

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the  
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Nancy Yasecko: Okay. Tell us your name.

Joe Wickham: My name is Joe Wickham.

Nancy Yasecko: And when and where were you born?

Joe Wickham: I was born in the Ames, Iowa, December 20th, 1911.

Nancy Yasecko: What brought you to Brevard County?

Joe Wickham: Well, my father, when he was in college bought 40 acres of land in Florida, sight unseen for \$5 down and \$5 [00:00:30] a month. And in the early days, the early '20s, things were tough all over and banks were closing and everything else. So, he came down there to see where his 40 acres was. He had never seen it. And at that time, he came down and that piece of land was west of Malabar, there's a nice big shopping center on it at the present time. [00:01:00] And he was an engineer and among the things that ... he was trying to find a job someplace also. And he met another engineer by the name of Jim Hunter and they were the engineers who laid out the Melbourne Tillman Drainage District, which is practically all of this section of South Brevard, south of Melbourne. And that's the way we came here and I graduated from the Eau Gallie High School in 1928. We came here in 1926 [00:01:30] and ... well, there weren't a lot of people here in those days. There was five in my class and I was the only boy.

Nancy Yasecko: So, when you came here you were a teenager.

Joe Wickham: I was a teenager.

Nancy Yasecko: What are your impressions? What did you think when you got here?

Joe Wickham: I thought this is one of the greatest spots in the world because I loved the outdoors and I could fish any place I wanted to and could go hunting; and there was all types of ducks and deer in this country in those early days. [00:02:00] And every little boy in the community knew how to fish and I had a little old rowboat that had a sailboat rig on it and I could sail all over this river. And I did. It was just a great spot for a young person to live. Of course, I didn't have a lot of society to meet, but I had the outdoors and that's exactly why I enjoyed it so much.

Nancy Yasecko: What kind of house did you live in then?

Joe Wickham: Well, first of all, we lived in a couple rental houses. Then we went to ... [00:02:30] we moved out to the old KMI, the Kentucky Military Institute, which was an area which was south of ... the creek here in Eau Gallie and it's some big old barracks that they had there, because in the early days, the Kentucky Military Institute used to come down here and live during the winter time when the weather was

bad up there. That was one of the places I lived, and another place, which we lived, was up on Highland Avenue, one of the old houses, which is up there at [00:03:00] the present time. In those days, you know, there weren't a lot of automobiles to get in your way and everything else, and I remember an old gentleman who lived next door. He'd walk out to the street, look up and down the street, and if he didn't see anything, he'd go and get in his car and back out in the street, you know, and he just assumed there was no one would be coming. Very unique area in which to live. And the weather was fantastic.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you have heat [00:03:30] in your house?

Joe Wickham: We had a fireplace. In those days we had fireplaces and what you would do, you would build a nice little fire and then they would let it smolder all night or bank it. Very frankly, those old fireplaces were all you needed. The way the house was designed and you had big high windows in the old houses, you know? So then, during the summertime you had cross ventilation. And then they got real sophisticated and finally began to put [00:04:00] attic fans up in the ceiling and you could crack your windows about four or five inches and turn that big fan on and it would suck all the air through it and it was like an air conditioning unit.

It was quite a spot. But, I'll tell you one thing I learned during the war, when I was in the South Pacific I promised myself if I ever got back on that Indian river, no one would ever get me off of it. And I've been here ever since.

Nancy Yasecko: Let's talk a little bit about more what you did [00:04:30] when you were a kid. You must have gone to school. You say you were the only boy?

Joe Wickham: I graduated from the Eau Gallie High School in 1928 and it just happened in my class, I was the only boy. We had a lot of little local fellas that were outstanding athletes. We had a cross country team, as an example, that won the State Championship and I think that was because they had to run around on this rough land and didn't have to worry about ... then when they found the flat piece they could thoroughly enjoy it. But, [00:05:00] it was an interesting community. During the wintertime, you know, we had a lot of well to do people come here from up North and it was just a great spot, in which to ... and there were not so many things to divert young people's attention that they couldn't apply themselves to the community.

Nancy Yasecko: And how were your teachers? Do you remember your teachers?

Joe Wickham: We had outstanding teachers out here. And they were very talented. They all came usually from someplace else. And I remember one lady that taught [00:05:30] literature who was a niece of Sidney Lanier, you know, the great poet. And that kind of people came to us. And we had fellas that were mathematicians that were just out of this world, you know, and I ... And we were lucky, very frankly, because these people all come from someplace else, but they wanted to

come down to Florida and that's the way they got here and we young people enjoyed the benefits of going to school under that condition.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah, that [00:06:00] is lucky because, often times, a small community won't have that kind of-

Joe Wickham: See, in the beginning, we didn't have a county school board like they have today. We have trustees for each little community. I was one of the trustees at one time for the Eau Gallie area. And all during this time, you know, we had \$5000 homestead exemption because of the rough times in the beginning, [00:06:30] you know, in the '20s when the crash came and everything else. And to keep you from losing your home, they gave you a \$5000 homestead exemption. What they would do, they would assess your property at \$4,999.50 if you didn't have anything else, so you didn't have to pay taxes. And the only people who paid taxes were the young businessman or person who had rental property. So, we had to change that and I was responsible for getting [00:07:00] them to assess their property up to 65% of its true value, you know. But-

Nancy Yasecko: When was that? When did you change the-

Joe Wickham: In the '20s. In [?], when I first got on the commission was in 1952, that's when we began to do that.

Nancy Yasecko: Let's see. So, you were here as a teenager and then times were kind of tough. These were The Depression times.

Joe Wickham: That is correct.

Nancy Yasecko: There wasn't a lot of money going around.

Joe Wickham: Well, there wasn't hardly any money going around and I had my father's surveying [00:07:30] and a lot of things and then I knocked all around the country looking for work. I used to leave here every summer and go out and work in the wheat fields, you know, and I go all the way up into Canada. And that was the only jobs that were available. But, I tell you one thing it did, you got in good physical shape, you know? But, you would hitchhike or ... you didn't have an automobile in there because you couldn't afford it most of the time. But, it was an interesting spot to live. More nice people came to us [00:08:00] than any other spot in the country because of the climate down here.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). When you got to be just about draft age is when the war ... World War II was-

Joe Wickham: Yes. I was in the construction business and I was—I was one of the superintendents that built the Melbourne Fighter Base, which is now known as the Melbourne Airport, and I volunteered in the Navy. They left me there until I [00:08:30] finished at the hospital one night at the base and I thought, "Well, they

forgot where I am." And the next morning I had my orders to proceed to Norfolk, you know, because I was a Warrant Officer in the ... and that's the way I got into the navy and then I spent three years in the South Pacific.

Nancy Yasecko: What were you doing out there?

Joe Wickham: Building air strips and landing facilities. Built many, many air strips all the way through the Solomons and New Guinea and Philippine [00:09:00] Islands.

Nancy Yasecko: Were you a part of the Seabees?

Joe Wickham: Yes. The Seabee Battalion. Quite an interesting time out there. I spent three years out there.

Nancy Yasecko: And you learned a lot about construction and changing land.

Joe Wickham: And mosquito control.

Nancy Yasecko: It was pretty bad out there too.

Joe Wickham: Oh, it was terrible out there. But, in the unit that we were in, the Seabees, we were good at what we were doing because all of [00:09:30] us had had experience in all types of construction and road building and bridge building and all that sort of thing. And having lived here in Florida in the days before mosquito control and everything else, I had a pretty good insight on what was going on even down there. It was a great place and well, I was glad to get home after peace was declared.

