

## **Walter Elliott - OPL - 2-6-16, b. 1959**

### **Introduction**

Walter Elliott is a staff writer for *Local Talk*, a group of local weeklies covering Newark, the Oranges, Irvington and surrounding areas. It has been publishing for fifteen years.

[sbh comment: As happens with many local weeklies, editorial content in *Local Talk* tends to the conservative: The editor speaks rather favorably of Donald Trump, has grave reservations about trans people in bathrooms, and is convinced that the US court system is totally corrupt because it lets known malefactors off for lack of evidence.]

The interview takes place in a library, probably the Orange Public Library.

Because his father worked for some time in auto dealerships, and he himself is particularly interested in car racing and railroad lines, Walter's memory is especially acute when it comes to the former locations of tire stores, auto dealers, railroad depots, etc. (See ~11:49–12:15; 37:00; ~1:04 ff and *passim*.) Also, he apparently walked around a lot when he was growing up, especially in East Orange, and he recalls the former businesses on many blocks adjoining Main Street, especially in the Brick Church area.

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Walter begins by saying he expects Chris (Matthews) to find him to be an interesting specimen. He gives his name as Walter F. Elliott, and emphasizes that the 'F' is important.

### **Birth and connections to Orange**

According to his parents, Walter says, he was born in Orange Memorial Hospital on March 28, 1959. His father still lives in Orange, on High Street.

Walter says he grew up in Orange, and might still be living there if he had not met his future wife in June or July 2007, in the same month he was hired by Local Talk. They were married in Orange City Hall by Mayor **Mims Hackett**. "Say what you will about Mayor Mims,...I can say on that day I did one right thing." After that he moved to his wife's place in Elizabeth, and has lived either in Elizabeth or Newark ever since. Because of his job with Local Talk, however, and the fact that his father is here, he has "kept tabs" on the town.

[Later on, about fifty-three minutes into the interview, Walter indicates that there was another hiatus, of twenty-nine years, after his graduation from high school, when he either did not live in Orange or never visited the building where the graduation took place.]

### **The Elliott family's various homes**

Chris explains that the Valley Arts project is interested in the effects of 280, and Walter

responds by explaining that he and his family lived in several different places. When he was an infant, the family lived in Montclair, on [sounds like 'Consha' or 'Conshock' Place but I cannot find any such street in 07042, 07043, or 07013. There is a Cottage Place, but this does not seem to be what he says at **1:43**].

Next, the Elliotts moved to the "East Orange side of North 15th Street," right on the border with the Roseville section of Newark. [N. 15th is north of the freeway, but east of the Parkway, in East Orange, a few blocks from Roseville Avenue.]

In 1964, the family moved to a house on Liberty Street, Orange, and he attended Forest Street School for six months. [Liberty is a two-block street running south from Union Street to a dead end, and is quite close to Our Lady of the Valley.] He recalls learning about calendars and dates at that time by noticing the dates, 1964, then 1965, on license plates at the World's Fair, which the Elliotts attended twice in each of those years.

In February of 1964, he says, although he must mean 1965, on the very same day that Stan Laurel died [2/23/65], the family moved to a house on Elizabeth Street in Orange. His mother took them in the family Austin, a late forties model that they bought second hand, first to the White Castle for hamburgers, and then over the old two-lane pre-280 Scotland Road bridge into the North Ward. He lived there "pretty much" from that time until 2007. [Elizabeth runs from Day to Cleveland, two blocks north of Park Avenue.] **[3:38]**

### **Clearing out for the freeway**

Walter attended public schools, and almost always walked: Cleveland Street School, Central Middle School, Orange High School. Therefore, he states, he was walking through the area impacted by the freeway, but he was "only seven, eight years old when they started clearing the houses for it." **[4:28]**

He does recall "when they cleared the path. It was like, I want to say it was 1967 or '68, ... I remember they cleared that whole swath of that area, uh, between what is now Freeway Drive East and Freeway Drive West." **[4:58]** He then mentions Hurlbut and Smith Streets and says that he recalls a small circus or a carnival that set up somewhere near South Essex or South Centre, and stayed a couple of days, or a weekend.

[On the Walter G. Alexander Group tape, about 22% in, Tim Jones also recalls this little circus that appeared on the cleared out area: "In front of Gray Street, there was just an empty lot, all the way down to Lincoln Avenue, all the way down to Center Street, there's been an empty lot for years. Then, all of a sudden, here comes a circus. They put a circus right there. They put a circus right there, from Lincoln Avenue, all the way down to Center Street."]

The actual digging, when it finally started, took a long time. Walter explains that when the family first moved into the North Ward they had equally easy access to West

Orange, Montclair, Glen Ridge, and East Orange, as they did to "Orange Center," meaning Main Street and the business district, as he explains. [5:59]

Walter recalls "going up the first Orange Mountain as a kid. I do remember ... that NJ DOT ... put in temporary, temporary roads ... before they built the overhead bridges." [6:36]

The temporary roads would be in place for a couple of years, he states, and his father jokingly claimed that the temporary bridges were up so long that they made up an entire career for some of the project engineers and other workers.

