This is an interview with Irving S. Amrhein for *In the Age of Steel: Oral Histories from Bethlehem Pennsylvania*. The interview was conducted by Roger D. Simon during July, 1975 in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Simón: This is an interview with Mr. Irving [S.] Amrhein at his office in the First Valley Bank Building, Bethlehem, July 1975. My name is Roger Simón. Tell me where you were born, Mr. Amrhein.

Amrhein: I was born in Bethlehem in 1895.

Simón: What part of town was it?

Amrhein: I believe to the best of my knowledge was on the West Side of Bethlehem on Spring Street.

Simón: I take it that’s not where you grew up?

Amrhein: No. We were there probably a couple of years, and then we moved over to the South Side and I believe we lived on 2nd Street for a year or two. Shortly thereafter, we moved to 3rd Street. So I’ve lived in various sections of the city.

Simón: That 3rd Street area, that’s where you remember most of your early growing up?

Amrhein: That was, I would say, until the age of eight or nine years. But at that time, 3rd Street was really the shopping center of South Bethlehem and Bethlehem. I mean, they had a market building there where farmers would come in from the country two or three times a week. In those days they came in with horse and wagon. Within a block or two, there were all kinds of businesses such as a harness store, which I presume not many people have seen today. I used to sit around and watch the people from the store come out and fit a collar on a horse and take measurements for a new set of harness.

In winter, these farmers would come in with sleighs, and those days the streets were mostly dirt, they weren’t paved, and during the winter there wasn’t anything like snow removal. The merchants shoveled the snow off of the sidewalk into the gutter, and before long, you had a pile maybe four feet high on each side of the street, and in the center it was maybe a foot of snow, and gradually it would be compressed by horses and sleighs going over it. It was real interesting.

Simón: Snow stayed on the street most of the winter then, and people got around?

Amrhein: We had snow from early winter to late in the winter.
Simon: What did your dad do?

Amrhein: My father was in the hotel business. I told you that we lived on 2nd Street. On 2nd Street it was different than it is now. The street ran through the properties now occupied by the steel company. But at that time on the north side of 2nd Street, the New Jersey Zinc Company\(^1\) was in business. In those days, I remember seeing a little narrow-gauge railroads with small hopper cars on there drawn by a mule. Of course, I was pretty young. I didn’t know too much about it, but it was a zinc company and there was a lot of white dust floating around.

Simon: Did your father have a hotel on 2nd Street?

Amrhein: On 2nd Street for a year or two and then moved up to 3rd Street. On 3rd Street, we were between what is now Adams Street and the next street at that time was Elm Street. But in that block, aside of our hotel was Adam Brinker’s Harness Store.\(^2\) Below that was Crystal (sp?) Brothers Pictures and Frames. Next to that was Newman’s (sp?) Bakery Shop\(^3\). Beyond that was a butcher shop. Next to that, as I recall, was something like an oyster bar. But there were all types of business, and they were in about a two-block area.

Simon: What was the name of the hotel?

Amrhein: I think the hotel was called Sample Rooms\(^4\), which was a rather peculiar name. (laughs)

Simon: You lived in the hotel?

Amrhein: Well, yes. The hotel was a three-story building, and we lived in the second floor, and the third floor at one time had been a lodge room, so it was rather large. I remember it was a playroom for we children, and I used to run wires along the side and I had a wet factory and I had bells hooked up and a lot of little things that kept me interested.

Simon: What kind of clientele did the hotel have? Traveling salesmen, people like that?

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\(^1\) Now known as The Horsehead Corporation, this company was founded in 1848 and was a major American producer of zinc, especially from 1897-1966.

\(^2\) Born in 1843, Adam Brinker was a local entrepreneur who opened this harness shop in 1867.

\(^3\) Project staff were unable to find additional information about the frame shop and the bakery.

\(^4\) Project staff were unable to find information on this hotel.
Amrhein: No. I would say that a hotel wasn’t exactly the right name for a place of that sort. It was more or less of a taproom.

Simon: That was what was on the ground floor?

Amrhein: That was on the first floor. In the rear, there was a stable there, a two-storied stable, which I recall was interesting to me because it was rented to a teamster, and he kept several horses there and a wagon or two. On the second floor, why, he would store hay and grain, and it used to be interesting to me to see them groom the horses and take care of them.

That would face on what at that time was called School Alley. There was an alley in back between 2nd and 3rd. Back there, there was a blacksmith shop, which I don’t think too many people today know much about. So I used to stick around there and watch the blacksmith make wheels and shoe horses, and almost anything you wanted done, he’d do.

Simon: Wheels for wagons and carriages?

Amrhein: Yeah.

Simon: He’d repair it? What else did you do around there as a youngster?

Amrhein: Well, those were really the chief interests. I was interested in seeing farmers come into the market and going through the market and the different produce and things they sold. In those days, you didn’t have activities such as the city provides today. There wasn’t anything like a Boys Club or a Girls Club\(^5\) or a YMCA\(^6\) or YWCA\(^7\). There weren’t any organized forms of recreation. It was mostly hanging around.

In the next block from us, there was a mill that ground grain and sold wheat and oats and things of that nature. I used to hang around there, and they would deliver grain. So sometimes I’d get a ride from here down to Northampton Heights or places like that. I always found something to do. And it was very interesting that every now and then they would take

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\(^5\) The Boys Club began in 1860 to provide activities for young boys. In 1990 the organization changed its name to The Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

\(^6\) Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) was founded in England in 1844 to serve as a place of Bible study and prayer for young men. The Association found a home in the United States in the 1851. The YMCA (Young Men's Club of America) is located in communities around the United States and is dedicated to fostering principles of healthy living.

\(^7\) The YWCA was founded in England in 1855 a group devoted to Christian homes form women and a Prayer Union that prayed for women. The Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) began in the United States in 1866. Currently the Association focuses on fighting racism and empowering women.
these millstones out of the machinery and a traveling tradesman of some kind or craftsman would come around and he would dress the millstones. That was using a chisel and a hammer, he would cut grooves in it. That’s something that you don’t see today.

Simon: Was there much athletic recreation? Was it sandlot baseball and such?

Amrhein: At that age, I can’t recall any organized or even semi-organized athletic affairs.

Simon: Did you play in the street as much as anything?

Amrhein: We played in the street as much as—about the only place you had to play in the street or the backyard or hang around the blacksmith shop.

Simon: How did your father get into the hotel business, do you know?

Amrhein: That, naturally, was before my time, and probably was the only thing available. But I at least give him credit for the fact. I don’t know how he started, maybe as a bartender for somebody, but he gradually accumulated enough funds to buy one place and continually moved up the ladder by buying a larger place the next time. I think I could safely say he may have owned at least four or five hotels.

Simon: Was he born here in Bethlehem?

Amrhein: No, I believe that he was born in Charlottesville in Virginia.

Simon: Do you have any idea how he came to town?

Amrhein: Well, I recall being told that my grandfather and grandmother migrated to this country from Germany. I think they landed in New York and gradually got down South, and they tell me that my grandfather ran a shoe factory in Charlottesville, close to the university or on the edge of it or something like that. During the Civil War, I guess a lot of the things were destroyed, and I don’t know whether he was discouraged or not. Somehow or other he got out of there and moved up to Bethlehem.

Simon: Was he Moravian or anything of that—
Amrhein: No, I believe that originally my grandparents were Catholic. To the best of my knowledge, my father was Lutheran, and I started in the Lutheran Sunday school, St. Mark’s over on 4th Street on the South Side [Bethlehem]. After we left the South Side and moved over to Linden Street in Bethlehem, all the youngsters there were going to Christ Reform Church, so I went to Christ Reform Church. I became a Moravian eventually because I married a girl who’s a Moravian.  

Simon: That 3rd Street area was, I suppose, pretty heavily immigrant, steel-working families when you were a youngster there?