Nancy Yasecko: So, you came straight back?

Joe Wickham: Yeah, I came back ... and [00:10:00] in those days there was no airport, no air facility in the city of Melbourne or Eau Gallie and we landed in a little old DC3 in Vero Beach and that's the way I got home. But, I would have walked home if they'd given me half a chance.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you find it changed when you came back?

Joe Wickham: It was still very quiet in the community. We had-- Because of the Banana River [00:10:30] airport and Banana River base and that sort of thing, times had changed. A lot of people had been here and gone, you know, and with the Fighter Base down at Melbourne, we had—we had a whole new group of people who'd come to us. Those who worked here and who wanted to stay here and came back after the war. It was kind of a unique spot in which to live. We had a big ... that was the beginning of our growth. The real growth in our [00:11:00] community came when we established permanent mosquito control because before that, everybody wanted to get away from here by about May because the mosquitoes were so bad.

Nancy Yasecko: How bad were they?

Joe Wickham: Oh, some of the people used to say they'd get ahold of 'em and say, "Now, the mosquitoes are either gonna eat you here or they're gonna drag you down a little closer to the river," you know. But, when we started permanent mosquito control and dredging and filling in the area, we found out that for the first time we could walk down the streets in [00:11:30] Melbourne and Eau Gallie, as an example, in the daytime without carrying a swisher and beating off the mosquitoes; so, that is the way we began the permanent mosquito control. And we bought more dredges, more draglines, and people like Salmela were in charge of the organization and one of the persons we hired was Lee Wenner who became a County Commissioner. And we realized we were headed in the right direction and we did a great job on the mosquito control for [00:12:00] many, many years, and that's the way we got it started.

Nancy Yasecko: When you say, "We," you mean the county?

Joe Wickham: I mean the county. Yeah. I mean through the County Commission. We were the ones that appropriated the money and set up the whole program and we hired ... once in a while we did the smart thing and we hired some people who knew how to fly and knew how to make things work and the leadership in that program, in those days, is what made it such a success, very frankly.

Nancy Yasecko: When did you come on the County Commission?

Joe Wickham: I came on in 1952. [00:12:30] I had been on the city of Eau Gallie's City Council for quite some time, and they finally talked me into that; and I stayed on three terms and then I quit for two terms and they kept after me and I went on back again and stayed on three more terms. So, I was basically here ... when I first went on the County Commission there was only about 20,000 people in the whole county and about 600 people paid all the taxes. So, we've some a long ways [00:13:00] from those days.

But it did. But, it did ... we did the right thing. We opened the community, got rid of the mosquitoes and everything and made it the loveliest place to live and probably no spot in the United States has had more nice people come to it then Brevard County because of the highly intelligent people, you know, college ... come because of the Missile Program and because of all of these other things. This is the way, for instance, FIT was formed, [00:13:30] because they were fellas that were working in the Missile Program at the Cape and decided that they wanted to be part of our community and started the college.

And this is one of the most unique spots in the world. You go to Sunday school and you find out every little school teacher was a college graduate and that sort of thing, and normally you don't see that. The class of people who come to our community are what made our community [00:14:00] what it is today and we got a lot to be thankful for.

Nancy Yasecko: When you were on the commission, as well as dealing with mosquito control, you had to deal with roads.

Joe Wickham: Roads.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us a little bit about that.

Joe Wickham: Well, there weren't many roads. I remember, as an example, that we just started working over on the beach and I had to help the laborers survey A1A many, many years ago and we were starting to put what is known now as South Patrick [00:14:30] Drive, you know, and all ... and I remember they were trying to figure out what they was gonna call it and Dave Nisbet, who was an old commissioner friend of mine and he said, "Let's call it A Wickham A." But, I laid out all these roads, they said "Old Joe Wickham's lost his mind. He's building roads so far out in the country no one will ever find 'em." That's Wickham and South Patrick Drive and Babcock.

I got 'em back in the early days when you got all the right of ways for nothing, [00:15:00] you know, and everything like that and it's paid dividends many, many times. And we acquired our parks and all that sort of stuff back in those same days. We took advantage of people because they all thought it wasn't even be worth anything at all, you know? But, when I put in one or two roads and they began to see the value of the property, I didn't have any problems that time on getting right of ways, you know, when somebody else would of had to have proven [00:15:30] that they could do it.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess for the property owners who had property way back here, having a good road was a good thing.

Joe Wickham: Yeah. Well, in those days, you know, land was worth about \$28 an acre, you know, if you could find a customer. Just look at it today, they ... well, some of these prices they pay are astronomical. But, that's all because we made big, wide right of ways for the roads. We drained the land, and most people don't understand that in the beginning, most of this land was underwater [00:16:00] in some state, and we put in the necessary drainage. People today think it's always been like this and it's a beautiful country 'cause we did what was necessary to solve the problem in those days.

Nancy Yasecko: Did your dad ever talk to you about when they were laying out the Tillman Drainage District what they ran into?

Joe Wickham: Oh, yes. And they laid all of that and it was underwater, it was all basically underwater in those days. And, of course, he had a terrific [00:16:30] engineering background, you know, and his intention, along with Jim Hunter, was the fact that they wanted to dry the land out so the people had something to talk about and to utilize that land. But, all that land that you see out there where there's thousands of houses down with everything else was basically underwater. And

so, they did a great job and they laid that ... the engineering and the laying out of that whole Tillman Drainage District fit back in the south end of the county and then [00:17:00] just north of that came the Crane Creek Drainage District, which is the area which is from U.S. 192 north up into Eau Gallie. And those old timers weren't so dumb at that, you know. They laid out these whole drainage districts and made the land available and accessible as you see it today.

Nancy Yasecko: How would they get back into that swampy area to survey it?

Joe Wickham: They waded in. When I was a young fella, I used to drag a chain in that mud [00:17:30] and that water and I thought nothing of being sometimes waist deep in water out there. But that's--And in the early days ... in the real early days, the federal government state outline, laid out a lot of section lines, you know and everything else. Some places, for instance over on the beach, the mosquitoes were so bad they'd sit out in the river there, in the Indian River and the Banana River, and draw the shore line [00:18:00] and they call that the meander line over there, you know. And you found some interesting things when you would begin to really survey it. And there was a lot of litigation in the early days trying to clear up right of way and everything else ... the Gleasons and the Carlos Canova and the Aspinwalls and all of those people were really having a terrible time keeping things straight because none of the engineering had worked, you know, because they [00:18:30] weren't gonna get eat up with all those mosquitoes and those rattlesnakes and everything else that were over there. It was quite interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: So, the very first survey was kind of sketched in? They didn't get out there and really do it.

Joe Wickham: Yeah. I remember way back in the early days that I had on a survey crew that run the north county line from the ocean to Maytown, which is a little town way back over near Sanford, you know. [00:19:00] Through the swamps and there were deer and bear and everything else in that back country in those days. It was quite an experience. No one even touched it from the early days when they had surveyed the federal government had surveyed the section line. But, I attribute that to a lot of the nice things that I know about our community because I got involved with it all the way through its growth and what it is today. [00:19:30] And there's been a lot of good leadership in our community and that's helped.

Nancy Yasecko: A lot of things happened real quickly-

Joe Wickham: That is true.

Nancy Yasecko: Which is unusual.