Walter also remembers that he saw the railroad spur, and later on learned that the Morristown and Erie Railroad out of Morristown or Roseland, "the freight road, not to be confused with the M&E ... you know, the old Lackawanna, New Jersey Transit, M&E line," had built a special RR spur in the right of way to truck out the rock and fill that was dug or blasted out as they built the highway up the first Orange mountain and on to the second Orange mountain. [8:01]

Walter remembers "vaguely," from going up Mount Pleasant Avenue, that there were a couple of wood frame houses and an entrance to Llewellyn Park that were taken down, but that would be in West Orange. He also recalls that the highway right of way cut through East Orange and into the Roseville section of Newark "until you get to the bridge that they built, over the railroad ... the Lackawanna Railroad ... and Orange Street." [9:08]

Before the freeway was built, his parents would travel to New York via Main Street, which becomes Orange Street as it moves through East Orange and into Newark and then Harrison, where they would pick up the Harrison Turnpike [now Harrison Avenue] and get onto the Turnpike "in the Meadows." [9:39]

### **Changes in the Oranges that may or may not have been caused by construction of the freeway**

Walter says his memory does not always distinguish between what was taken down for the highway, and what was torn down for other reasons, giving as an example the area on Valley Road where the West Orange Fire Station is now. He doesn't think that fire station [which sits on Valley right where it is about to pass over a freeway access road and the freeway] existed at the time the freeway was being built.

Across the street, where a liquor store is today [Valley Liquors, 426 Valley Road], there used to be a used car place or possibly an Oldsmobile dealership, with a 40 foot tall pillar featuring vertical letters spelling out 'Oldsmobile.' South of the fire station (back on the west side of the street), there is a one-and-a-half story wood frame home that used to be a dry cleaning establishment, and then a brick garage building that used to be a big Ford dealership. This was separate from Washington Ford on Washington Street in West Orange, where his father worked during several summers. [11:49]

The father was a mechanic's foreman who "worked his way up into assistant ... dealership manager. Then the teaching bug got him and he taught at ... Lincoln Tech, Union, and in Newark, and ... also, ah, the Elizabeth ... public school system ... that's high school, special needs students, auto shop." [12:17]

### **East Orange: Brick Church**

Now moving to East Orange, Walter mentions Brick Church: He remembers the area in 1964-67, "before it became the way it is now." He recalls a supermarket across the street [south of the current transit stop], where Freeway Drive West runs today. [13:16]

[By "Brick Church," Walter refers to the 'Brick Church' transit station immediately north of Freeway Drive West between Halsted and South Harrison. A shopping mall called Brick Church Plaza, with a large parking lot, is located between the same two streets, and between the railroad tracks and Main Street. The church for which these are named is a handsome and well-known edifice on the NW corner of Prospect and Martin King Boulevard (Main Street), a block north of the station. Several postcard images of the historic church, currently the [Faith Temple No.1 OFW Baptist Church](#), are currently available on Ebay. West of the church, and across the street from it, a [Muir's Department Store](#) has been replaced by a modern apartment building called [Brick Commons](#).]

### **Main Street in East Orange**

Continuing eastward, Walter picks up at the point "where Main Street and Freeway Drive West meet," and recalls a taxi dispatcher with a tall aerial. He says things get interesting at this point, "because the original Main Street ran ... in more of a zig-zag - like way, because, as he understands from history books, he says, they were trying to avoid swamps, ... and they were following an old Lenni Lenape trail." Originally, he says, Main Street in the area of East Orange City Hall, proceeded diagonally to the East Orange Public Library, a Carnegie Library, now the Municipal Court, which was not taken by the freeway. That diagonal section of Main Street, he adds, kept on to run over the Parkway, and is now known as Maple Street.

Meanwhile, the engineers were forced to cut the preexisting Maple Street in half, producing sections north and south of the freeway. This now forces people to detour via Grove Street. He does not recall much of that Grove street neighborhood before the freeway, but does recall that a Ford dealership was demolished. [15:45]

[The old diagonal section of Main Street near the court has become Freeway Drive East, and soon runs into the complications of a Garden State Parkway interchange where it is forced to turn sharply to the south, becoming S. Maple Avenue, where it soon terminates on Sussex Avenue. Walter explains more about this after 18:00]

A separate Ford dealer was located where a public service agency named something like "East Orange Family Assistance" is now, across the street from a BP station, and next door to a Walgreens. The Walgreens parking lot used to be the [Ormont Theater](#), he says. [16:13]

Going even farther east, Walter states that a trolley or bus turnaround was once located on the East Orange - Newark border; in design it resembled the one on the border of South Orange near Dover Street.

At this point Walter explains how the highway engineers straightened out Main Street and describes the complications involving the Garden State Parkway, as described in a note above, and comments that municipal leaders took advantage of urban renewal money, whether or not that was connected with the construction of the highway, to do some redevelopment.

