some of the young men exempt because they were farmers and involved in agriculture?

HS: Some were, yes. I was a 4-F because of my eyesight. So, I stayed here.

SH: Was that a difficult thing, to be 4-F?

HS: No, it never bothered me particularly.

SH: No one said anything or made comments.

HS: No. Our job as an Ag teacher was pretty important in those days. They always said that

food will win the war.

SH: What about Victory Gardens?

HS: Yes, there were some.

SH: Was there a draft board? Were you involved with that at all?

HS: No. There was a draft board, but they threw me out.

SH: You talked about having an extra fire company. What were they to do?

HS: Just in case of emergencies, they'd help the regular fire company. The regular fire company didn't have much equipment at that time. In 1940, a month after we moved in, the school caught fire and it really did a lot of damage. There was a short circuit in the wiring in the auditorium backstage. They had made the stage out of white pine, no backing, no masonry back cover at all, you know, the cheapest they could get and that went up. Fireproof curtains just burned, one right after the other. The ceiling came down in the auditorium. The Belvidere Fire Company, then, was mostly elderly men. They had, I guess, a 1916 fire engine and a 1926. That was all they had. If Washington's [fire company] hadn't come over, we'd really been stuck, because there were no other fire companies around then. They finally thought they had it out, and then, they left somebody to watch it and he got hungry and went downtown to the diner. While he was down there, the fire started up again. The second fire was worse than the first one. I spent all night there, carrying books out and things. I just went by the doorway and Niagara Falls let loose from the water from upstairs. They found a lot wrong with the building. They hadn't built a firewall. You know, the contractor kind of chiseled and, when they rebuilt it, they had a local man do it and he did a much better job.

SH: How long did it take to rebuild it and get back in school?

HS: Oh, we were out of school for a whole month, no school at all. They patched things together and got going again in, I guess it must have been March by the time we got back. They had us doing all kinds of work. They did away with the one hour lunch break. We had to move pianos and things and move things out of there. It was quite an experience, I'll say.

SH: What did your lesson plan look like? Did you stay in school that extra month to make up the time or did the State say, "Do not worry about it."

HS: Then, you didn't have to make time up if you lost it. They didn't have the rules they have now. I imagine you'd go all summer if something like that happened.

SH: Being in an agricultural area, did you have a different start and end time than the rest of the schools in the state?

HS: We started Wednesday after Labor Day. We ended, usually, the second Friday in June,

which is earlier than most schools. I know, when I went to school, we went until 30th of June.

SH: During the war, was there ever any thought that there might be any kind of an attack here in the United States?

HS: Oh, yes. We're more or less prepared for that. We had bomb shelters and they had signs up all over, you know, where there were shelters.

SH: Were you part of the blackout? Would you have to put your lights down here?

HS: Oh, yes. You had the lower half of your headlights, or the upper half, shaded, painted black.

SH: Did you have someone checking in the downtown area of Belvidere?

HS: I don't think so. We only had one policeman.

SH: You talked about, during the war, as a Boy Scout leader bicycling up along the Delaware to the copper mines. Were there other activities that you basically reinvented or continued in a different way that you remember? How did farmers manage with the gas rationing?

HS: Well, farmers had gasoline.

SH: All they needed?

HS: Pretty much, yes.

SH: What about materials and replacement parts?

HS: Yes, yes.

SH: Were there scrap drives out here?

HS: Oh, yes, we had them; scrap iron and newspapers. Boy Scouts used to pick up newspapers. We even had a press to bale them with. We'd sell them by the ton. They were pretty good money, sixty, seventy dollars a pound then.

SH: What about the War Bond effort? Did anybody come out here to encourage people to participate in the bond drives?

HS: Oh, yes, yes, people bought bonds.

SH: Did they sell them in the school at all?

HS: I don't recall if they did. The banks sold them, post office and places like that. You could get them.

SH: Were there rallies where veterans would come out and talk to people?

HS: I don't recall anything like that.

SH: We have heard that people also wrapped bandages and helped out in other ways?

HS: Yes, there was a lot of that done, a lot of volunteer work. Ladies usually did that.

SH: Were there any military units in this area, training or anything like that?

HS: Oh, yes, the National Guard is right in the county here, the same one there is now.

SH: What did they do?

HS: I guess they went in the service. They were called up.

SH: Did the school children write to people in the service? Was there a letter writing campaign?

HS: Yes, quite a bit.

SH: Had you started to date your wife at this point? I know you did not marry until after the war.

HS: No, after the war.

SH: When did you start dating? Did you drive all the way to Bellville every weekend?

HS: Yes, I did that for a while.

SH: It did not take long to convince her, then.

HS: No.

SH: When you moved back as a bridegroom, did you live in the same place or did you have a house?