Joe Wickham: We who lived there realized ... you know, we went through the cycle of the boom days of the '20s, then when The Depression came, there was nothing, no food, nothing to eat, and ... they don't understand that they used to have to eat swamp cabbage and [00:20:00] they lived on mullet and everything else and even the

environmentalists today who don't understand that there was time the only meat we had was when we butchered sea turtles, you know? And that was part of the survival of those days. And, of course, today they're trying to protect ... which is right, but I remember when I was on the ... many a time, when I was on the beach that I'd see a dark object over there when I was trying to gather some turtle eggs [00:20:30] and so forth, and I'd come up and I'd see a bear would be digging into the turtle eggs down there to eat, you know. People don't realize that that's the way it used to be in the early days. You wouldn't think there would be a lot of deer and bear in this country but there were. They migrated north and there's still a bunch of that type of thing up around the Cape area, which they've preserved and done such a beautiful job with. Quite interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: I'll say. I'll say. I can [00:21:00] Judge Platt told us that during the '20s got to be you couldn't find a cabbage palm anywhere.

Joe Wickham: That's true. And they got to be experts in ... they called it ... some of the aristocrats called it heart of palm, but the old cracker folks called it swamp cabbage. The same thing though. But, if you were hungry it was good. And he's right. The Platts were great people in the developing of our back country, you [00:21:30] know. You had to give them credit. They weathered many a storm out there, you know. But, they were pioneer type people. They and the Gleasons and all these other people, you know, and they ... now we're finding that everybody thinks that all that land belongs to the state even though they've been paying taxes on it for 150 years, and whether you like it or not, when the federal government sold it to them and the state, they own it, and [00:22:00] if they're gonna try to take it from them, they ought to compensate them for it. It's just that simple.

Florida's here to stay and we're gonna have more and more people all the time and it's because of the type of people who were the pioneers and the people who weren't ... who followed long behind 'em, like me, who had a mania for making and for putting in roads and draining the land and it's paid dividends many, many times.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:22:30] Let's see, just to go back to our list here, you talked a little bit about what the roads were like when you were a kid. What were they made out of?

Joe Wickham: They were made out of marl, which they dug out of the ground. And some of them, for instance, are out along the area from Coquina Ridge south, which goes down through Eau Gallie and that section. They'd get ... there were a lot of rocks on this shoreline and they'd get down in that and dig it up and grind it up and spread that.

[00:23:00] And over on the beach, just north of the Eau Gallie Causeway area and south of where the yacht club is over there now. There was a tremendous big Indian mound over there and over a period of many, many years, they hauled it away and put it on the roads with shell, you know. But, that mound was a tremendous mound and just, it looked ... and it had come there because the Indians for hundreds and hundreds of years [00:23:30] had stopped there to eat

the shell, I mean the oysters and the mussels and all that kind of stuff, and they'd just shell it right there. Then they would bury ... sometimes some of their ... if one died, some of the family, they'd bury 'em down in this, all this shell and there was a big mound there. Must've been 15, 20 feet high.

Nancy Yasecko: I know Honeymoon Hill in Merritt Island is-

Joe Wickham: Honeymoon Lake up there, yeah, is a perfect example. That was a beautiful little lake [00:24:00] down in there ... all the young people, when I was a young fella, lived in that area when they wanted to go someplace, when they got married or something, couldn't go anyplace else, they'd go down to down that street and they called it Honeymoon Lake. You know, you know where I'm talking about? The lake down there. And they'd go down and camp, you know, on a wedding trip. I wonder how many people today would want to go down there and camp on a wedding trip 'cause they couldn't go anyplace else.

Nancy Yasecko: But still just as pretty as can be.

Joe Wickham: Beautiful. Beautiful little lake. Yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah. And it's kind of hidden. If you're in the river [00:24:30] you don't know it's back there.

Joe Wickham: You don't know it's there, but it's a little narrow area on the west side of it, you know. But, it was an isolated spot even from the early days because most people don't realize, but that section over there has been a beautiful section. And Georgiana and that section all these years, people living there ...

I remember one time, way--many, many years ago, and that church is still standing there in Georgiana. I was building some [00:25:00] houses up on the north of there, over in Cocoa Beach and I kept watching and that poor little church was expanding and, you know, falling apart and I couldn't hardly stand it so I ended up getting some angle iron and some big bolts and everything and I didn't ask anybody or anything, but when we were coming home I'd stop a few minutes early and put all this up.

Finally, we jacked that church all together and put those tire [00:25:30] rods in there and made it like it's ... it's still sitting there and you should go there and it's a beautiful little church. Fixed it all and I walked and said, "We got paid by the Lord for doing that." And it's been a beautiful little church, but they didn't have any money, you know, or anything else. Every time I go by there now, I think of that. We did it after work and coming back. Isn't that interesting?

Nancy Yasecko: Oh, that's marvelous. They must have thought some kind of angels were coming by [00:26:00] at night.

Joe Wickham: Well, those people over there just didn't have any money. We didn't even ask anybody. The door was always open, you know, and ... could you imagine having a place like that today? With the doors open and everything else? They'd have it demolished.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, I can't imagine doing any building without a permit today.

Joe Wickham: They didn't know what permits were in those days. In other words, they built many, many things ... it's when they begin [00:26:30] to get all the influx of people and everything else, because they didn't have any building codes or anything else when I first went on the commission in 1952. And we established building code, plumbing codes, and subdivision and plat laws. And we did all of that because of the impact that was already beginning to be a part of our growth and had we not, [inaudible name 00:26:56] and I, who lives incidentally up in the central part of the [00:27:00] county now. We got together and did all of this and it paid dividends many, many times because we got a community, which is worth living in at the present time.

Nancy Yasecko: No doubt about that. There were other kinds of transportation that was used a lot when you were younger, not so much now. The railroad was important.

Joe Wickham: Well, everybody ... the old railroad, yes. In the early days they just followed [00:27:30] the high grounds, you know. And over a period of many, many years the way it runs through Cocoa has been changed out to where it is today. You know, Eau Gallie it used to come down Guava, which is one block west of Highland Avenue, and then it went down to the Indian River and in the beginning that was the end of the railroad while they built the bridges across the Eau Gallie River and [00:28:00] Crane Creek. And then they came out and came on down ... and you know where the post office is in Eau Gallie? They ran right through that post office area and went over across there and just missed where David's construction company, my old construction company, is at the present time and was there for many years.

Then they decide that they wanted to move it, and I think this is a very historical thing, wanted to move it and straighten it out to where you see it today. And Grandpa [00:28:30] Gleason, Lansing Gleason and Bill Gleason, Lansing's father and Bill's grandfather; he owned all the land out there, and he told them that he would give them a right of way through there if they would stop all the passenger trains there, because if he wanted to go to St. Augustine or Palm Beach, he didn't want to have to go down to Melbourne or to Vero Beach to catch the train. So, they made that agreement and for many, many years every [00:29:00] passenger train, big Pullman train that came from New York or came up from Miami was stopped out there. So, Grandpa Gleason, if he wanted to get on could go up there and go either direction. I thought that was a very unique thing. He was a fine old gentleman and that's why the East Coast Railroad is where it is today in our community.

Nancy Yasecko: That's a great story.

Joe Wickham: Isn't that interesting?

Nancy Yasecko: I bet some of the conductors didn't even know why they were stopping in Eau Gallie. Tell us a little bit about the [00:29:30] Gleason family and how they came to this county.

Joe Wickham: Well, the Gleason family, I understand first came here right after the Civil War looking over areas with which to put all those who, throughout the South, who had been part of the Civil War problem of with all of the laboring class and the working class, you know, and to give them a place to stay. They, apparently, came into this area that one of the Gleasons [00:30:00] ... and he thought that there was too many problems to having a lot of slaves in this area because of the mosquitoes and everything else. But they got into this land involved in those early days and, and if you read history, they got quite involved in the state problems, legislative and all, and they tried to start a college here in our community and that sort of thing.