Amrhein: The section of 3rd Street from New Street down two or three squares was mostly business. There were very few families living there, unless the building was large enough to accommodate a store on the first floor and living quarters on the second floor. I know that two or three doors from us there was a jewelry store, then there was a grocery store, and the grocery store was run by two boys by the name of Cunningham. Most stores in those days delivered your purchases, so most of them had, in the rear of their lots, had stables and kept horses, and that was interesting to kids.

Simon: Do you remember much hostility or condescension toward the newer immigrant groups, the Hungarians and Italians, whatever?

Amrhein: No, I don’t recall any animosity that existed between these people, because, after all, you had certain people running stores and all these other people who worked for the steel company were customers, and they seemed to remain on good terms. Of course, the city was a lot smaller, and you knew a fair percentage of the people. From two or three squares below New Street, things began to thin out and maybe there was somewhat of a residential section in that neighborhood. I know at one time further down 3rd and 4th Street, we use to call Shanty Hill. I don’t know why, but people down there probably raised goats and things like that. It was more open.

Simon: I’ve been told that 2nd Street had a bad reputation in many ways. Do you know anything about that?

Amrhein: 2nd Street, let’s say, maybe 20 years later during the time that Jim Yeakle was the mayor, why, I must have been, let’s say, in my 30’s, so that was at least 20 or more years later. I remember driving over to 2nd Street to watch buses come in from New York and Philadelphia, and 2nd Street at that time became a red-light district. I don’t know why it was permitted, but it seemed to flourish.

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8 A pre-reformation religion with origins in Bohemia and Moravia (present-day Czech Republic).

9 James M. Yeakle was mayor of Bethlehem from 1922 to 1930.
Simon: This was not the case, though, when you were a youngster in the turn of the century?

Amrhein: No, that was 20 or 30 years later.

00:15:52

Simon: Did you do any schooling on the South Side at all, go to school there at all?

Amrhein: Yes. I started school on the South Side, what was called the Central Building on the Vine Street. I went there for maybe three years before we moved to the North Side. Then the North Side, I went to the Jefferson Building on Maple Street, I think for two years, and then I entered high school, and that was the old Franklin Building on Center Street.

Simon: When you were in school on the South Side, you don’t recall any antagonisms among the ethnic groups?

Amrhein: No, I didn’t notice any. Of course, like all kids, I guess, on the way to school and on the way home, we had our little scraps now and then, and I think that maybe there was more fighting between kids, but I don’t think it was due to the fact that one was Jewish and the other was Hungarian or anything of that nature.

00:17:13

When I lived on the South Side and was still going to school, we used to go up to Lehigh University\(^{10}\) on Packer Avenue. At New and Packer Avenue, there was a building there that the caretaker lived in, and I think that building’s still there. At that time, a man by the name of Buck lived there. He had charge of the grounds around for Lehigh. Later on, Buck’s son became vice president of the Bethlehem Steel Company, and at that time there were very few buildings on the Lehigh campus, maybe a half a dozen. There was Christmas Hall and Saucon Hall\(^{11}\) and the library and Chemistry Building, the Physics Building. But many of these buildings were put up, say, in the last 25 years. So Lehigh campus was full of chestnut trees. I know as kids before and after school, we’d go up and, with a stick, stir around the leaves and pick a pocketful of chestnuts. Of course, I think a disease killed all the chestnut trees a few years later.

Simon: Was there any other mixing with Lehigh in terms of recreation or did you go to football games?

\(^{10}\) A private university located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

\(^{11}\) Originally a church, Christmas-Saucon was the first building was purchased by Lehigh University in 1866 and is located at 14 East Packer Avenue.
Amrhein: Football games were an attraction, and Lehigh played some outstanding teams. I remember their playing the Carlisle Indians when Lookaround and a couple other rather famous—I think Jim Thorpe played, and I think Lehigh didn’t fare too well. (laughter) Also, Lehigh used to have a good lacrosse team, one of the outstanding teams in the East at that time.

00:19:34 Simon: They’ve revived that lately. Was soccer very popular?

Amrhein: Soccer wasn’t popular at the university, but I would say in the 1930s or somewhere in that, or maybe in the 20’s [1920], the Bethlehem Steel Company had a soccer team, and they brought some outstanding players over here from Scotland and England. They had quite a reputation.

Simon: What about baseball? Was that a very popular spectator sport?

Amrhein: Well, it was somewhat interesting. Different sections of the county would have local baseball teams. I don’t think they were very high quality or anything like that, but on the North Side alongside of Liberty High School, on the other side of Elizabeth Avenue there was a field. They used to call it East End Field, and they had a team they called the East End team, and they played teams like from Coplay and Allentown [Pennsylvania] and places of that kind. It was interesting to us youngsters, that’s for sure. But, also, across the street from where Liberty High School now is, they used to have a fairgrounds and that was interesting while it lasted.

00:21:08 Simon: Tell me a little about it.

Amrhein: Well, I know one thing, trolley cars used to run those days, and they come in Linden Street, and they’d have a switch there and there would be eight or ten trolley cars, and what seemed like a tremendous crowd then in those days were maybe ten, fifteen hundred people, and people in the fair. We kids used to buy little tubes of liquid, and you’d squirt the girls with them. I don’t remember too much about it. They had horseracing. They had, I think, a half-mile track, and for a few years that seemed to flourish. Then like a lot of other things, it gradually petered out.

Simon: That was just a once-a-year fair?

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12 Carlisle Indian Industrial School (1879-1918) was located in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Famous athletes Gus Lookaround and Jim Thorpe played on the school’s football team.

13 A public high school located on Linden Street in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
Amrhein: That was once a year in the summer for—I believe it lasted about a week or so.

Simon: So you moved over to Linden Street when you were about eight years old, something like that?

Amrhein: Eight or nine years old.

Simon: Then your father had a place over there?

Amrhein: No, my father passed away before we left 3rd Street, and that was one reason we moved. My mother didn’t want to raise we children, and there were four of us in the family, above a barroom or a taproom or whatever you call it. She didn’t think it was the right atmosphere to raise a family in.

Simon: Did she have any kind of store or anything on Linden Street?

Amrhein: No, fortunately for the family, my father probably was pretty thrifty and accumulated enough money that my mother could sell the place, move the family over to Linden Street, and eventually all of us went to school. But in later years, why, the family’s wealth, maybe it was wealth then, you’d probably laugh at it today, but her money just about lasted until she passed away. I know, I had to help a little bit.

Simon: Where on Linden Street did you live?

Amrhein: We lived on the corner of Ettwein and Linden, it was a double house. The mayor lived in one side and we lived on the lower side.

Simon: Which mayor was that?

Amrhein: That was Jim Yeakle, the guy who condoned all of the—

Simon: Red-light activities.

Amrhein: —red-light action on 2nd Street.

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14 James Yeakle was mayor of Bethlehem from 1922 to 1930.
Simon: So you moved there about 1903, ’04 [1904], something?

Amrhein: 1906, ’07 [1907], ’08 [1908], somewhere in that neighborhood.

Simon: What was that neighborhood like?

Amrhein: That was purely a residential area. There were three or four houses beyond our house, and from there on out where Liberty High School there was nothing but a big field, and there was a little depression in the field and water would accumulate there. In winter you could do a little skating there. It wasn’t deep enough to do any swimming in the summer. But there were cornfields there where we’d probably go out and help ourselves to a few ears of corn, maybe smooch a couple of potatoes at home and go out and build a little fire and roast corn and potatoes. It was our playground.

In those days when a new house was being built, that was our gymnasium. You’d crawl all over the darn place, and why more of us didn’t break limbs or our necks, I don’t know. But at any rate, that substituted for all the activities that they provide for children today. We didn’t have any. You had to play or make your own games, and at night you’d play under the streetlight, which were arc lights and these carbon electrodes in it. You’d play Nine Bricks or something we used to call Nipsy. You had to provide your own entertainment.