### **More on the Brick Church section of East Orange**

The topic of redevelopment takes Walter back to the Brick Church section of East Orange, and he says it used to be "chock-a-block" with stores, restaurants, and a hotel, with a newspaper stand and the Red Oak Sign Store on the SW corner of Main and Harrison, and west of that the Arctic Kitchen and a florist, maybe Norman Florist, both located on the ground floor of a four to five story apartment building. [19:40]

Further west, "under the border" was the [Palace Theater](#), which "was around until at least '78, ... '79, '80, somewhere like that." He remembers going to a screening of Dr. Dolittle there, and Grease. [20:12]

### **Main Street Orange**

Now back in Orange, on Main Street near Oakwood, in the building where the One Stop Supermarket is now [at 50 Main, between Oakwood/Hillyer and Glenwood] was another car dealer, a Dodge dealership, he thinks. The adjoining lot to the side and behind the store, he says, is a business called [D'Aloia \[Used Auto Parts\]](#). Walter suggests talking to the D'Aloias,, John, "the tall guy," and his brother.

[The same business was mentioned by Tim Jones in the Walter G. Alexander interview.]

John D'Aloia was and still is the landlord at 26 Main Street, a building dating from "the twenties or at least the fifties" and now being used by the [Kerry Coley for Mayor](#) campaign. [sbh: Coley has been endorsed by *Local Talk*.] Previously, however, from around 2007 to June 30, 2015, the building housed *Local Talk*; Walter thinks it was once the location of the Club Normandie, a nightclub, and spelled with '-ie' "like the passenger ship that burned in the New York Harbor ... during World War II." [22:10]

### **Oakwood Avenue and the Orange "Ys"**

Turning now to Oakwood Avenue, Walter first mentions a three or four story Tudor style apartment building that was knocked down in the early 1980s, he thinks, to make room for a group of "low-level" stores and a parking lot. Farther south along Oakwood, a lot of things were torn down, [he doesn't say when, but presumably during the construction of 280] but he has vague memories of seeing a 'YMCA' sign, and he knows there used to be an Oakwood 'Y' that "[s]ome people called ... the colored 'Y'," although 'colored' is not a term that he used to use, he says, and still does not for the most part. [23:20]

He says the Orange 'Y' was on Main Street, and he remembers the 1917-1973 building at 395 Main Street, now replaced by the current building which he recalls being under construction when he was in Central Middle School ~1972-1973.. [This building is no longer a 'YMCA,' but houses a community center. It was discussed during the Karen Wells - Main Street Walk, about 50-55 lines in.]

Walter recently learned, from the Orange Facebook page, about "the so-called Italian 'Y' on Hurlbut Street" and now realizes there were at least four 'Ys' in Orange. [24:12]

### **Brick Church once again**

At this point, Walter leaves Oakwood, and returns to the Brick Church section of East Orange, starting with "the area which is now known as Brick Church Shopping Plaza." From the southeast corner [of Main and South Harrison], going south, there used to be, he says, "a Blimpie Base - sandwich shop; a funeral parlor; there was an entrance to a large back parking lot; there was a four-five story warehouse, it was a big old brick thing, which ... may have been another Mayflower one — we used to have a Mayflower in the Valley section.... You also had, a brick church: There's a second brick church! Everyone knows about the brick church that still stands, ... originally the Second Presbyterian Church of Orange— That's before Orange got sectioned off" back around the time of the Civil War, he says. "And then when you turned the corner you had, ... the Suburban Hotel Restaurant." [25:40]

[Blimpie Base was the original name of the Blimpie chain, which started out in Hoboken in 1964. The extant brick church, of course, is the eponymous edifice mentioned above at ~13:16, and sits a block to the east, on the north side of Main. Currently the Plaza parking lot takes up most of the east side of South Harrison. sbh cannot find any information relating to a second brick church.]

### **An excursus on McDonough Tire**

On the west side of South Harrison, he says there was a magazine stand, a small driveway, and then an office for R. & A. McDonough, a Goodyear Tire Dealer. McDonough Tire also maintained "a large recapping ... plant ... down in the North Ward, ... along Washington Street, just before you get to its end with ... the Rosedale Cemetery. [26:21]

According to Walter's understanding, McDonough Tire was such a major outlet for Goodyear that it explained the frequent appearance of the Goodyear Blimp in the area.

Walter explains recapping as a process of retreading tires, usually industrial tires. As a source for better information about the McDonough tire operation, he suggests a 'young' McDonough who lives in Hope and used to be the **President of the NJ Mayors' Group**, having succeeded **East Orange Mayor Bowser** in that position. [27:52]

### **The rest of the west side of South Harrison**

Returning to the Brick Church area of South Orange, Walter says that he thinks that after McDonough Tire there was a barbershop, but definitely remembers the Mecca

Magic shop, which he describes as "a local landmark and a local font." He remembers it especially because he wrote about the final closing of the business, by then located in on Bloomfield Avenue in Bloomfield. He recounts moves from Newark to East Orange to Bloomfield, and thinks the final location, an old movie theater and union hall, now houses a Farmers Insurance operation recently opened up by a man named Clinton Robinson. At another point he says a church may have moved in there. [30:10]

[Mecca Magic is fondly remembered on several of internet pages, one of which includes material added by Walter (indycar) in 2007:

704.1.1.