But, they invested in a lot of land and [00:30:30] throughout the entire area, not only on the beaches but in the back lands and up and down the river. And throughout all of this they were great pioneers for our community because they brought a new culture to our community that's still here. And they've been a very important part of the progress and development of our community. All those meander lines I was telling you about that were in the wrong place over on the [00:31:00] beach area? It was through their efforts in Washington that they were able to get this all straightened out, you know, so that the surveys fit the land as it is, and all of that sort of thing.

And they've been great people in our community. When I was pushing for roads and everything and that type, they made-- I didn't ever have to ask how much they wanted for the right of way. They always wanted to give the right of way because they [00:31:30] knew that whatever I was doing would help their land. And many of the roads that you see today were given by them. They were involved in the Melbourne Airport. In the beginning they owned much of the property where the Melbourne Airport is today. And they have been leaders ... and they laid out the original plat, the old village of Eau Gallie, you know? All that sort of thing.

And they've been on the progressive side of our community because [00:32:00] they've helped make the community work as you see it today instead of taking any negative position that whole time, trying to figure out how much they could make off of it. And because they've taken care of their land and made sure that people, that they got proper access to it and everything else. They didn't care where I put a road just as long as I told 'em where it was going to be and wrote the legal description and that's good. And they thought, way back in the early days, [00:32:30] when I was laying out all these roads, they said "Oh, Joe Wickham has lost his mind. He's building roads so far out in the country no one will ever find them." And they think I'm a lot smarter now than when I was doing it, you know. But, it's quite an interesting thing.

But, I had no problem dealing with the Gleasons or the Platts. All of these old timers, when they began to realize that I was doing for the community what needed to be done ... and it's been a great thing [00:33:00] and there's still a lot of the Gleason family around. And Bill Gleason I know you know Bill, well he's a very fine and well known lawyer in our community. And they still have a lot of land within our community and are an important part of the future development of our area.

Nancy Yasecko: When you were thinking about laying out roads, how did you approach the problem?

Joe Wickham: Well, the first thing I did was, I had been ... when I worked out in the wheat fields and everything else, you know; out through the Middle West, [00:33:30] I noticed that all the roads, that they somehow ended up on section or half section lines, you know. So, I pushed when I first got on the County Commission, to put reserved right of ways on each side of the section line. In other words, so that if you come in to develop your piece of land, you had to leave that much access for a road along the section lines and all; and it's paid dividends many, many times because the people [00:34:00] realized that when they come in and they want to do it in my district, as an example, they knew that if they wanted to have a subdivision developed in the area, that I wanted a right of way across every section line. And we reserved-- the Gleasons had signed this agreement in the beginning, which gives us many accesses. And people today don't realize that that's the way we had to do things in those days and it's paid dividends many, many times for our community.

Nancy Yasecko: What about [00:34:30] the causeways?

Joe Wickham: Well, the causeways, well, local people pushed for the causeways. The one in Melbourne was one of the first ones, then Sweet Smith Sr. pushed for the one in Cocoa and it's been there many, many years. And in the early days, you didn't go straight on across. You went across the river and you wandered up a little north and went back down through Angel City and went across and came out in the middle of Cocoa Beach. [00:35:00] They pushed for the road to go straight through as you see it today and to bring 520 in from the west, you know, and tie it all together. And down here, we pushed to have ... Melbourne was in many, many years ... they built the original bridge and then, if I remember correctly, it burned down three years later and then they had to rebuild it. And then--the last bridge in this area was the one in Eau Gallie here. [00:35:30] And we finally got it in. That was the reason that area did not develop until the last thing.

Nancy Yasecko: Was there much boat traffic on the river?

Joe Wickham: Everybody had a boat when I was a young fella. And there was--people don't understand this, but we had little freighters that delivered all types of freight up and down there; and they docked in Melbourne and they had regular places to stop and all the same way. It was quite a unique thing. We had big [00:36:00] boat tankers coming up and down through here. And back in those early days, before

there was any cars around, if we wanted to go someplace and you wanted to have a picnic or something else, you got in a boat and sailed around. There weren't a lot of outboard motors in those days, you know. But, everybody had a boating complex within our community. And this is the concept we had.

The last area to develop it was across the Eau Gallie [00:36:30] Causeway because Old Mr. Canova was homesteaded over there and he built a pier, and that sort of thing. And he brought all the lumber down the river and dragged it across the ... over to what is now known as Canova Beach. And he built a big fishing pier over there and all that sort of thing. And he was an old engineer also. And this is the way and that's when we pushed to put a road together across [00:37:00] there and over to the beach. And what Mr. Canova did ... and that's the reason they called it Canova Beach.

And also, his daughter Pat, she died this last year, Her name was Kosinski and she give her land for a park. Several hundred feet all right on the ocean over there, in honor of her family and her mother. [00:37:30] And I think that's great. You know, most of these people that live on that beach now, I'm not going to tell you who they are but a lot of them want millions of dollars for any little piece they get. But, she dedicated this whole several hundred feet of ocean front to her family as a park. Isn't that nice?

Nancy Yasecko: That's marvelous.

Joe Wickham: They did that all this year.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah.

Joe Wickham: The old time people who we lived with in our community were very important because they loved the community and its history and wanted [00:38:00] to preserve it in that manner, not to see how much money they could make off of it.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, I imagine she remembered when she was younger going to the beach and that was the place to go. Did you ever go to the beach for having-

Joe Wickham: I rowed across that river many times before the bridge got ... and walked over there. Right where south of Canova's where the little 15 foot right of way that somebody had dedicated in the early days. And we could go across over there to the beach. That's where we walked over there before they [00:38:30] had any roads, you know.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joe Wickham: And Mr. Mathers, John Mathers, got a permit way back about 1928 or nine to build Mathers Bridge. And at the same time they gave the right of way for the ... the right of way all the way across the south end of the county, out across west

to [00:39:00] build a road and bridge and there had been a lot of controversy about that whole section the last few years. But those early days were quite interesting, you know? And Mr. Mathers, I think that they charged 10 cents for a mule and that sort of thing. If you rode a bicycle, it cost you a nickel or something. It was very unique.

Nancy Yasecko: It was a toll bridge.

Joe Wickham: Yeah. That's right. It was a toll bridge. Ten cents for a vehicle in those days and all. The Eau Gallie Bridge was ... they were all [00:39:30] toll bridges in the beginning.

Nancy Yasecko: Oh, that's amazing. I had never-

Joe Wickham: Yeah, it was quite unique, you know. When you look back, that was the way they paid for them, you know.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). But, Mathers Bridge, it was his own bridge or was in a county bridge.

Joe Wickham: In the beginning, it was his own bridge. He paid for it and charged that much to get across it, because he owned all the land, between the Mathers and the Carters and Lindsey and some of [00:40:00] them. They owned all that land on the south end of Merritt Island. And he owned most of that land right through there, so he wanted to get to it; and he paid for the bridge. You know, private and it became ... later it became a state owned bridge. A county owned bridge. Isn't that interesting?

Nancy Yasecko: That's amazing.

Joe Wickham: These old timers ... there used to be a place called Carters Cut, which is about a mile north of that, which has all been filled in now, where they had [00:40:30] cut ... Mister Carter had cut, with some other people, cut a hole through the south end Merritt Island so they could put their row boats through there, you know. No kidding. This is the way it was and if you come across from over here on the mainland, you saved yourself a lot of ... half a mile or a mile of ... with a row boat in those early days, you know. And they called that Carters Cut. So, things have changed tremendously in [00:41:00] these many, many years you know.