Simon: Even baseball was rare.

Amrhein: It was very rare.

Simon: Was that because—

Amrhein: We could play a little in this field in back of our place that we used to call Violet’s Pond. That was enough space to play a little baseball, but it wasn’t even level.

Simon: Was even baseball equipment minimal as it was something of a luxury, bat and ball?

Amrhein: Absolutely. Those days for a baseball you’d probably take a—you’d make a baseball out of string and put something in the center and wrap it around it. When you got it finished about the size it should be, you’d cover it with tape, electricians

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15 Nipsy is a game in which a stick is used to propel a ball from the ground into the air. Once airborne, the ball is struck. The winner strikes the ball the farthest.
tape, and that’s what we used for our baseball. If a kid had a glove, he was lucky. I remember at that time most of us would have bicycles.

Simon: You did have bicycles.

Amrhein: I know I bought a bicycle secondhand for seven or eight dollars. (laughs)

Simon: About when was that?

Amrhein: Oh, that would be about 1908 or 1909, in that time. Of course, then the streets were all dirt, and practically every evening, you’d get the hose out and sprinkle the street to keep the dust down. That was before they started oiling streets. Later years, why, they started putting oil on the streets to settle the dust.

Simon: Did the city sprinkle at all to keep the—

Amrhein: The city, I recall, had some sprinklers, horse-drawn, and they’d go through there once in a while, but you still had to contribute a little bit by sprinkling at night.

Simon: So you got a bike. Did a lot of the kids around there have a bike?

Amrhein: Yes, quite a few of them did. I remember while I was in high school, we took an extended trip. I think there were three or four of us who had bicycles. One of the fellows had a relative living up near Swiftwater [Pennsylvania]. That’s up in the Poconos [Pennsylvania]. So I recall starting out in the morning and bicycling all the way up to Swiftwater, and I don’t know how many miles. I’d say that was probably 30 miles, and, boy, that was really an adventure. Then we spent the night or maybe two days with the relative of—I think the fellow’s name was Jake Stuber (sp?)¹⁶. I can recall they had a farm and a barn, and in the barn on the second floor, you went up with a ramp so they could drive their teams up there, they had a barrel of cider. We’d take pieces of straw and stick it in there and suck the cider out. (laughter) Funny how you remember those little things.

Simon: Was that hard cider?

¹⁶ Project staff were unable to identify this person.
Amrhein: I don’t know how hard it was. I don’t think it had any effect on us. Maybe we couldn’t get enough out of it, but we really thought it was something big.

Simon: That was a big summer?

Amrhein: You bet your life. I also recall that when I finished high school, I think my mother bought a canoe for me, and the son of the principal in our junior high school—I don’t think you’d call it that in those days—he and I went up to Saylors Lake in Pennsylvania, and we shipped the canoe up on the Lehigh New England Railroad. We had a tent, and we stuck it back in the woods around the lake. In those days there wasn’t any such thing as a sleeping bag. You’d put a blanket down over some leaves or boughs that you’d cut, and we spent the bigger part of the summer up there. We’d go fishing, and at night we’d take the canoe and a flashlight and catch frogs. We’d fry maybe a trout or two and a frog (laughs) in the same pan, and it tasted great. This was Bob Dufendorfer (sp?)18. I also remember his older brother coming up one weekend and bringing a couple of steaks up. I don’t think he got a bite of it. (laughter) I think we consumed the whole thing. But it was a great way to spend the summer.

I know we ate many a meal up a cherry tree, and there’s a little stream there with a bridge going over it. This isn’t exactly kosher, but when you’re hungry, why, you don’t think of that. One of us would take a landing net that you use when you go fishing and go under the bridge, and another one would go a little way above the bridge and throw stones in. That would drive all the trout down under the bridge where the water was a little deeper, and we’d scoop them out, go home and eat them (laughter).

Simon: Quick catch.

Amrhein: Yes. Boy, I don’t think much time elapsed, maybe an hour between the time we caught them or when we were finished eating them.

Simon: What else was going on around (inaudible) Street in those days?

Amrhein: Well, there wasn’t much excitement, that’s for sure. Generally in the evening, you’d go sit in somebody’s front porch with a half a dozen kids, and, I don’t know, I don’t know whether we told tall tales or not. I think we were too darn young for

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17 The Lehigh and New England Railroad was organized in 1895 and ceased operations in 1961.
18 Project staff were unable to identify this person.
that. But particularly if there was a good-looking girl in the neighborhood, there’d be a half a dozen of us sitting on her steps.

Simon: What was there for refreshments? Was ice cream something of a rarity in the summer?

Amrhein: I know at home we would get a sterner (sp?), they used to call it, or a gallon of ice cream in a wooden thing with ice around it on 4th of July and maybe on holidays. That was the extent of ice cream. Or when we were in high school they used to hold class parties, and then the thing to do then was to go around and try to steal the ice cream from the class party of some other class. Great stuff. (laughter)

At that time, at Broad and Main Street there was a confectionary store, an ice cream parlor\textsuperscript{19} was run by people by the name of Hightberger. That used to be the gathering place for kids that were old enough to go downtown in the evening. You’d take your girl there and buy her an ice cream soda or a banana split if you had enough money to do it, because money was pretty scarce.

Simon: Did you go over to Central Park\textsuperscript{20} much?

Amrhein: Yes, while I was in high school, Central Park was probably in its heyday. They had a theater there of fair size, and they had a stock company there, and they ran a different show each week. We used to get season tickets, and that was the place to take your girlfriend. They had some outstanding actors. I remember last night we were looking at something on television. I think it was Eddie Foy. His father played there, and I can think of Eddie Foy\textsuperscript{21} and there were a half a dozen who later on became rather prominent actors. But we enjoyed that, and that ran all summer, maybe eight weeks or something like that.

Simon: It was sort of an amusement park too?

Amrhein: It was an amusement park. They had (inaudible) roller coaster and then the old mill. They also had a dance floor, which in later years most of us patronized, and it was on the top of the hill and you had a good view. That had a veranda going all the way around the dance floor. They had fairly good orchestras.

\textsuperscript{19} Perhaps refers to A. Betge confectionary and Ice Cream, which was located at 36 Main Street in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{20} A now defunct park with rides such as a Derby Racer racing coaster that was located in Rittersville, Pennsylvania.

\textsuperscript{21} Eddie Foy, Sr., 1856-1928, and Eddie Foy, Jr., 1905-1983, were part of an touring act called “The Seven Little Foys.”
Simon: Did you go to school after high school at all?

Amrhein: I went to Bethlehem Prep School. That’s out here on 8th Avenue. It’s now a city park. I stayed there instead of staying at home. It was kind of unhandy to get from Linden Street all the way over there, so I stayed there and I enjoyed that. We had quite a few students there from South America, and then we had an organized athletics program and we football and basketball. Gave me something to do.

Simon: What did you study over there?

Amrhein: Just about the normal thing like chemistry, physics, a language or two. We also had a Glee Club\(^2\). Anything to keep us busy and out of trouble, I guess.

Simon: This was after you graduated from high school?

Amrhein: Yeah.

Simon: The kinds of recreations and amusements were about the same at that point we just talked about?

Amrhein: You had more supervision there. I mean, you weren’t allowed to stroll into town every time you wanted to. I know over weekends, we’d probably get permission to go out and take the trolley and go to Allentown. I think the fare was $10 \(10\) cents] at that time. I can also recall the last trolley coming back to Bethlehem was 12:10, and I know on one occasion I missed the 12:10 and walked all the way back to school.

Simon: From the Allentown fairgrounds\(^2\)? Must have taken half the night.

Amrhein: Took pretty long. It was largely country. I mean, it wasn’t built up at that time.