### **I Sure Do!**

by [indycar](#), 12/11/07 2:21 PM

Re: [Does anyone remember](#) by [aunt24](#), 12/11/07 2:21 PM

Mecca Magic, originally from Newark, moved from So. Harrison Ave. first to Bloomfield Ave., Bloomfield. Its last years were spent in the former Savoy movie house, Dodd St., Bloomfield's Watsessing section.

Its final disappearing act was in 2002.

I remember:

- The Blimbie base on the corner.
- R.A. McDonough Goodyear.
- Suburban Restaurant.
- A (Food Fair?) supermarket where 280 is.
- The corner newsstand.
- Oak Leaf Signs.
- Christian Science Reading Room
- The Gaslight Restaurant/Art School/Best & Co. on/by a now non-existent one-block street.
- Parts Unlimited

And, of course: Muirs, Palace Theater, Ormont Theater, and Woolworths.

One Big Question:

Were the Blimpie Base, Mecca Magic or any other neighborhood stores offered or promised first space in Brick Church Shopping Center?

Thanks for the memories!

<http://www.nj.com/forums/eastorange/index.ssf?artid=3180> (Downloaded 16/05/12)

See also [http://www.optimystiks.com/COLLINSpaage\\_2.htm](http://www.optimystiks.com/COLLINSpaage_2.htm) (Downloaded 16/05/12).]

### **Main Street from Harrison to Prospect and around the block to Harrison again.**

Now finishing off his account of the west side of South Harrison, Walter mentions the entrance to the Suburban Hotel/Restaurant's parking lot, and says "that takes care of South Harrison before we go under the bridge," and says he will now cover "the actual block" going east on Main Street toward Prospect Street: Yeager's Stationery; a Christian Science Reading Room; and a restaurant or other establishment that he does



not recall. [31:24]

A Newark & Essex National Bank stood on the corner [of Main] on the other side of Prospect, he says, adding that there used to be several banks of the "same type, same size," including one by City Hall Plaza at North Carleton, but that one has been replaced by a vacant lot. [32:03]

At this point, Walter uses his memory to turn the now imaginary corner of Main and Prospect and complete the circuit of the block as it used to exist, and lists:

- The Brick Church branch of the Post Office;
- What he thinks may have been a fabric store (he calls it a 'linen store'); and
- Olive May Health Food Store [now on Main Street and at several other locations: <http://olivemayhealthfoods.yolasite.com/>].

Olive May was the location on that block that "stood out," he says, because they ground their own coffee, and "you could smell 'their own coffee.' " He explains that the odor was as distinctive as the hops odor from the Rheingold Beer plant. [33:02]

[sbh is wondering if Olive May only ground the coffee, or roasted it on the premises. Roasting would create a more powerful aroma.]

### **Moving to the north side of Main Street and Washington Street**

Now turning to the NE corner of Harrison and Main, Walter recalls Ann's Coffee Shop. It had a white front with a big Coca Cola circle logo on it. To the east, on that side of Main, was Parts Unlimited, an electronics store and repair operation with a vacuum tube testing machine. [35:08]

Before continuing farther east on the north side of Main, however, Walter now turns to what he calls the final block of Washington Street. [Washington blends into N. Harrison at William Street.]

### **Artists and libraries**

There was an art studio there which he particularly recalls because his mother, Ann Elliott, was an artist who did "mostly surreal oils" but also a little sculpture. She made jewelry too, and was a part of "the local artists circuit in the late sixties and early seventies." Similar groups of artists worked in Irvington, South Orange, and, of course, Greenwich Village, he says. [35:45]

Mentioning his mother, and spelling her name, reminds Walter of a story from his childhood that "one of the reasons they settled on Elizabeth Street in Orange was that it was ... close to everything," with walking convenient, bus routes nearby, and many places only a short way away by car. As an example, he points out that if the Orange Public Library did not carry a book he wanted, he could use one of the libraries in West Orange or East Orange, which were within walking distance, or head farther afield to libraries in Newark or New York City. [36:58]



### **Back to Washington Street**

Now picking up the previously promised account of the last block of Washington Street, Walter points to the intersection of William Street, South Harrison, and Washington Street, and says there was a Firestone tire store on the NW corner. Across the street [that is, on the NE corner], a vacant lot has replaced a former Art Deco era Beck & Sons clothing store. A restaurant, the Gaslight, with its own parking area, was also located on that last block of Washington Street.

### **East on Main Street**

Walter is not sure how many of the changes that took place around the time of the highway construction were a direct result of the work. As an example of a change he does recall, he mentions the bus station at the point [in East Orange] where Market Street veers off from Main Street. He doesn't recall exactly what was there, but can recall the construction of a racquetball court on a lot that now features the Rohr construction supply people. [39:16]

[Main Street has become Orange Street at this point; Walter calls it 'Orange Road.' Market Street veers to the southeast and crosses the freeway. The website of the [von Rohr Equipment Corp](#), a metal fabricator and equipment supplier, states that the business opened in Montclair and spent forty years in Bloomfield before relocating to East Orange in 2000, thus giving a *terminus ante quem* for the racquetball court.]