Nancy Yasecko: Speaking of changing the landform, one of the biggest things that happened was the port there in Canaveral.

Joe Wickham: Yup. The port was ... and they did a great job. They were able to get to one of the House reps, named Joe Hendrickson and a couple of others and got them to support that harbor up there and it's done a great job for [00:41:30] the community. At the same time, they were ... because I did the core boring for it, it was to put one across from Canova Beach across, you know. Because up there ...

up at Canaveral, they had to put big jetties out there, you know and all; and right here at the one near Canova Beach, you go out four or five hundred feet and you had deep water, you know.

Nancy Yasecko: Ah.

Joe Wickham: But, they didn't have the political pull and everything else to get it in [00:42:00] there. The port up there has done a great job for Brevard County and that community.

Nancy Yasecko: You were never on the Port Authority were you?

Joe Wickham: No, thank goodness. I've been on everything else. But, there's some fellas in there, over a period of many years have done a great job for that Port Authority. And they were able to get the canal dug from there all the way back in to the Indian River, you know, across next to the highway so that they could move ... they could bring a lot of things in to the [00:42:30] port, and from the port, in the inland water system, you know. Very, very clever concept.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess they used some of that for the missiles that were coming, the big pieces.

Joe Wickham: That's right. In the early days a lot of that stuff was barged in there. What's going to happen again is, just as sure as we're sitting here, is that when they start making these space platforms, they're not going to ... they're going to be bringing big pieces in by barge and by boat [00:43:00] and then the rest of it's gonna be built right here in our own community.

And people don't realize that that's going to happen, because all that area that is now theoretically vacant along the Indian River and over on Merritt Island, is going to be a great big construction area for the development of all of these parts that they're going to have because we have all of the smart know how in our community, with the class of people we got, and they're going to realize this is a lot easier to [00:43:30] build this stuff right here and assemble it right here, then it is to cart it all over the United States. They may not like it in other places, but that's coming. Just as sure as I'm sitting here. And we're gonna build the roads to ... and we're gonna make the waterways adequate to take care of this thing. We're gonna build railroads and they're not gonna need the railroad ... they're talking about going to Orlando. They're gonna need the railroad to supply our own people and the growth we have within our community.

Nancy Yasecko: The [00:44:00] cycle out at The Cape has also been kind of boom and bust.

Joe Wickham: That is true. But, I'm just saying what's happened out there, for instance, way back in the ... they moved all of the ... under the Johnson regime, they moved all of the administration to Houston. Now they're talking about bringing it back here where it belongs, instead of having two or three units established, they're gonna move all the important factors close to the system, which is gonna be developed

at [00:44:30] The Cape. And the outlying areas are gonna be the support of people, instead of these outlying areas being the dominating factor, and where the missile program is being the support of people. That's coming.

People are getting a little more intelligent, little less selfish, and people are beginning to realize that some of these organizations, in the past, have dictated the policies the way they wanted it. But, that's changing. [00:45:00] Anybody knows that if you're gonna build a big missile program and all, the smartest thing to do is to get as close to it as you can to make it work.

Nancy Yasecko: I think it was a question of finding political support for the program that kind of spread it all over the country to get the votes.

Joe Wickham: That's exactly right. I'm saying now, they've been thinking about it a long time, now they realize that the smart thing to do is to be where the program is. And we've got better weather, theoretically, year around than anybody else. We got everything that they need for this system [00:45:30] and they're all gonna be a part of it. They may not ... I many not live to see it all, but I'm looking forward to it. I'm gonna be around another 20 years maybe. Our community is gonna grow and fit this whole system.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you remember when The Cape first came in, when they first started launching rockets over on the island.

Joe Wickham: Oh yeah. I went up to some of those original shots and if you don't think we've come a long ways, you ought to see them today and see what they ... you [00:46:00] ought to ask somebody to show you some of those old films that they-

Nancy Yasecko: What was it like if you decided you wanted to go out and see one.

Joe Wickham: You had to get permission to get up to see 'em. When one of those original ones blew up, it was an experience.

Nancy Yasecko: You saw 'em blow up?

Joe Wickham: Oh yeah. In the early days, they ... they had all the trials and tribulations of a new system and they've perfected them, you know, since then. It's quite an experience. That's the reason I say that, "Whether they like it or not, the future development of [00:46:30] the Missile Program is here at Cape Kennedy."

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Joe Wickham: And the surrounding area. And it's gonna benefit everybody up and down this whole East Coast and back into the interior of the state, but you can't let somebody hoard it someplace else, because they can be a part of this great program, but we don't want the focal point of the development of this future system to be off in the middle of the state or down in the end of the state because

that isn't the way it is. Because they [00:47:00] want to be here where the action is and where they can solve their problems and do it all. And you don't take an automobile and put wheels in on place and the engine someplace else and the frame someplace else and make it work.

Nancy Yasecko: That's a fact. Do you remember when they started foreclosing for MILA, for the Merritt Island launch area? Some of the old timers weren't to happy about that.

Joe Wickham: Well, they did a great job though, 'cause the county got involved with it in that condemnation in [00:47:30] the beginning. And we did--One of the things we did, and it went to those people, and they were taking in all those orange groves and everything, and grapefruit groves, and they were the finest groves in the country. But, when they agreed to sell 'em to them, they also signed an agreement, I understand, to let them ... to contract with them to ... for the fruit for many, many years and that left the people in business and that's what they wanted to be; and it's worked out very, [00:48:00] very satisfactory to our community, because those people had developed some of the finest systems in fruit in the world. And they had a right to be upset. But, the federal government and the people up there, made a deal with them that they could all live with and it's been a great thing, not only for our own people, but for the government too, because they became a part of our community. And our civilian military consul, which has been so active in our [00:48:30] community, has eliminated about 90% of any friction that could have been created by these systems because everybody is ... they all could get together and talk about their problems and meet each other on a personal basis and it's paying dividends. It's really interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Let's talk a little bit more about when you were young here and what it was like. Where did your family do most of their shopping?

Joe Wickham: In those days, there was a ... you didn't see a shopping center like you got today. For instance [00:49:00] anyway, in Eau Gallie we had Karrick's Grocery in the Karrick family that was a very important part of the growth of our community. Down in Melbourne they got so modern they brought an A & P store in, you know, and then the Piggly Wiggly and we finally got one up in our own community. But, basically we traded on the local level and there were ... with our dry good stores and that sort of thing and this era of big stores [00:49:30] came after the war. Really because--Before that, in the early days for instance, people like Karrick, if you had a yacht and came down the river, he would go down and take your whole order and deliver it to you; and if you lived in the community and wanted a lot of things, you could call in your order and they'd deliver it to your house. Can you imagine such a thing today?

But, [00:50:00] we went thought that cycle of not only that but doctors. I can remember when Dr. Creel and Dr. Bean and Dr. Hay and Dr. Hicks and they were the only doctors within our area. There were some more in the central part of the county, you know, and that's the way they've ... they were the leaders who pushed to build the first hospitals in the area and had they not been in our

community, we wouldn't have had those hospitals. [00:50:30] They were great guys.

When I think of when Dr. Creel delivered children and the people didn't have any money, they'd leave a box of groceries on the front ... you know, vegetables on the front porch or something else, because they couldn't pay him anything else. Somehow he survived and everything else, but I would hate to think about one of these doctors today only getting a bushel basket full of vegetables [00:51:00] or fruit. Wouldn't you? But--

Nancy Yasecko: Did they make house calls?