Simon: Do you remember the first few automobiles in town?

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\(^2\) A musical choir that was historically featured male voices but now includes females.

\(^2\) Located on 17\(^{th}\) Street, Allentown, Pennsylvania.
Amrhein: Yes, I can recall one of the first ones was a doctor by the name of Walters, Mitchell Walters\textsuperscript{24}. He lived over on the South Side on the corner of Vine and 4th Street. He was our family doctor at that time. Later on, his brother had an office on Broad Street about a half a block from New Street. So they’d come around and make house calls those days, and it was quite a sight to see that.

I recall from Ettwein Street towards Liberty High School there was a slight grade. You wouldn’t call it a grade at all today, but those days when an automobile would try to chug up there, half the time they’d get stuck. We used to sit on the porch and laugh at them and yell, ‘Get a horse! Get a horse!’ Those were great days.

Simon: Was it still pretty much considered a rich man’s luxury, though?

Amrhein: I presume that there were only a few in town. It was mostly doctors who used to make house calls with a horse and buggy and sometimes have a driver. So the first people that I recall having them were doctors, and then some more, the affluent people gradually got cars. Heck, half the time they were having punctures. If you went five miles out of town, you were in the woods.

Simon: Would you say that was true up until the First World War, that the car was still quite a scarce—

Amrhein: Well, let’s see. That would be around—

Simon: 1917.

Amrhein: Yeah.

Simon: You were 22 years old.

Amrhein: There weren’t too many cars. I noticed one thing that people went to work at the steel company by trolley. The trolley would come in Broad Street from Allentown and go over the New Street Bridge, which was a rickety affair, and from different sections of town. They’d get to the steel company. At various gates at the steel company, they’d have switches, and when it was time for a certain shift to change, why, you would see maybe, six, seven, eight trolleys lined up waiting for people to come out. There wasn’t anything like providing a parking lot, because nobody had cars. Some of the executives of the steel company did, why, that was a curiosity.

\textsuperscript{24}Probably Mitchell Walter, M.D., born Farmersville, Pennsylvania 1867.
Simon: From where you lived on Linden, if you wanted to go down to Main Street to shop—

Amrhein: Walked.

Simon: You walked.

Amrhein: Believe me, we certainly covered a lot of miles. We didn’t need much exercise. That did it.

Simon: A trolley, for a trip to Allentown, I guess—

Amrhein: Ten cents.

Simon: Did you go to Allentown much? Was there much call to?

Amrhein: I recall when we lived on the South Side, and I was a very young kid, sometimes my mother would take me to Allentown, and we’d take the train. We’d go to Lehigh Valley Station and take the train and ride to Allentown, and that was probably faster and more convenient than taking a trolley car. We’d get off at the foot of Hamilton Street and walk up the hill to 6th, and between 6th and 7th, Peters and Jacoby\(^{25}\) had a restaurant, an ice cream parlor, and I know it used to be a big event for me when my mother would take me up there and do some shopping and we’d go down there and have our lunch.

Simon: Did you shop mainly, and the family shop mainly on Main Street?

Amrhein: No, I think most of the shopping in the early days was on 3rd Street [South Bethlehem]. Later on, why, there was more business built up on Main Street. I know where Orr’s Store\(^{26}\) is, that was Bush and Bull’s\(^{27}\) and somebody else before that, but before the store was that size on the corner, there was a store that sold stoves. Everybody had a stove those days.

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\(^{25}\) Peters and Jacoby opened an ice cream and cake shop in 1888 at 627 Hamilton Street in Allentown, Pennsylvania. They also had businesses at 122 North 7\(^{th}\) Street, as well as a shop in Catasauqua, Pennsylvania.

\(^{26}\) Started by Matthew Orr, this department store had multiple locations including a location in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania that is currently home to the Main Street Commons.

\(^{27}\) Bush and Bull’s department store was open from 1870 to 1938.
Simon: Big cast-iron affair.

Amrhein: There were cast-iron stoves, and I know when you were a kid, I’d have to go down the cellar and bring the scuttle of coal up, and every so often you’d have to take the ashes out in the scuttle and take them out the back of the yard and dump them. So the stove business was pretty brisk in those days.

Simon: Did you have central heat in your place, or did the stove do the job?

Amrhein: We had central heat.

Simon: Coal furnace?

Amrhein: Yeah. I can remember shoving coal in the darn thing as I got older.

Simon: What about indoor plumbing? Was that pretty common by that time?

Amrhein: Well, we always had indoor plumbing, but there were quite a few places surrounding us that had outdoor plumbing, and I know when we moved over on Linden Street, we had an outhouse outside of the place, but we didn’t use it.

Simon: Was it before they put the plumbing in?

Amrhein: Yeah, but when we were there, we had indoor plumbing.

Simon: What did you do after you finished at Bethlehem Prep?

Amrhein: I think that I entered Lehigh\textsuperscript{28} that year, and there are a number of classmates still around. Chenoweth\textsuperscript{29}, maybe you heard of him, he was a quarterback over at Lehigh, he’s still here in Bethlehem. And Pat Pazzetti\textsuperscript{30}, I think, was there a year or two earlier. I was in the class of ’17 [1917], and that’s a long time ago, come to think of it. But there are a number of people here that were in my class. Of course, when you get to be my age, each year there are fewer and fewer of them.

\textsuperscript{28}A private university located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania
\textsuperscript{29}Albert Chenoweth played quarterback for Lehigh University and later served as a Superintendent for Bethlehem Steel. Mr. Chenoweth’s oral history is also part of In the Age of Steel project.
\textsuperscript{30}Vincent J. "Pat" Pazzetti, Jr., was an All-American quarterback for Lehigh University.
I can recall that shortly after I was married, a number of couples that we associated with and went down to Saucon Valley Country Club and places of that kind, why, most of them have passed away. As a matter of fact, I told you that I was born in ’95 [1895]. That means that later this year, I’ll be 80 years old. That covers a lot of time. (recording paused) Amrhein: —industrial (inaudible) that included math and some chemistry. I know I had a German class, and I think our books were all technical. I could speak a little Dutch, being raised in this community, and I was mixed Dutch, German, and I think I was probably as source of a lot of amusement for some of our instructors.

Simon: Was Pennsylvania Dutch spoken widely in the community?

Amrhein: Yes, from about the time I told you that my mother used to take me to Allentown shopping, I think one of the requisites to get a job in a store was your ability to speak Dutch. You’d walk up Hamilton Street, you heard as much Dutch being spoken as you did English. So as matter of fact, I don’t think you could hold a job in, say, a clothing store or any department store unless you could speak Dutch, because a large percentage of your customers were Dutch.

Simon: And that’s all they spoke?

Amrhein: A lot of them, that’s about all they spoke, and they spoke that much more fluently than they did English. Some of the English was really murdered those days.

Simon: You just picked it up by hearing it in the community?

Amrhein: Yes. I wasn’t very good at it, but I had enough of it mixed up with German, and I don’t think either of them fared very well.

Simon: What was the social life like at Lehigh when you were an undergraduate?

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31 Pennsylvania Dutch refers to emigrants and the descendants of emigrants from southwestern Germany and Switzerland who settled in Pennsylvania in the 17th and 18th centuries.
Amrhein: Well, they had a few fraternities at Lehigh, and I don’t think that the social life those days compared to or was comparable to what they have today. Of course, nothing else was either. I know Drown Hall\(^{32}\) was in existence then, and I know we’d go down there and shoot pool or something like that, but there weren’t too many activities.

Simon: Dances and such?

Amrhein: I don’t recall much dancing.

Simon: Did the social life center heavily around the fraternities, or weren’t there that many?

Amrhein: I would presume that that’s where most of it was. I lived in town, so—

Simon: You still lived with your family?