HS: No, I used to board with Mrs. (Byrd?), across from the Catholic Church. I had rented a house. My aunt came up to keep house for me. She passed away just a few months afterwards and I rented this house and paid twenty-five dollars a month. After she passed away, I sublet most of it to the family. I kept one room upstairs and lived there and boarded with Mrs. Byrd for about five years. Then, when we got married, we had our house on Parker Street for a year, until we built this one. I bought this place in '47 and we built this house in '48. We designed it ourselves and hired some help to build it. I asked the carpenter how much he wanted and he said, "A dollar-and-half an hour." So, I had two men at a dollar-and-a-half, one, a dollar-and-a-

quarter, and they started to work here about the first part of May. We moved in the 8th of August. Now, that was all done with hand tools. We had no power saws or anything like that in those days. I spent my weekends sawing studs and doing work myself. So, it cost us sixteen thousand dollars.

SH: Unbelievable. It is a beautiful house.

HS: Well, it was mostly my wife's idea. We went camping up to Cape Cod the first year we were married and we saw some houses up there we liked and kind of got the idea.

SH: When the war was over, were there any kind of celebrations here in Belvidere?

HS: I don't remember too well, but everybody was very happy, I'll tell you that.

SH: Did you lose any of your students in the war?

HS: I don't recall right now.

SH: You have had a stellar career. You have wonderful scrapbooks and files here. Can you tell us some of the things that you are most proud of? You do not seem like a man who would brag, but I hope you will, a little bit at least.

HS: Well, it took us quite a while to get going. As I say, I worked with this one superintendent for ten years and he wouldn't let us do anything. He didn't believe in many of the things that I did. Our philosophies were about opposite and, well, like, he wouldn't let us go to the judging contest.

SH: Really?

HS: He didn't believe in contests and I would say that we had the poorest FFA chapter in the state for quite a few years. After his ten years, we got people in here that had the exact opposite ideas and we began to make some progress. We did get thirteen gold emblems in the national chapter contests. In doing that, you had to be among the top fifty or sixty in the United States and there are only, I think, two allowed for each state. That's all New Jersey had. We were going at it with Newton on that. Newton had seventeen, all together. We had thirteen, and we had some silvers and bronze. You know, they were not quite as good and we were active in cooperative activities. We used to farm sixty-five acres here. We had four tractors and a lot of equipment. Most of them, we bought ourselves. I mean, we usually didn't bother the school board for money. They paid my salary, but, when it came to sending the kids places and paying for things like that, we earned the money and got it out of our treasury. We used to take in about forty thousand dollars a year. That was pretty good twenty-five years ago.

SH: Especially for such a small amount of acreage. With this cooperative acreage, was it donated for your use or did you have to pay rent on it?

HS: It was donated. I don't think we paid rent on any of them, that I recall. We had fifteen acres. A man had an orchard and we fixed that up and used that and made cider and sold that. We used to sell seed corn. We'd sell three hundred bushels of that, make four or five hundred dollars. We'd sell oranges, as many as two trailer loads.

SH: Oranges?

HS: Citrus fruits.

SH: Really?

HS: Yes. Now, the teacher tells me he had trouble selling half a load, because the kids just don't go at it, but I used to push the kids pretty well and get my foot behind them, once in a while.

SH: I did not know you could grow oranges in New Jersey.

HS: We don't. We bought them in Florida. We had them shipped up here in trailer loads.

SH: Okay, I misunderstood. I thought you were telling me that you figured out a way to grow oranges in New Jersey.

HS: No, we did that in the fall. We used to sell Christmas trees. We planted forty thousand trees for Leo Chesrone up in Delaware. Then, he'd sell them back to us at a buck-and-a-half a piece. We'd sell them for three or four and make some money. We had a lot of activities and the kids ate it up, too. I mean, they were enthusiastic. You'd see them run to FFA meetings. "Mr. Secretary, what is the next item in the agenda?" Everything was quite formal. We put in quite a bit on leadership and things of that type. We had a number of students that got the American Farmer degree. That's the highest degree you could get in the FFA. We had enrolled in cooperative contests; we were given trips for that. First, when we went to Michigan State, that was a real nice experience. I took three students with me for that. One of those students still takes me down to the state FFA conventions. He called me up last week and wanted to know if I wanted to go. I said, "Sure." I used to take them around; now, they take me around. Then, we went to Colorado University another summer. We spent a week out there while we were at it, rented a car and went around, did some sightseeing.

SH: Were you in Fort Collins?

HS: Yes. Then, we went to the University of Virginia and Ohio State. You could get the award every two years. Then, they did away with it, but we had quite a bit of experience that way. Of course, we went to national conventions. We received some national awards out there.

SH: Did you participate in the county and the state fairs as well?