Joe Wickham: Oh, yes. Everybody made house calls, the doctors in those days. And as I said, those doctors did a fantastic job within our community and things were tough in those days, you know. You had all kinds of water problems and I've seen 'em stung with stinging rays and everything else, you know. But those old timers knew just exactly what to [00:51:30] do. And Dr. Hay, when they first started the little hospital in Melbourne, his wife would do the cooking in the kitchen and everything else, was a semi nurse and everything else, and they did--were part of the growth of our community and are the reason we have such a good system as we have today.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you remember going to see the doctor when you were little?

Joe Wickham: Lord, I had broken bones and lots of things and one of my brothers got burnt very severely [00:52:00] and they first ... I never saw it before and then in those days when they were trying to graft skin, they just did a field job right there on the job. Of course, I got burnt real bad in World War II when the airplane crashed, but things were a lot different then. I was burnt pretty solid from the waist up and they ... and it still shows if I get out in the sun for a long time, I see it, but [00:52:30] I'm a lucky old person. And I'm very grateful for it.

Nancy Yasecko: What about a dentist? Was there a dentist in town?

Joe Wickham: Oh, yes. We had a couple. Dr. Strange and one or two others. Dr. Mullins, he came down from Chicago old Dr. Mullins, because the fishing was good down here and retired here. And his family still lives here. But, they were great guys. These people came here, basically, after the [00:53:00] war. They were entirely different in those days than they are today, but they were beautiful doctors and dentists. After that, came many other doctors. Dr. Simmons and all the other group. They came here because of associations during the war years, you know, and became a part of our community. The dental doctors and the regular [00:53:30] doctors and surgeons all basically came here after the war, except for people like Dr. Creel and Dr. Hicks and Dr. Bean, but many of these you see today all are part of the products of development after the war.

Nancy Yasecko: What about some courthouse stuff. Do you remember dealing with the sheriffs?

Joe Wickham: Oh, yes. I had a [00:54:00] lot of interesting days with the sheriffs and I was a very good friend of practically everybody that was in that sheriff's department. And they had basically done a great job within our community. And Bill Williams married Minnie Ragan, he was an old time sheriff. He married a local girl, Minnie Ragan, and I knew all the sheriffs after that. Bill, when he- he wanted [00:54:30] a prisoner you know, he didn't do like they do today and run all over, he'd go down and send word and he'd sit in front of the fire station in Eau Gallie, on a big old block we had out there. He'd sit there and wait for this guy to come because the person knew that if he didn't come and he had to go get him, he'd wish he had. He would do this all the time and he was a great guy, a great community oriented person, [00:55:00] you know.

The sheriffs, in those days they were closer to the people. They'd come through the community and visit to make sure they understood everything that was going on. Jimmy Dunn was involved this way and he would make tours throughout the county and stop and visit and if he wanted to buy vehicles, he wanted to spread out the purchase of vehicles throughout the county and everything else. In those days, they used [00:55:30] to be an integral part of our community. Now it's so big and cumbersome that, even though they want to ...like for instance, Jake is a great guy, he would like to go a lot of places but they keep him so busy with all this red tape that he can't do it. But, I'll let you in on a secret. If I was in any position within the county or administration, I'd be out like I used to be and find out what the people needed and why they needed it, so that I could help make decisions that make the community [00:56:00] work.

Nancy Yasecko: It seems like everybody knew everybody.

Joe Wickham: That's the truth. We knew all their good points and their bad points, you know. And I think that was one of the reason that we were able to make things work in the beginning, because we knew how to approach people and because we knew what they might do in any reaction concept. It was quite interesting. [00:56:30] And as I said, when we finally got to where we had people thinking positively that our community was not going to the dogs, from that day on we sailed right along just between you and I.

Nancy Yasecko: I understand there were some memorable court trials.

Joe Wickham: Oh, yes. They had several of them that involved a lot of the local people, but I wouldn't want to talk [00:57:00] about them.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, do you remember Colonel Butt who was a lawyer around-

Joe Wickham: Let me tell you, Colonel Noah Butt was one of the sharpest that I ever saw. He was Bill Akridge's, Judge Akridge's father-in-law. Colonel Butt and I were great friends. I remember that we caught some little children eating out of garbage cans, you know, trying to survive. And he told me one day, he said, "Joe what are we gonna to about [00:57:30] 'em?" Then I found somebody who would take 'em.

And so he worked up all the papers and everything else and I paid their bus fare for them to go up to Titusville to go to ... and we got these children assigned to this lady and her husband. And those kids turned out to be something really worthwhile within the community and all, because we worked up those adoption papers. Colonel Butt [00:58:00] didn't want a dime. He just wanted to help solve the problem and that was the way things worked.

Between he and Bill Akridge, who was his son-in-law, who became a circuit judge you know. They knew the law. In fact, they had written a lot of the state law legislation because he was in--the Colonel was up in Tallahassee a lot of the time. He was a great guy and I admired him to no end, because when he got on a jury [00:58:30] trial, if he was really working it, he'd get you crying along with everything else. And he was just good and a nice gentleman too. We were lucky in those days to have those kinds of people in our community.

Nancy Yasecko: A lot of people have mentioned he was a great orator.

Joe Wickham: Oh, I tell you. When he'd get to talking to the jury he'd make you think. And he was the best I ever saw.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, the state legislature [00:59:00] had a lot to do with the kinds of things that happened here. I guess one thing that happened early on was the fact that the cattle used to roam free.

Joe Wickham: Yes and I'm trying to remember the name of the ... he became governor after that, but he was running around making speeches and he hit a cow and likely killed him and he came around ... I saw him and he had his arm in a sling and a lot of things. But, he pushed [00:59:30] to get the cows off the highway and put the fence law in. But, you're right. And these people don't realize it, but in the early days, we had thousands and thousands of cattle in there. The Platts and all those kinds of people, that's what they did. The hunters and all those people. And they ranged their cattle and they grazed them on everybody's property, you know. But when this guy got so badly [01:00:00] beat up and bundled up, you know, and broke bones and everything, he pushed for the fence law.

But, the early days, they'd graze 'em. They didn't think about anything grazing cattle 50-75 miles away from where they originally started from. They'd just let 'em eat everything. In a way that wasn't bad, but when the people began to ... each year make sure the grass is a little better, they'd ride along and just [01:00:30] throw a match out and catch the place ... back in the days when we used to have some real fires in the early days, because they'd burn all of the brush off so they had nice green grass come up for the cattle. Didn't think anything about it, because it was the way they did things, you know. And it got rid of all of the trashy growth that was on top and that sort of thing.

This was great cattle country. We all had rodeos in our little towns. Eau Gallie had a rodeo [01:01:00] every year, you know. And every little town had its special day

for celebration. Eau Gallie's was Washington's birthday and Melbourne had the Fourth of July and Cocoa had some other day, so that everybody could go visit the other person, you know. That's the way we did things.

Nancy Yasecko: Would the cowboys participate in these special days?

Joe Wickham: Yeah. They didn't import all the talent in those days. But, the local [01:01:30] cowboys did all the riding of the bulls and the horses and the roping and everything else. And when you went to those, you saw everybody that was in the community because 99% of them all came to see that. It was a great time, you know. We had quite a layout out there on Aurora Road that we had a big rodeo field and everything else there. And every little town had its own little band and, [01:02:00] for instance, Eau Gallie and Melbourne used to join together on special days so the band would be bigger, you know, and play. It was an experience.

Nancy Yasecko: I may be wrong here, but I'm thinking, weren't there some Seminole Indians that had cattle out in the west side?