Amrhein: I think in those early days, you had to make your entertainment. I know when I was at school, a number of us would go to Allentown Saturday evenings. That was a big event. There we’d go to the Columbia Hotel\(^{33}\). That was a hotel up at 9th and Hamilton Street. We’d go in there and have our dinner there and we’d have a drink or two. I think we were old enough then. I’m not sure, but we at least managed to get a drink or two. After that, we’d walk around Hamilton Street, or we’d go down to Meeley’s (sp?)\(^{34}\), which was a dancehall, and then if we didn’t do that, we probably went to a vaudeville show. There weren’t too many. There was a theater there, the Lyric Theater [Allentown, Pa.], that ran plays occasionally, but that didn’t interest us much, wasn’t as great an interest to we kids as vaudeville and going to a dance. These were public dancehalls.

Simon: You’d pay a quarter or something?

Amrhein: Um-hm.

Simon: So that was as much of that as there was to do on the campus.

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\(^{32}\) Named after Thomas Messinger Drown, former President of Lehigh University.

\(^{33}\) Established in 1894, this hotel and restaurant was located at 10th and Hamilton Streets in Allentown, Pennsylvania.

\(^{34}\) Project staff were unable to locate this business.
Amrhein: That was about it.

Simon: Was spectator sports pretty big then?

Amrhein: Well, I wouldn’t say so. In high school, we had basketball. Football didn’t exist in high school in those days. They didn’t have athletic fields. Bethlehem didn’t even have a gymnasium, I know. When I played basketball at Bethlehem High, we used the Moravian Parochial School’s gymnasium.

Simon: This was when you were at the Franklin School?

Amrhein: Yeah.

Simon: What about Lehigh? Was it much different?

Amrhein: We had a gymnasium at Lehigh. I think as far as I got in athletics at Lehigh, I participated on the freshman team. I think we got a numeral for it or some darn thing like that for it, but that was the end of my activities.

Simon: Was wrestling still popular then?

Amrhein: Wrestling was very popular, and then in later years it became increasingly popular. I recall that shortly after I was married I used to attend all the wrestling meets at Lehigh. One of the executives at Lehigh, a fellow by the name of Ken Smiley, I think he eventually became vice president over there, he was interesting in wrestling. I know Ken and his wife and Alma and I went. If a meet was down at Princeton or Lafayette or out at Penn State, we’d attend.

Simon: By car?

Amrhein: Yeah. In those days I had a car by that time.

Simon: When did you get that, your first car?

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35 Also known as the Franklin School, this high school was located on Pine Street in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
36 Moravian Parochial School is now Moravian Academy, a coeducational college preparatory independent school located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
37 E. Kenneth Smiley was the Director of Admissions at Lehigh University.
Amrhein: I think I was well up in the 20’s [1920] before I had a car, maybe ’25 [1925].

Simon: Were you in the First World War?

Amrhein: No. During the First World War, I worked down in the steel company.

Simon: That kept you out?

Amrhein: Well, let’s see. You had to report for examination. For some reason, a couple of us tried to get into the Navy. I didn’t pass the physical. Three of us went and I think only one of us passed. Eyesight and hearing. I don’t know why.

Simon: Then you stayed down at Steel?

Amrhein: Then I worked down at the Bethlehem Steel Company. I was down in what used to be called the bridge shop. At that time, they were making—I believe they were 25-meter [25-mm?] gun carriages.

Simon: You got this job right out of Lehigh?

Amrhein: Yeah. Let’s see. You know, there were a lot of women worked at that time. I mean, it was a conglomeration. Women were running machines down there, and I had a job as assistant foreman, making jigs and fixtures to hold pieces of equipment so you could put it on a machine. It’s interesting. I learned a lot there, not that I want to do it as a regular occupation. But it wasn’t too monotonous, that’s for sure.

Simon: How long did you stay with them?

Amrhein: Oh, that’s kind of hard to say. Two, two and a half years, something like that. I was there until they closed the shop down.

Simon: So that’s the reason you left? Did you want to stay with them in some other capacity?

Amrhein: I don’t think I would want—I, later on, worked for the steel company in the main office in the Accounting Department, and it was in the Billing Department. You priced different material. For instance, I know I worked on tinplate, tinplate and black plate, and then most of that product was priced on freight from Pittsburgh, FOB [Freight on Board] Pittsburgh. So
you had to figure railroad rates from Pittsburgh to Bethlehem, and from where we shipped it maybe out to the coast. Oft
times, it was to an advantage for Bethlehem Steel to price it on that basis, because if it was shipped to Baltimore where
most of the tinplate was made in Baltimore, it was shipped from Baltimore to Washington or somewhere around there
where there were a lot of large canneries and things like that, instead of charging from Sparrows Point to Baltimore or
Washington, you charged from Pittsburgh. So that put Bethlehem in a more competitive position for that product anyway.

Simon: Go ahead.

Amrhein: I was going to say at that time, the steel company was getting a little more socially minded, and they provided the
opportunity for employees to take up more accounting and business law and different subjects, and some of it was provided
by—I know our law class was headed by a steel company lawyer. But I also know in the accounting we had a Lehigh
professor, and I think in economics we had a fellow from Lehigh by the name of ‘Valdy’ Stewart\(^{38}\), who was quite a
character and who later on became a member of the Public Utility Commission.

But all industry seemed to be growing more socially minded over the years. I know years ago, you’d work twelve hours a
day, and then you came down to ten and five-tenth. I don’t know why the five-tenth, but that was it. You’d hear about
Detroit and Pittsburgh and these people working eight hours, and everyone I talked to said, ‘That’ll never happen here.’
They just thought that was something entirely foreign to Bethlehem Steel. But eventually Bethlehem Steel—and they
thought if you worked eight hours, why, you’d only be doing half a day’s work.

Simon: When you worked there during World War I, you were on a twelve-hour shift?

Amrhein: No, I believe it was ten and five-twelfth. The people who worked these twelve-hour shifts were mostly those on open
hearth and hot metal. You would work twelve-hours days, and they only had two shifts. Twelve nights, and every two
weeks they would switch shifts and you’d work twenty-four hours. Think of somebody working 24 hours at a stretch
today. But that was the custom.

Simon: That was accepted?

Amrhein: Yeah. I didn’t hear people do much—of course, there were certain elements that grumbled all the time, but I think working
conditions in all industry have improved over the period of years, and I don’t know whether it was brought on by unions.

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\(^{38}\) John Lammey Stewart was Professor of Economics and History and Library Director at Lehigh University and a member of the Pennsylvania Public Service Commission.
Personally, I think that is industry becoming more socially aware of what they should provide, and I think we’d have had most of these improvements in working conditions without unions.

I can also remember when I was a kid and they had a strike at the steel company. I can see a troop of state police, mounted, coming across the New Street Bridge and parading down 3rd Street. They used to have some rather—well, some fracas and were rather violent in those days.

Simon: About 1910 strike?

Amrhein: In that neighborhood, yeah.

Simon: Were you getting involved in any civic groups at all or organizations?

Amrhein: Let’s say when I went into the security business, that’s 50 years ago, so you can say around 1925, I joined a service club which at that time was the Exchange Club. There were a couple others, but that was one of them. I was in that a number of years. We met at the hotel, and we had quite an interesting enrollment in there. We had Rip Ware, who was a city commissioner or councilman in those days; Fritz Klein, who was another one. Then we had, Earl Schaffer, who was mayor in the city a few years later, and Bill Hutchinson, who was a member of the Hutchinson family and one of the owners of the Bethlehem Fabricators, and a number of doctors and dentists and practically everything. We tried to do some civic good. I know during the Depression, Bob—I can’t think of his name right now—was mayor.

Simon: Pfeifle?