Walter also says that he cannot remember what was in the location where the supermarket, now Western Beef, is today [at 1A Main Street, across the street from von Rohr, and closer to the Market Street intersection.

### **Old diners, including one on the Brick Church - Orange border**

Having exhausted his memories of the area of the Market Street intersection, Walter now returns to the border between the Brick Church section of East Orange and the Third Ward in Orange, and mentions a typical diner that used to be located at 9-11 Main Street [more or less across Main from where a Wendy's is today, or was recently]. He cannot recall the name of the diner, and doesn't "want to confuse it with the Main Street Diner that was still further east on ... Main Street," or "the Orange Diner that used to be on ... Lincoln Avenue just off of ... Main Street here." He would not be tempted to confuse any of these with the Orange Circle diner, formerly located where Dunkin Donuts is now, on Jefferson and Main. He thinks the 9-11 Main Street diner was torn down in the eighties, and recalls having his first cup of coffee there while on the way turn in his senior thesis by leaving it in the apartment lobby of his English teacher. That cup of coffee made him feel he "could scale a redwood tree with [his] bare hands. [41:11]

Now he says he feels as if he were covering a lot of the "rings" but not hit the target, "the actual right of way, the ... heart of it."

### **Orange High School and changes in Orange after 280**

Chris M asks about changes in Orange after the highway was constructed, pointing out

that some people see a clear dividing line between the pre- and post-280 versions of the town. Walter demurs a little, pointing out that he was only five or six or seven years old when it was being built [and therefore does not have a clear memory of what Orange was like before the highway came through], although this section of it did not open until 1973 [when he would have been fourteen], and was just starting at Orange High School in the current OHS building. He says the story of OHS is worth looking into, and recommends Mindy Thompson's book. [42:40]

Turning back to the question of changes in Orange, he adds that he didn't spend much time in the neighborhoods that were affected by the highway, and once he started at OHS mostly ventured in a southward direction. He has only a vague memory of what the Valley was like during the six months that he lived there [around 1964]. He would describe himself as "basically a North Ward kid." In any case, before starting high school, he adds, he didn't venture far afield. [43:19]

At this point, reminded of his high school years, he mentions "the struggle to get the current Orange High School built," which he considers something of a "soap opera," and says he remembers "being part of the march, with my parents, in support of the Orange High School." The march started from (or ended at) a Catholic church that was on the SW corner of Oakwood and Main, and is still there, he says. He recalls a small building across the street from the church, but owned by the church, that the Orange School District used for an alternative learning center sometime in the early seventies. [44:18]

Walter's mother was hired as a yoga teacher there, and the alternative school was referred to by students, jokingly, he says, as the school for "alcoholics, criminals, and lunatics." [44:41]

At this point, there is a short interruption while the interviewer and interviewee discuss with a woman the fact that the library is officially closed to prepare for an event, and the interview that is going on involves the Reverse Archaeology Project. She says she had just spoken to "Casey." After Walter points out that he makes his living with words, she asks him when he is going to come out with his own book. He responds by saying that question is like asking "a short order cook when he's going to prepare a full course meal," and suggests that if the book is fated to be written, it will be. The woman then asks if the project has a website, and Chris gives her the url, <280inorange.org>, but says it is in a fairly preliminary state. [46:40]

### **The march for OHS and other school-related issues, including segregation**

Getting back to the march for OHS, Walter says it proceeded along Main Street, and he is not sure if they marched westward to the Colgate Building [discussed at length on the Karen Wells - Main Street Walk tape], or if they went the other way. He adds that the Rosa Parks School [around the corner from the Colgate Building] was also once the High School. He thinks the westward route is more likely and says he recalls the involvement of a Catholic church because a young priest was in charge of organizing the march. [47:18]

Walter also remembers a "hot and stifling and tense" night in August of 1968 when "the Central School auditorium was packed," for a City Council vote on "the bond issue." It was his first time in that particular building, built during the Woodrow Wilson administration. It functioned as Central Middle School "for a while." [48:03]

He recalls "a definite impression among us, ... those of us who went to public school, that we went to public school— by going to public school we were supporting the integration of Orange. And those who did not support the integration of Orange, went either to private school or to Catholic schools." He mentions St. John's Elementary, which remained open until around 2010-2012, and Our Lady of the Valley, adding that Orange in the 1970s used to have "a lot of intense sports rivalries," and was a basketball powerhouse at that time. He heard that "the [basketball] games were almost like miniature wars" involving Orange with schools like Clifford Scott HS, and East Orange HS, and states that there was a football rivalry between OHS and West Orange HS. [49:31]

"Getting back to atmosphere," as he puts it, he states that there was a definite impression that those who went to Catholic schools did that in order to avoid being with "minorities." "The kids would play together, in the neighborhoods" he says, mentioning, as an example, Elizabeth street [his own street, to which the family moved in 1964 or 1965], which was in a traffic backwater that allowed uninterrupted street play, but when school time came the kids went off to different schools. [51:05]