Joe Wickham: Well, see in the early days the Seminoles they were nearer down around where Lake Okeechobee and all that section were. That's where they were. They were all [01:02:30] in that area, you know. But, this whole section in here was predominantly controlled by people like the Platts. There were three or four families of the Platts and all these others. But because of the war, we grew up too fast and the cattle business had to become a byproduct of what it used to be.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Can you tell us about some of the memorable legislators that came from this [01:03:00] area?

Joe Wickham: Oh, Dr. Creel was a legislator. And as we were talking about, Colonel Butts and Bill Akridge; and Jimmy Pruitt. And Jimmy still lives here. And of course, the present legislators, but I wouldn't want to talk about them. But, Jimmy Pruitt did a great job for us, as an example, in those early days. He and his [01:03:30] entire family made quite an impression while they were in Tallahassee and because of him, that's the reason we got much of our legislation at the present times through.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, I guess they were some help too, as you were trying to expand the county when you were a Commissioner.

Joe Wickham: That is correct. Yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: With schools and-

Joe Wickham: And they would support our growth. As an example, the first appropriation for mosquito control in the early days, O.L. [01:04:00] Burton was our legislator. We asked for some money from the state level, a couple million dollars, and they appropriated it for our mosquito control and everybody laughed at us, you know.

They thought, "Oh, that bunch out there, just experimenting," but Brevard County took that money and for two or three years we were the only people in the state that wanted to be in the mosquito business. Then they [01:04:30] suddenly found out that what we were doing was solving the problem. Then everybody wanted to get into the act. That's the reason it's been state controlled ever since, because we started it and we did such a good job the first two or three years, that it expanded all throughout the state. And I attribute that all to, not only the legislators we had in those days, but because of the types of things that we did [01:05:00] from a local levels to make it a success. It's quite interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: Mm-hmm (affirmative). There was such a population boom in the '50s and the '60s, you needed schools left and right. Did the state provide the funds for those schools? Or-

Joe Wickham: Well, they would give part of the money and, of course, we had the school tax and everything else to put in there. An interesting thing, there were so many young people, you didn't [01:05:30] have the problem then that you have today where you have many retirees and all that sort of thing. 'Cause we had this heavy impact of young people, they realized how important it was to have the school system that was adequate for their children. So they had voted in favor of new schools and when the old timer, the older people, would not support such a thing. That's reason we got a school system as we have it today.

[01:06:00] Now they've got to go through a different system. They've got to convince some of these older people that they want to do the right thing and when they talk about putting in a great fee for building schools and everything else, they're not going to be able to make this thing work, unless they convince these people that what they're doing is very important. And they're going to have to tell them what they're going to do with it and everything else. And I think it's very important that we have schools that are properly financed and that sort of [01:06:30] thing. But, I'm just saying, what they need to do is to ... you know, when you talk about \$138,000,000 or something, that's a lot of money. And you've got to convince some of these people, even young people, that they're going to spend this in the proper manner. And it's gonna be quite an interesting subject.

But, we've got some beautiful schools. We have some of the finest facilities and some of the finest [01:07:00] teacher personnel in the state of Florida. And we're very proud of that and we need to keep that sort of thing. And if a school needs a ... what it really needs to do is to do a selling job among its people. You can't isolate yourself from the general public and make things work. You gotta get with them and talk about the things that's gonna make ... why you make this school system work. It's quite interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: We have [01:07:30] schools in this county from kindergarten all the way though the community college level. Can you tell us anything about when the Community College-

Joe Wickham: Well, first of all, I can remember when the only kindergartens were private kindergartens. And they came around and talked about 'em. They talked to my wife over at the kindergarten, as an example, 'bout all of the things that you needed to do and how you incorporated them. Not only her, but all the others. First thing you know, they [01:08:00] had incorporated that system into the school system, which eliminated many, many little private kindergartens. This is quite an interesting approach.

And then we got into the community, because so many people could not go far enough to go to college, they got into the community college program. And we, in Brevard County, have been exceptionally lucky having Max King, who was born down [01:08:30] in Fort Pierce, was one of the ring leaders who come to our community and developed one of the finest systems in the state of Florida and you've gotta give him credit. And his schools look outstanding in any community and throughout this United States. When you have that kind of a leadership and that kind of a school system, you've got something to be proud of.

And many young people in our community have gone the first two years to this community [01:09:00] college because they don't have any facilities to go someplace else. But, in that two years of schooling at the community college, they find out exactly where they want to go and what they have to do and then the school systems help get them scholarships and that sort of thing. It's improved their whole system for schooling in the state of Florida and we, in Brevard County, have been lucky because we probably got one of the finest community colleges in the United States. That's something to be proud of.

Nancy Yasecko: [01:09:30] There's one of the branches of that campus, is right over here, is part of this setting we're in.

Joe Wickham: That is correct and in those early days you'll never know what we went through to get that over there. We went through lawsuits and every other thing to get it there and it's still there. And it's done a great job within our community. It's something to be real proud of. It only reflects the dignity and [01:10:00] the position throughout the county. Look at the new one down in Palm Bay. Look at the one up in the central part. Look at the one in Titusville. They started out from scratch with one school up in the Cocoa area and they're all growing and prospering. And they have tremendous following. What's going to happen, that which is beginning to happen now, is that some of these big colleges are gonna be a part of the growth of these units, and many of these children will not have to [01:10:30] go to Tallahassee or go someplace else to get a college degree, because they ... like, Rollins College and all of these others, will be a part of the system here within our own community. These young people can get their college degree without having to leave our community. That's coming.

Nancy Yasecko: It's amazing to me. A lot people, they don't need a four year degree if they can get a specialized two year degree, they have the kind of credentials they can start working in [01:11:00] a lot of different professional type fields.

Joe Wickham: As an example, my oldest son, he went to Florida Southern after he went here for a couple years. He went to Florida Southern and graduated magna cum laude. Then, he came back here and went to Florida Institute and he got a Master's in Business Administration. Then he got a Master's in Oceanography. And I thought, [01:11:30] "Lord, I'm gonna have nothing but a scholar all the rest of his life." But, this kind of a facility is what's helping to make our community grow. And it's gonna improve and we're gonna have more and more of these big college systems wanting to be a part of this thing; and somehow or another they're gonna end up with four year course systems within our own community.

Nancy Yasecko: I think that's absolutely right. Well, you can tell us some about the [01:12:00] early churches that were here when you were young.

Joe Wickham: Well, that's the ... for instance, on the island is Georgiana and all of those, those little churches were the keys to what is in the system today. The Methodist church of Georgiana was part of that program. And I remember when the first churches, real churches, they were all little wooden churches in the beginning. I can remember when the church down in Melbourne, [01:12:30] the Methodist Church down there begin to develop and the Catholic Church began to develop to what they are today; and the Episcopal Church used to be over on the U.S. 1, and they moved it all the way out to where it is today. And I was the lucky person to have the contract to build their Episcopal Church and it's a lovely church. And then, they built themselves a school beside this and so has the Catholic Church. Throughout the area, they [01:13:00] have their little schools.

We've come a long way with our school systems and our church systems. And we're just beginning because they're furnishing the need. And now, these same churches are building homes for the elderly and they're a part of their church system. And that's gonna be more and more of that in the future. It's quite interesting. And people are going to be able to be a member of that church. And the Episcopal [01:13:30] Church has several units in the city of Melbourne right now. All these other churches are gonna be able to move into this same category and they'll have, basically, a built in clientele that they'll have two thirds of their church program will be wrapped around these older people who are moving into these senior citizen churches. And that's coming.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah. The black communities had their own churches. I guess still do, for the most part.