Amrhein: Bob Pfeifle. Right. He was trying to raise money to help poor people. I mean, people would come to him that didn’t have coal or anything. He’d buy them a ton of coal. He disbursed the charity, and a lot of people were opposed to that. So at the Exchange Club, we came up with an idea of putting out what we called Exchange dollars, and we had them engraved

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39 The Philip J. Fahy Memorial Bridge runs over the Lehigh River and connects the north and south sides of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
40 Founded in 1911, this is a national community service organization.
41 Project staff were unable to find information on this individual.
42 Project staff were unable to find information on this individual.
43 Earl M. Schaffer was mayor of Bethlehem from 1950 to 1962.
44 Bethlehem Fabricators, Inc., originally Guerber Engineering Co., fabricated steel and erected buildings and other large structures.
45 Robert Pfeifle was Mayor of Bethlehem from 1930 to 1950. He was elected on a ticket targeting crime.
by some company near Philadelphia. We worked on this theory. On the back of the dollar, we had, I think, 33 sections marked off, and the idea was to sell these dollars to businesses who would, in turn, use them to pay employees, and they would, in turn, use them to buy merchandise. Every time they passed through somebody’s hand, you had to paste a stamp on the back. We sold the stamps too.

So a lawyer who’s still in town, Jim McFadden, and myself and one or two others in the club, we had to go around to—I remember speaking to the Rotary Club, the Women’s Club46 which we had at that time, and various school organization, Parent-Teachers and all that, trying to explain the plan to them and getting them to agree to buy a certain percentage of their payroll in Exchange dollars.

We had an office established up here in Broad Street where the city owned an arcade, and we hired an employee to run the office with the assistance of one or two of the Exchange people. There if a merchant got too many of these dollars on his hands and couldn’t pass them all out, he would bring them up to us and exchange them, and we’d give him money for it. We’d also sell him stamps to put on the back. Therefore, if a dollar ran the full 33 exchanges, it had a dollar’s worth of stamps on the back, which we sold, so we had an almost dollar profit, which we turned over to the mayor, and the mayor used those funds to buy food and fuel and things like that for poor families who were destitute, because at that time you didn’t have all these welfare organizations.

Simon:  Didn’t the county have any kind of relief?

Amrhein: Not that I recall. But I can remember there was a lot of opposition to this plan. For instance, the head of our Economics Department over at Lehigh was a member of Rotary, and when I talked to the Rotary board, he started giving me a hard time, telling me about all the fiat money that had been in existence and confederate money and all that stuff. He started delivering a lecture just as if he was at school talking to a bunch of kids. So I had more nerve in those days, so I cut him short and told him I didn’t come down here to listen to a lecture; I came down here to explain the Exchange Club plan to him. I don’t know. We made a few thousand dollars. We didn’t make a whole lot.

Simon: It was understood the money was going to be given to the mayor?

Amrhein: The mayor. The money was all turned over to the mayor. We had a number of financial organizations like Chase National Bank and a number of big banks writing to us for buying samples that they wanted to put into their museum.

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46 Rotary and Women’s Clubs are community service organizations.
Simon: Was some of the opposition to this because of the fact that Pfeifle was a Democrat? Was it political?

Amrhein: Yes, I think it was purely political. A lot of people opposed him because he was a Democrat, and a lot of people didn’t think that Pfeifle should dole out this money. I don’t know who they thought— No matter who we picked to dole it out, why, there’d have been some opposition.

Amrhein: Right.

Simon: Let’s go back a little bit into the 20’s [1920] and sort of approach the Depression then chronologically. You got into securities, you said, in ’25 [1925].

Amrhein: The market was very good from ’25 [1925] up to ’29 [1929]. We were making money. In those days in this business, most of the securities that were sold were sold to banks. I’d say 90 percent of my business was with banks, but we had a half a dozen banks in Bethlehem. We had the First National Bank. We had the— it wasn’t the Union Bank.

Simon: Wilbur?

Amrhein: We had the E.P. Wilbur Bank. We had the Lehigh Valley Trust. We had the Bethlehem Trust. And we had a bank over on 3rd Street, which was the Castoni (sp?) Bank. Then there was one at 4th and New Street, but that (inaudible) People’s. That didn’t last too long.

Simon: Was there a Bethlehem National also?

Amrhein: Yes, there was a Bethlehem National on 3rd Street, what’s now Adams Street. Having been born and raised and going to school in Bethlehem, I knew most of these people, so I think they were largely instrumental in my being able to make a go of the security business. I would call up Phil Burns of the Bethlehem National Bank, and we had a new issue of maybe French seven-and-a-halves. ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I’ll take twenty.’ I’d call somebody else up, Bob Taylor47 was with the First Valley Bank, and tell him we have a new issue of so-and-so. ‘Well, bill me for 25.’ Frank Snyder. They all were pretty generous, as far as I was concerned.

47 Likely refers to Robert Sayre Taylor, Jr. (1903-1993), a local attorney who was active on a number of not-for-profit boards.
Simon: What about some of the wealthier families, the Dodsons\textsuperscript{48} and the Lindermans\textsuperscript{49} and Wilburs\textsuperscript{50}? I guess the Wilburs dealt with their own bank.

Amrhein: I presume that they did most of their buying through their banks.

Simon: Were there any brokers in the 20’s [1920] in town?

Amrhein: No. Elkins Morris\textsuperscript{51} had an office at Broad and New Street, and there was a fellow by the name of Allman (sp?), who represented some company. He lived at the Bethlehem Club\textsuperscript{52}, and that helped him get some business. There was a man by the name of Newton Darling (sp?), who had worked for the steel company, and he wasn’t getting anywhere fast, so he and a couple other fellows went to New York and he managed to get a job with the First National.

In those days, all the big city banks had subsidiary organizations selling securities. Later on, that was discontinued by law. But he sold securities to my mother, and as that went on, I gradually became more interested, and finally I was doing most of the interviewing with him. Ultimately, he thought I ought to go into the security business. So one day he stopped me and said, ‘Hey, there’s a firm in Philadelphia that needs a representative in this territory, and I told them about you. I made an appointment. You give them a call.’ I gave them a call and I went down there and I got the job. You didn’t have to know too much.

Simon: So you just hung up your shingle?

Amrhein: That’s right. And I started out working from my own home for a year or two, and then finally I opened an office in Allentown and I was there for a few years, and I moved back to Bethlehem.

Simon: Was Allentown considered more the business center than Lehigh Valley?

\textsuperscript{48} Established in 1859, Weston Dodson & Company was a coal and distribution company located in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
\textsuperscript{49} Garret and Robert Linderman were officers of Bethlehem Iron and had financial interests in the Lehigh Valley.
\textsuperscript{50} Elisha P. Wilbur had interests in the Lehigh Valley Railroad and in banking.
\textsuperscript{51} A partner at Elkins, Morris, Stroud and Co.
\textsuperscript{52} Established in 1909 as a social club for Bethlehem Steel executives, it also had rooms for management trainees to board. The building is located on N. New Street in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
Amrhein: At that time, yes. There were bigger banks and they were more central, because in those days, instead of sitting in an office and having people come in to do their business, those days most of my business was with banks. I would sell. I remember I was only in business a year or two, and I used to sell about a million dollars worth of securities to the Merchants National. Those days, a million dollars was a lot of money. Today it’s peanuts.

Simon: I’m not so sure about that. (laughs)

Amrhein: I used to cover the surrounding territory. I’d go up to Slattington, go up to Lehighton and Mauch Chunk, down through the Perkiomen Valley, down the east and up to Bangor [all in Pennsylvania], and you’d call on those places the same day each week that the bank was having their directors’ meeting. Then you’d be called into the directors’ meeting to try to sell a piece of merchandise you have. You’d have to explain the company and all everything pertaining to it, and it was very interesting. Now, today, most of our business is stock. As a matter of fact, you probably—

Simon: What was it you were selling in the 20’s [1920]? Was it stocks or bonds?