### **Assassination of Dr. King, riots in Newark and their aftermath**

In response to a question, Walter states that the neighborhoods were definitely mixed, and he grew up taking the existence of mixed neighborhoods "as a matter of course." He didn't think of himself as "white" until someone pointed it out. It was not something he felt self-conscious about, although he does recall "the assassination," explaining only after a pause that he means the assassination of "Dr. King." He also remembers hearing "indirectly" about the riots in Newark, and that, as a result of these events, "there was a tension in the air." Then, in a side comment, he states that his memory of the 1965 blackout in New York is based on the fact that the television stopped working because all the transmission towers were on the Empire State Building. [52:40]

The results of these events did not affect Walter and his classmates much because they took place after they had graduated from high school and begun to lead separate lives. For example, after receiving his high school diploma as part of the first graduating class that went all the way through the post-renovation OHS (with a ceremony in the building that is now the Orange Preparatory Academy or Orange Middle School, due to the fact that the renovation did not include an auditorium), he himself "walked out the auditorium and [dramatically] I did not come back for 29 years." [53:45]

He returned for the first time after Twin Visions Metro in Newark, "a predecessor paper" run by the Scott brothers, asked him to cover an event. "They put me in the front row with the other dignitaries...the mayor," and he looked around and remarked to the mayor and/or another person, "You know, the last time I was here was when I graduated

high school." The lesson he took from that was that "You can go back to where you came from, but never have to hit reverse gear." [54:30]

Searching for things to add at this point, Walter recalls the time in the 70s when the Highland Avenue Station had a station agent, and asks if the interviewer remembers the "Edison era electric cars." [??] He recalls when "Toast of the Town in the Valley used to sell actual pizza," and the Shoprite in Brick Church, one of three, with another in the Valley on Scotland Road, and the third being the Doddtown Shoprite. He adds that this [presumably the redevelopment along Dodd Street] was another example of cooperation between East Orange and Orange and possibly Montclair, "because it realigned that whole ... Thomas Boulevard stretch. [55:45]

Returning to the topic of supermarkets, Walter points out that "where Valumart is on Main Street," there used to be an A&P. There was another small A&P in the Valley, on Valley Road, near the Hat Diner, and that became an art gallery in the late seventies or early eighties. He does not know what it is now. [56:13]

### **Doddtown**

Chris Matthews asks about Doddtown, what it is, and Walter explains that it was named for the Dodds, who settled in the area early on. There was once a Dodds Tavern or Dodds Inn, on North Essex Street. The location, on the same block as the former Orange Drugs, was diagonally across the street from where Sandwiches Unlimited is, and has become a nightclub. [56:55]

[Sandwiches Unlimited in Orange is on N. Centre Street, according to Googlemaps Streetview 2013. That block of North Centre also comprises a large, nondescript building, 10 N. Centre, that once housed the Level 10 Club, and sits diagonally on the other side of the street from the sandwich shop. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F3IRbhnEfDA>> After going out of business, Level 10 seems to have become the Caribbean International Club (CIC), also now closed.]

Epstein's Hardware, in Walter's memory, used to be Gilbert's, and he thinks Jeff Feld owns the property and could provide more information. Feld "is an interesting guy too," he says, "but that's a whole other story." [57:26]

[A Jeffrey S. Feld is an attorney in Orange, and has been involved in affordable housing cases; this may be the person meant.]

Returning to the topic of Doddtown, Walter explains that it is "largely a section of East Orange, that ran— ... When I think of Doddtown, I like to think of when Washington turned into Dodd Street, in Orange, right in the— ... You'd think that ... Washington and Dodd would turn, would change names at the West Orange - Orange border, but no, Washington kept going until you reached the old, first, main gate of Rosedale Cemetery." There, where Washington Street meets Cleveland Street [on the south side of the cemetery], "That's where Doddtown starts." [58:13]

[At Line 26 of her interview, Lorraine James also talks about the Rosedale cemetery on the border of Orange and West Orange, and about Burnside Street, which runs through the cemetery and gave its name to her old Burnside neighborhood. In this area, a narrow northern section of the City of Orange abuts West Orange on the west and East Orange on the east.]

Going east from that Cleveland Street corner, Walter continues, there was a Canada Dry bottling plant on the other [south] side of the street. "That's ... the Art Deco building part of ... New Jersey Transit's Orange garage." Walking down Washington Street from "the three corners" in the late sixties he could see the bottles through the bay window of the building. He defines the three corners as Washington, N. Day, and Alden Street.  
**[59:00]**

[This is confusing, perhaps because of the alterations around Thomas Boulevard, mentioned above at ~55:00. A person who walks up Washington from Alden and N. Day now will pass a smallish brick building with a bay window (350 Washington), but it seems too small for a bottling operation, does not stand out for any Art Deco details, and is not contiguous with the bus depot, although there is some kind of fenced parking contiguous with it. A person walking up Thomas Boulevard, on the other hand, which is what N. Day jogs into after it ends at Washington Street, will be impressed by the handsome curving brick or tile work and curved glass block windows of the depot at the corner of Thomas Boulevard and Dodd Street.]