Joe Wickham: Well, they [01:14:00] have a lot of them down there and a lot of the black children come to many of the other school churches and their families, because of the integration in the school system, now also in the church system. And many of them have people that sing in the choirs and play musical instruments and a lot of this has come out of the college system. And they're very talented people and it'll make you feel good to see that they're doing such [01:14:30] a great job.

Nancy Yasecko: Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like pre-integration, where the black community was pretty much entirely separate from the white community?

Joe Wickham: That is true, but I tell you, there was ... many people don't realize the close bond that came between the people in those days. You know, I grew up, as I said, in the community. And I knew everybody and their brother and we urged them to vote [01:15:00] and we were just thrilled to death when something nice happened to them; and I remember some of those that worked for me in the construction business, and they had big families and they would send them all to college and everything else. I was as proud of those kids in that family as anybody in this community. And that's what happened.

And most people don't realize that they weren't isolated from each other like people try to convince you. [01:15:30] They were part of the community as well and we all were the same. And we helped each other. And that's the reason we got along so well. And I always got a big thrill out of the fact that when a lot of these school teachers, girls, made such a huge success of their lives and helped raise all these other children and that was great growth in our community.

[01:16:00] And we've got some lovely people who have been with us all these years who have been personal friends of all of us. And you read a lot of historical things and you think that everybody is angry with everyone else, but that isn't true. They are an integral part of our growth of our community, just as we are. And it's been a great feeling to feel that comfortable with all those people.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, there's no question that they were disadvantaged, but after integration- [01:16:30] What was it like during that time of integration? Did it proceed fairly smoothly here?

Joe Wickham: Well, yeah, because we had pretty good schools, you know. And the churches, bless their hearts, they did a great job in their churches. And they had athletic programs that just fit and we all used to go to their programs, all of their contests, and they'd go to our contests. We didn't think anything about it and that's ... [01:17:00] No, I think education, where we begin to let everyone to get an education and encourage everybody, both white and black, to do something, is when we began to see the bright side of this whole setup. You just don't force things away, take things away, from somebody and give them to someone else unless there's a common denominator, you know. And our community has grown up to love [01:17:30] each other and I get a big kick out of it in spite of all that people say, because I've known many of these people for practically all my life. And it makes me feel good.

When the fellas who worked for me got half a dozen kids, they all got to college, I was just as proud as punch at that whole family, because they reflected to me what our community was all about. [01:18:00] They ended up as coaches and school teachers and everything else. And I got such a charge out of it, because of the way they had to start.

Nancy Yasecko: Right. Well, we had a lot of people come in to live here but also a tourist industry grew up around here. That started way back, didn't it?

Joe Wickham: Well, I'll tell you the truth, we had tourists in here and the wealthy came in here and would come down in the wintertime. [01:18:30] If you want to know when things began to happen, we had a certain element that was in here from Ballards, flower makers, you know, and Swift Premium and all those kind of people. But, when we started permanent mosquito control, we turned this whole country around. When we began to eliminate the mosquito, people became interested in our community and wanted to come here and stay the year around; and all of the retirees and everything else [01:19:00] came because of that mosquito program, because we had done something that no one else had done and our community reflected new concepts and growth.

We've had just ... when I think of the thousands and thousands who have come to stay with us because we made things more accessible and this was a great spot in which to live and we kept the environment the way it needs to be and the fishing was [01:19:30] great and the hunting was great and boating was great. You ever see the river out there when you maybe see a hundred little sailboats out there at one time? Makes you think. That's what's made our community work. But really, I think that the attitude of us to furnish recreation facilities, furnish the facilities that people needed, and cultural [01:20:00] facilities, it was just a good place for people to come. You know, you can't expect everybody to come and be on a certain level here, you know. And if you're up here, you either get down to there or you lift 'em up to yours and it's quite interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: You told me a little story about Mr. Salmela and a mosquito control plane that went a little out of commission.

Joe Wickham: Oh, that was a really [01:20:30] close shave for Jack Salmela. He was a great pilot, you know, and he ... down where the old ice plant is, down in Melbourne, someone had stuck an antennae up there, you know, way up in the air and he come sailing along there one morning, spraying just treetop high; hit that antennae and he crashed just south of that old ice plant that's right on U.S. 1 down there. Crashed and [01:21:00] tore the airplane all to pieces with all that mosquito spray in it and I think it burned it. But, he got out of the darned thing and we rushed down to find him and couldn't find him. He, with his head all split open and everything else, he was walking up to the hospital. And then finally, on the way up to the hospital ... and you can look at him right now and you [01:21:30] can see that he quite a scar there.

But, he was an outstanding leader in the mosquito control for many, many years for us in Brevard County. And one of the reasons we've got such a great influx of people is because of the outstanding job that he had done in the mosquito control program. He's a great guy, a great person and he's still around and a very good friend.

Nancy Yasecko: Another thing he was interested in, and something that relates to The Cape, is he was very interested in the wild life and they put that wildlife [01:22:00] refuge up there at The Cape. Have you had any involvement with that?

Joe Wickham: Oh, yeah. See, the county dug all of the dykes up there and everything else to impound the water and everything else, and they impounded and put fish in 'em so that they would eat up the larva and everything else. And by doing that, and with the cooperation of the Air Force ... you know, they insisted that the county run the mosquito control [01:22:30] program up there because of the things we've been doing in the past. And his whole area was mosquito controlled by the county program under Jack Salmela.

I've been up there many times and well, I remember one morning I was flying up there looking over to see what they dykes were, how they were holding up and all, and I said to the pilot [01:23:00] ... and he was an outstanding old timer from up on Merritt Island ... and I said, "What is that down there?" And he says, "Let's look." And we swung down and the biggest old panther I ever saw was walking along there and all he did was look up in the air and look back down and totally ignored us and just kept walking along. That's how the animal population up there adjusted itself to the missile program [01:23:30] and to the airplanes and everything else. He just looked up and saw we weren't gonna do anything to hurt him and he just kept walking, you know.

And in those days, in those fish beds up there, they would just boil with fish. And I attribute 99% of that to the way that the mosquito control had taken care of the problem up there. And you're right, it was a great preserving area for all types [01:24:00] of wildlife and still is and it will be. And one day it will be as well known for its preserving of the live wild animal as it is for the Missile Base. And that's coming because they've left up all the necessary vegetation and everything else, and they've kept people from coming in there and shooting all the game and everything else, so they're getting adjusted [01:24:30] to people, they're getting adjusted to noise, and they will be adjusting to all the growth for the future. Quite interesting.

Nancy Yasecko: It's an amazing area.

Joe Wickham: Yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: It's so much bigger than you realize 'cause-

Joe Wickham: They don't realize the thousands of acres that are in that thing. And, as I said, it's going to be accessible to the public a great deal more because they've got the proper road system in there now and all. And they're gonna make sure that [01:25:00] the guy who wants to come in and poach and wipe out the game, he won't have a chance in that area because they're gonna make sure that the animal life is protected along with all of the program of the missile system.

Nancy Yasecko: That security system for the missiles has paid off.

Joe Wickham: That's exactly what's going to happen.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah. Well, tell me about any hurricanes that you remember.

Joe Wickham: Well, we've had a lot of hurricanes since I've been a boy in the area. [01:25:30] I think many, many years ago one of the most interesting things that I can remember was the Mayor of the city of Eau Gallie back in those early days, Joe Torrence, there was a terrible hurricane and there was a packing house just south of the old Oleanders hotel, which is right on the end of the causeway down there. Now it's a restaurant now. But anyhow, big pieces of metal were [01:26:00] coming off this packing house and sailing up the street all the way up across Highland Avenue and that section-