Amrhein: No, it was mostly bonds.

Simon: Corporate bonds.

Amrhein: Yeah. Corporate and government bonds. We sold foreign (inaudible). I remember selling Poland bonds, Czechoslovakian bonds, French bonds, Italian bonds. Some of them turned out all right and some of them didn’t do so well.

Simon: The banks weren’t buying much common stock now?

Amrhein: I don’t know. I don’t believe a bank is permitted to buy common stock.

Simon: You didn’t sell much over the counter to the general public? I don’t mean unlisted securities.

Amrhein: I know what you mean. Individuals?

Simon: Yeah.
Amrhein: When we would call on a bank, say, in Lehighton, after you became well known, you’d say to the cashier, who was generally the big mucky-muck, you’d say, ‘Who is there in town who might be interested?’ Sometimes a bank would buy securities for different individuals in town. Ultimately, we would call on what we figured were the moneyed people in town and sell them a few thousand dollars worth.

Even today I have clients that I got 40, 50 years ago, and they’re all pretty old too. Some of them are older than I am. Some of them, I do business with their children. So my theory has always been that if you take care of your clients’ interest, you don’t need to worry about yourself. It’ll take care of it. Instead of running around getting new clients all the time, keep your old ones. For me, it’s been successful.

Simon: Did the crash catch you completely unaware?

Amrhein: I was in Canada on a vacation, I think in Quebec, when the crash occurred. I used to tell my wife, ‘Now, when we go on a vacation, I don’t even want to read a newspaper.’ That was one of the times. When I came back and found out what was going on, I sort of felt badly that I hadn’t kept abreast of what was going on. But business was slow. You didn’t make much money. The banks closed. I know the day the banks closed, I was living on Broad Street near 1st Avenue. I got in my car and I drove over to the South Side to the Bethlehem National where I used to do my personal business to make a deposit. I think I got my paycheck or something like that. I walked in the bank, I deposit, nothing unusual, and I drove up to Allentown to my office. By the time I got there, I got a telephone call saying they closed the banks.

My money was tied up in the bank and I was practically penniless. Of course, one or two of my friends came across, loaned me some money, and most places where you had been doing business with, did business with you and you didn’t have to pay them until money became—

Simon: They just carried it. Everybody carried it.

Amrhein: Yeah. So in a security business from 1930 for the next ten years was pretty tough struggling.

Simon: You managed to stay afloat?

Amrhein: Yeah, I managed to earn a living. It was pretty tough. I can recall that after I was married, I lived in an apartment on 2nd Avenue that was owned by a friend of mine, Dr. Beileman[53] (sp?). For three months I couldn’t afford to pay him any rent,

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[53] Project staff were unable to identify this individual.
so I said, ‘Hey, Doc, I think I’ll have to get out of here and move home with my mother.’ He said, ‘Well, don’t do that. Stay here and pay me when you can. If you move out, I’ll have to redo the apartment and may take a month or two or three months to get a tenant, and I don’t know how long he’ll stay.’ So I failed to pay rent for three months, but after that I started to make it up. But that shows how tough it was. My rent at that time was very modest in today’s terms, $65. At that time, $65 was a lot of money.

Simon: Sixty-five dollars a month?

Amrhein: Yeah. Heat provided. Of course, you had to pay your own electric.

Simon: Did you despair at all about the prospects for recovery? Pretty bleak?

Amrhein: It was a struggle, but I felt this way. I’ve always been an optimist. I figured that the country is going to grow, that we’re only started and things are going to get better and better. And I feel that way today. A lot of people feel discouraged, the high rate of unemployment and the declining sales and earnings of the company, but we’re not going to go out of business. We’re going to stay in business.

I recall selling to a dentist in Lehighton. I remember selling him General Motors stock at $14 a share. The stock declined further and went down to seven and five-eighth. That was almost half of what he paid for it. He didn’t like me too well because I’d sold him a half a dozen other things, Du Pont and General Electric, which did almost as badly. But figure, at 14, what it amounts to today. He’s had two or three splits of stock, and the stock’s selling at around 50. It has sold above 100. But he’s passed away and his son lives the life of Riley on the money his father invested.

Simon: Were there some people in ’32 [1932] and ’33 [1933] who were buying stocks, common stocks?

Amrhein: There were a few people who had money. Not too many of them.

Simon: I wonder sometimes why the market just didn’t close up entirely. There were doctors and some businessmen.

Amrhein: Yeah, there were people like that that had some money, and some of them who probably felt like I did and had faith in the country and figured that this isn’t going to put us out of business.

Simon: Was there a lot of real suffering in Bethlehem in the worst years of the Depression?
Amrhein: The worst suffering that I heard of were like stories that Bob Pfeifle or somebody would tell us. Of course, the poor people went to him, so he had more contact. I didn’t have much contact with them. The people that I came in contact with were friends that were socially on my level and had as little money as I did. None of us had any, and we got along nicely and we made the best of it.

I can recall this. During that time I ate so much soup, it came out of my ears. My wife would go over to Kip’s Butcher Shop, which was a high-class butcher shop on Broad Street here, and buy oxtails for about 15 cents apiece and make soup. Now, you can buy oxtail soup and I guess it’s considered a delicacy today, but that time we didn’t eat it because it was a delicacy; we ate it because it was one of the cheapest things we could eat. And I think we were healthy, probably more so than we were after that. I mean, we ate good, substantial food and nothing very fancy.

Simon: Could you see it on the street? I mean, were there breadlines in Bethlehem and soup kitchens?

Amrhein: No, I don’t recall seeing anything like that. They tell me on the South Side there was some of it, but I didn’t—

Simon: Didn’t see it?

Amrhein: Most of my contacts during the day were with banks or with wealthy individuals in various communities, so I didn’t get to see the poorer class of people, unfortunately.

Simon: Where was your office?

Amrhein: My office, when the banks closed, was in the Commonwealth Building in Allentown. That was across from the courthouse. Then business got so bad that we gradually decided to close the office. So, again, I did business for maybe six or eight months from my home, my apartment. Then as things began to look a little better, why, I rented office space on Main Street from the First National Bank, it was at that time. Johnny Husky (sp?) is now there with an insurance company. That used to be an old bank building. I rented the second floor.

Then the bank had an opportunity to rent the whole building to somebody, and I had a lease, so they came to me and asked me if I would move, provided they would give me office space in the Bethlehem Trust Building and fix it up and move me
and do all that. So I got a good deal that way. I held them up for all it was possible, and then I moved to Bethlehem Trust Building. We were there for a long period of years.

Then when they were going to tear the building down, we moved out to the Professional Building. We were there for about ten years, when our lease ran out. We moved in here.

01:24:00 Simon: Did anybody lose money in the banks? I know some banks didn’t reopen after the holiday.

Amrhein: Yes, I believe that a lot of people lost money in banks. First Valley or First National managed to stay open, but Bethlehem Trust Company was absorbed by the First National before it got into financial difficulty, so they didn’t close. The Union Bank or People went with E.P. Wilbur Bank. That was reorganized. The Bethlehem National Bank was reorganized.

Simon: When you say reorganized, does that mean the depositors weren’t paid off?

Amrhein: They were paid off a certain percentage.

Simon: So you lost some money, I’m guessing.

Amrhein: I didn’t do too well, but what I’m eternally grateful about is that the Depression hit me when I was comparatively young and I had enough confidence and I was young enough to start over. If it would hit me now, I’d probably be licked.

Simon: Wasn’t there a lot of people, retired people, who lost what they had?