HS: Oh, yes. We used to show about fifty head of cattle down at the Warren County Fair, ... another fifty down at the Trenton Fair. We were very active in showing and doing things like

that.

SH: Was it beef or dairy?

HS: Dairy. This was dairy country. There were nine hundred dairy farms in the county when I came here. Now, there are sixty.

SH: What other kind of stock did you have in this part of the country at that time?

HS: Oh, sheep and hogs.

SH: Now, with the sheep again, were they for wool or mutton?

HS: Oh, both, I guess. I had sheep myself, once.

SH: What kind?

HS: Hampshires. My daughter has Jacobs.

SH: Does she?

HS: She got about eighteen or so, I guess.

SH: Did you have goats and chickens?

HS: Oh, yes. I had three hundred chickens. I just got rid of them a couple of years ago. We did a lot of things like that. We were very active. I might speak a little bit about present facility at the high school. I think it's one of the best in the state. It's about ten thousand square feet, consists of two classrooms, a large shop, storage area overhead, a space for selling plants and things like that, also, two greenhouses that are forty-five-by-twenty-four, lavatories. Everything is there for a good Ag program.

SH: Do you think the State still continues to stand behind agriculture?

HS: I think so. We weren't getting too much support from the Department of Education. We seemed to be left out first; at least it seemed to me that way. Commissioners never paid much attention and, about ten years ago, they decided to move the program into the Department of Agriculture and that has been a big help, because, there, you've got people that will stand behind you and they're interested in what you're doing, whereas a lot of these educators are more on the academic side, you know.

SH: You also were a member of the school board in White Township, New Jersey. How did you see the education system change from that perspective, as a board member, as opposed to being a faculty member?

HS: Well, a lot of progress [was] made in the forty-two years that I spent there. I know, when I first got on the board, they were extremely conservative. They didn't want to spend any money for anything and, one time, the principal asked for a second kindergarten teacher. I was the only one that voted in favor of it. The principal says, "Thank you, Harry," but that's the way it was. It's not that way anymore. We've got very good people on the board now and people are interested in [the] education of their children.

SH: Are you in White Township here?

HS: Yes.

SH: Your house, your home?

HS: Yes.

SH: This is the Stony Orchard.

HS: Stony Field Orchard.

SH: What do you grow here?

HS: Apples, peaches, plums, cherries, pears, some vegetables. [It] keeps us busy.

SH: How much help do you have?

HS: Right now, we just finished pruning the peach trees and, to prevent diseases, we used tree wound paint on them, with some chemicals mixed in with it to kill bacteria.

SH: You must have a few hands that come and help you periodically.

HS: Oh, yes, yes, I have three.

SH: How many children do you have? What are they doing?

HS: We have four children. One son is out in the West and I have a daughter who is a nurse down in Hunterdon Medical Center and another daughter that works for M&M, then, a son that lives down in North Carolina.

SH: You talked about the facility that you were instrumental in putting together at Belvidere High School, but you also worked at preserving one, did you not?

HS: Oh, that's gone.

SH: That is all gone now.

HS: Yes. When they put the addition on the high school in the '70s, it was right in the way, so, we thought of moving it, but it was just too expensive. So, it's better to build a new facility. We got a much better one.

SH: Are there any other questions or anything that you would like to leave on the tape?

HS: One thing I forgot to tell you about the addition over there, it also has an outdoor area for steam cleaning tractors and a room just for painting. I forgot those two things.

SH: That is quite a facility.

HS: Yes, it is. You ought to go over and see it.

SH: Sure.

HS: I'm sure they will let you do it, if you went in the office and asked.

SH: Were you involved in any organizations with produce growers?

HS: Well, I belong to Grange. I was master of (Rothsberg?) Grange at one time and I belong to the State Horticulture Society.

SH: Is there anything else that we forgot to ask you about? I notice that you have a lot of books and photographs of trains.

HS: Oh, I like that, too. It's just sort of a hobby. We travel quite a bit. Since I've been retired, we've gone across the country four or five times. I've ridden on most of the Amtrak routes, a few I haven't, but I've never been out of the country, except to Canada and Mexico. I stuck my foot in there one time from San Diego.

SH: Have you been involved in trying to organize the railroad museum out in Philipsburg?

HS: No, I haven't been involved in that. I belong to the National Railways Historical Society chapter over in Allentown. That's about it.

SH: Thank you so much for taking time this morning to talk with us.

HS: You're welcome, I'm sure.

SH: Thank you for showing us all of this wonderful memorabilia that you have collected. Just for the record, I would like to say that Mr. Schnieber's office is almost wall papered with awards and certificates of achievement in all facets of his life. Thank you so much.

HS: You're welcome.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----

Reviewed by Travis Omilian 10/10/04
Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 10/19/04
Reviewed by Harry Schnieber 11/30/04