Continuing to comment on Doddtown, Walter says he has already mentioned the Doddtown Shoprite, and adds that there was a service station on the north side of the block [and presumably across from the bus depot], possibly an Exxon station, on a lot that always seems to have a service station and still does.

"Crossing the street [Thomas boulevard], and going into Doddtown— Now ... the commercial center for Doddtown, for me, was the intersection of Dodd Street, and, North Park Street." He adds that there was a Brick Church upholstery place, or a Brick Church Appliance showroom, a mattress factory or mattress showroom, and those places "still exist." **[1:00:25]**

[Of these, sbh can find only a mattress place on N. Park, but Walter talks about turning north on Park only after enumerating these businesses.]

On Park north of Dodd, according to Walter, there were "a whole bunch of little stores that were active at the time. And they included, a post office branch— ... you always had the building down the street ...for PSE&G,...[you had] little stores...restaurants." He thinks the border between Orange and East Orange ran through the center of the Doddtown Shoprite, "roughly speaking."

There was a four- or five-story brick and wood frame apartment building at the northwest corner of Park and Dodd, with a bar on the corner. Across the street "where the Utown(?) houses are," was a four- or five-story white brick-facade building with a

restaurant or a little general store. A man known as 'Santa Claus Joe' "held forth" at small shop a little farther east in the same building: "This gentleman ... used to refurbish and either sell ... at discount prices, or give away, toys to local kids."

Walter thinks that Santa Claus Joe had recently died at the time when his family moved into the North Ward. There was a little article about him in the *Orange Transcript*. [1:03]

"Going further east, going towards Osborne(?), the church, that's on the corner ... facing Osborne, that was a McDonalds." He thinks it lasted from ~1970 into the late eighties or early nineties, he says, adding that it was considered "a novelty" at that time. [1:03:2]

[Googlemaps does not (yet?) recognize the name 'Osborne' for any nearby street or section of Dodd here. [Living Water Christian Center Church](#), currently active at 374 Dodd, is likely to be using the church building in question.]

"The post office, moved to that modern building.... [T]here used to be a coal yard or something like that, ... [and] the East Orange Fire Station has always been there.... And you always had that little set of stores, always some activity." One was a cleaning establishment that went through several names, finally becoming "Fresh as a Daisy" and going out of business.

[The building at 333 Dodd Street, on the SW corner of Dodd and Brighton still sported signage indicating it was the Doddtown Post Office when it was photographed by Google in 2013. A little substation or engine house on the SE corner of the same intersection faces across Dodd onto a short strip of commercial fronts, including the closed cleaning establishment.] [1:04:37]

### **The Erie Railroad tracks**

Behind all these buildings, the backyards, the parking lot of the Doddtown Shoprite, and so on, was a spur of the Erie Railroad, a freight line. When Walter was a boy on Elizabeth Street, he could hear the Erie and Lackawanna trains coming through several times a week on "this little one-track line with some sidings and spurs."

[According to Google Earth, a narrow cutting is visible in the area today. It seems to be filled with water:]





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[<<https://www.google.com/maps/@40.7805366,-74.2182717,99m/data=!3m1!1e3>>  
Downloaded May 29, 2016 ]

Walter is not sure if the Canada Dry plant had a siding, but there was one off Cleveland at Alban Street where there used to be an empty lot and is now a small triangular park. He adds that Gist Place, adjacent, is a street he himself heard of for the first time quite recently, and there was a playground there in the sixties, seventies, and early eighties. [1:06:33]

Returning to the topic of the railroad line, Walter states that "the drawings and maps show that ... the western terminal was near the Orange bridge, was on Main Street right near the border with West Orange: Erie Loop. They called it the Erie Loop because ... that's where the PSE&G trolleys, the Number 21 trolley, used to ... turn around." That was before his time, however. During his youth the western terminal was at White Street near where "a steel frame prefab industrial garage of some sort" is today. Parts of the right of way, he says, have been "fenced in ... used by other people" although it belongs to NJ DOT. [1:07:42]

When Walter was attending the Cleveland Street school and walking home for lunch, if he heard the sound of a train laboring up the hill south of Elizabeth street, he'd run down toward the tracks because he liked to watch the trains move, watch the workers switch cars, and so on. He wondered where the trains went, and eventually followed the line westward to White Street, and eastward "as far as Prospect Street," but not all the way to Watsessing Junction in Bloomfield [east of the Garden State Parkway], where, he says, "there was a railroad bridge over the then Erie Lackawanna ... cut, for the



Montclair branch." [1:08:58]

At first the trains came by every day "on work days," then three times a week. By the time Walter was in high school, they were showing up only once a week. Conrail was created in 1976, he says, as "a consolidation of the bankrupt ... freight and ...passenger railroads," but the local stretch of the Erie and Lackawanna remained independent for a while after that. In 1979 a decision was made to remove the tracks between White and a spot close to Bloomfield Avenue in Bloomfield. He feels he "got a lesson in permanence" by walking down and seeing the machine that was being used to tear up the rails and sleepers so they could be trucked away. [1:10:42]

The right of way now belongs to the Norfolk and Southern Railroad which recently took up another section of track in order to provide access for water and utility lines that needed to cross it to supply the development set to replace their final customer, the Hartz Mountain office and plant. The weekly trains that serviced that plant were known colloquially as "the Birdseed Express." [1:12:00]

Because he loved trains, Walter says he used to eat his lunch at the Highland Avenue station, and that led to his interest in the history of transportation in the area. He adds that he served for a while on the Lackawanna Coalition, an advocacy group that "was an integral part of the reelectrification soap opera." [1:13:13]

### **The Orange Library**

Looking around the library where the interview is taking place, Walter states that he recalls when they opened up the wing where he and the interviewer are sitting. He thinks Marvin (?) Skilkit was the director at that time, although he cannot spell the name. Skilket was a reverse commuter, rare at that time, and so probably took the Morris & Essex trains eastward on his homeward commute.

As an example of the "treasures" the library contains, Walter mentions a state study considering a new use for the Morris Canal. He thinks the study is shelved in the Watson alcove, although the closest the canal ever came to Orange was in Bloomfield. [Lock 15E seems to have been close to Bloomfield Avenue.] [1:15:45]

The canal study, made around WWI, according to Walter, proposed making the entire path of the canal into a linear park with access to the water. Unfortunately the state permitted the owners to go into bankruptcy and drain it where desired, leading to the spotty condition of the route today. [1:16:34]

Walter's mother exhibited some of her artwork in the library, and told him that one of Skilkit's sons was hoping to become a NASA astronaut. He doesn't know if the son was the engineer/pilot type of the earlier astronauts, or of the later more scientifically trained variety. [1:17:20]

### **A passion for race cars**

There were always books in the house growing up, and Walter learned about race cars

from his father's books, including Griffith Borgeson's *Era of the Thoroughbred American Speedway Car*. He got hooked on auto racing. In 1972, at a Sunday dinner at his grandmother's house on the New Providence - Summit border, he watched as Mark Donohue set a record while winning the Indy 500. (His grandmother loved to travel; by this time she was retired from her former job doing insurance work in Short Hills and at Prudential.) [1:18:50]

Later on, in the year of Donohue's death in 1975, Walter discovered that Donohue's family home was close by, in Summit, and Donohue himself had been born in Orange Memorial Hospital. He says that he confirmed this with Donohue's parents and with his son, also a racer, who lives or lived in the Philadelphia area. The son does not know why the parents chose Orange Memorial over a hospital closer to their home. [1:22:15]

[Walter might enjoy instigating a correction in the Wikipedia article on Mark Donohue, which asserts a location in South Jersey for his birth, perhaps due to the residence of the son in that area.]

### **A writing career**

Walter always wanted to write about Donohue, he says, but "from Central Middle on up" people kept telling him he couldn't write. One day he had to change trains in Summit and decided to stop by the Summit library. He was short of the money he would have needed to study Engineering at County College of Morris, and a flyer for a mini-program in radio and television production at William Paterson caught his eye. That caused him to recall everyone's judgment of his writing talent and see this as an alternative career, but, the eventual result was that he ended up anyway, by the early 90s, going for a degree in Communications with a concentration in Journalism. Having always been active in activities like the school paper, he was also by that time doing freelance work for a small paper in Ridgewood, writing for *Area Racing News* (?) Auto Trend New Jersey(?) and working for "the great Chris Economaki's *National Speed Sports News*" in Ridgewood. [1:23:42]

In 1998 Walter received full credentials from *Area Auto Racing News* and from the Indianapolis Speedway to cover the 500. "Now ... this'll be eighteen years, full credentials— but it took me twenty-seven to get there! And part of it was the inspiration from here....[the library]" [1:24:10]

Currently he writes for "Local Talk dot com." He was writing for *Speed Sport* until Economaki realized that for the amount of rent he was paying in Ridgewood he could build editorial offices near Charlotte Motor Speedway. Economaki's departure led Walter to take a job with World Newspapers "out of their Union office."

As for the *Chronicle*, he does not recall when it was "an active newspaper," but it was always in Orange: "For many years it was just someone's, someone's used book store, used book store storage, something strange like that." [1:25:32]

"I remember when World Newspapers had, an office on ... North Essex Street. Then

they moved that office over to the Scotland Road, where the Family Success Center is today." Eventually they moved the entire operation to Union. [1:25:55]

In response to a question about how much of his hoard of historical information he has written up, Walter suggests that Chris start with "whatever he can find from Local Talk News," which will take him back to 2007. When he was at World Newspapers he did not cover much from Orange, and does not know if that was the result of a newspaper policy. His byline stories date from April, 1996, though June, 2004. He also wrote columns under the title "While I'm Here." He also suggests looking back into *Racing News* and *Speed Sport*. *Speed Sport* was regularly microfilmed for the Library of Congress until around 2010, when Economaki retired and the publication went dormant for a couple of years before being revived with new management after his death in 2012 (shortly before his ninety-sixth birthday). [1:28:15]

To sum up, Walter says he feels like Jean Shepherd, the radio and TV personality who always managed to wrap things up even if they seemed to meander during the show, bringing the interview to a close.

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