Amrhein: Yes, I know a lot. For instance, those days, I lost some money in bank stock. If you owned bank stock and the bank got into financial difficulties, you not only lost your stock, but you were legally liable for the same amount of money. It was like double liability. So you had to pay up for the bank stock. I know it took me—when the Depression hit me, I think I owed the banks about $50,000 that I used to buy securities. Well, I had some good securities like American Telephone & Telegraph. The banks were good to me. They carried me until the value of my collateral was less than what the note was. Finally, the bank examiners, I guess, forced them to sell it out, and I owed them the difference between what they got for it and what I had borrowed. So it took me a number of years to break even, and when you’re working for a dead horse, that isn’t fun.
So I learned a lot during that period. So now I have a rule that when I borrow money, I never borrow more than 10 percent of my assets, figuring that my dividends at 5 percent, say, over a two-year period would pay off the notes, which wasn’t a bad idea. Then business started picking up and booming.

Simon: When?

Amrhein: I would say in the 40’s [1940].

Simon: Not before?

Amrhein: No. It improved, but we didn’t really hit a boom.

Simon: People still pretty scared of the market throughout the whole—

Amrhein: Yes, I find that’s even true today. For a long time people were very reluctant to put their money in the market. Now I think they’re regaining confidence and they’re beginning to buy securities. You know, if you want to make money, you’ve got to buy securities when they’re cheap and sell them when they’re high. Now, that’s an old cliché, but when things start going down, people think they’re never going to stop going down, so they go down much further than they should actually go on values. So if you buy them anywhere near the bottom, why, you’re buying cheap securities. When the market goes up, people think it’s never going to stop going, it’s always going to go higher and higher. All right. They’re wrong on both. So you try to tell them that.

When things are booming, everyone wants to buy securities. When things are going down, everybody wants to sell and get out of the market. That, in itself, hurts. Conditions today are entirely different than they were in ’29 [1929]. In ’29 [1929], banks closed. Today you have deposits guaranteed by the government. In the 20’s [1920], there were pools and all sorts of backroom maneuvers and manipulation of stock. That’s no longer possible. You have the Securities Exchange acting as a policeman and checking it. Everything has been improved.

Simon: Do you think the New Deal55 did a pretty good job in regulating this industry?

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55 A series of economic programs from 1933-1936, authored by President Franklin D. Roosevelt, designed to lift the United States out of Depression.
Amrhein: I think that over the years all I see is an improvement which makes it safer for the individual to invest his hard-earned money, and if you work hard for it, you want to be darn careful what you do with it.

Simon: Were you involved in politics at all?

Amrhein: No.

Simon: Locally or anything?

Amrhein: Never.

01:29:11 Simon: You mentioned the Saucon Valley Country Club. Did you join that at some point?

Amrhein: Yes, I joined the Saucon Valley Country Club, and I used to think that would stimulate business. Every Wednesday, Phil Burn (sp?), who was president of the Bethlehem National, and Paul Gainey (sp?), who was local representative of some kind for the Bethlehem Steel Company, and Doc Schleer (sp?), who was a doctor in town, and myself, we had a foursome. We played golf every Wednesday, and why we four just sort of got together was none of us were too good and none of us were too serious about it. We went out and we got recreation. We had fun.

When the Depression got really bad in the 30’s [1930], I resigned from the country club. I resigned from the Bethlehem Club. I got out of everything that cost me money. I figured I had the choice of maintaining a front and not paying my bills, or paying my bills and getting out of things that cost me money, and I think that was pretty smart.

Simon: Did you ever get back in those institutions?

Amrhein: I never rejoined the Bethlehem Club nor the Saucon Valley Country Club. And I’d be honest, I don’t even miss playing golf. The day I left down there, I brought my golf clubs home and eventually gave them away to a doctor friend of mine. I haven’t played one game since, although a lot of people have said, ‘Oh, come on along down and let’s play a game.’ I don’t want to be a dub and play two or three times a year. I can be enough of a dub playing every day. I wasn’t that hot.

Simon: Were you in any other of these social groups like the Lions or the Masons or any of that?

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56 The Saucon Valley Country Club was founded in 1920 by a group of business leaders in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
Amrhein: Well, I joined the Masonic organization when I was 21. At that time, the Masonic organization was more or less of a—it was a social affair. There wasn’t much to do. You didn’t have a theater and all the other forms of entertainment. I joined when I was 21, figuring if I got in when I was 21, I wouldn’t have committed some foolish act that would keep me out of it at some later date. (laughter) So for a while I was rather active. I started working through the chairs and all that and attending all the meetings and committees and stuff, but gradually that petered out. I’m still a member of the organization and the Lehigh Valley Club in Allentown, which is restricted to Masonic members, and that’s about all.

Simon: Were you involved in that partly for business?

Amrhein: No. I found this out. I didn’t get any business because I belonged to the Lehigh Valley Club. I didn’t get any business because I belong to Saucon Valley. I didn’t get any business from that. I don’t think you get any business that way, for the simple reason if you’re going to talk business at the Saucon Valley Country Club— (recording paused)

Amrhein: I don’t think that would help me business-wise, and after you have a couple of drinks, your tongue gets loose, you talk a little bit too much. I think most people want to keep their private investing to themselves. I don’t think they want to discuss it with too many people, and they certainly don’t me to go around and say, ‘Hey, I do business with Lou Foy or somebody like that.’

Simon: In the 20’s [1920], was that, nevertheless, the motivation for a lot of these activities, the Masons?

Amrhein: I think it still is.

Simon: And the country club.

01:33:42 Amrhein: But for me it didn’t work out that way. For instance, I know Lew Foy59. He was, what, chairman of Bethlehem Steel Company? I know him because he’s on the board out at Moravian College60. He and I are trustees of Moravian College. I figure I made money in this business, and my needs are small. I have never wanted to have a $250,000 house down in the Saucon Valley. I don’t want to have a 50-foot yacht. I haven’t any desires of that kind. So my needs are modest, and

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57 Lion’s Club International is a community service organization.
58 A Fraternal organization engaged in charitable endeavors.
59 Lewis Foy was Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Bethlehem Steel from 1974-1980.
60 A private four-year college in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.
consequently I’ve accumulated some money. Now, what are you going to do with it? I haven’t any children. Well, I gave that some thought, and I finally came up with why not help some kid to get through school. So I was asked to serve on the board, and after I was on the board a while, I decided, well, I’m going to set up some funds out here and try to make my money do the most good possible.

The first thing I set up at Moravian College was a loan fund. I got one of the division superintendents of a loan company to come out to Moravian College and tell them how to go about setting up a commercial loan fund. That’s still in operation. They loaned, but I gave them to start with only $10,000, I think. They loaned out the $10,000 to students and professors at a certain rate of interest. Then they took those notes and go to the bank and borrow maybe $8,000 with that as collateral and then they can take that and borrow another and they can keep pyramidind it. So they’ve been doing all right.

Then I got the idea that so few people know anything about investing money. They all think the stock market is gambling. There is such a thing as gambling or speculating, and there’s another thing that’s such as investing. So I started a fund out there with 20 or 30 thousand, I don’t know how much, to buy and sell securities, and actually do it instead of just saying, ‘Now we bought this and now we did this.’ They transfer the stock. They collect the dividends. They keep all kinds of records. They do research in picking it out, and I’ve given them up until now something like $90,000, and I think their portfolio is worth over $90,000, which is a compliment to them.

I also started a scholarship fund, which maybe I’ve given them maybe $40,000, $50,000, and I started a lecture fund to provide them with money to bring outstanding people once or twice a year to talk on business subjects. I’ve restricted everything to business. Even my scholarships are restricted to business students, because I think if I had a son I would say to him, ‘Your greatest opportunities exist in the business field,’ business and maybe law connected with it or something like that, because they’re the people who become the executives and move up much more faster than, let’s say, engineers.

Simon: Having gone to Lehigh, how did you volunteer activities with Moravian?

Amrhein: Well, if I were to give Lehigh $10,000 or $20,000, that would be peanuts. It would go down the drain. I wouldn’t even know where it is. But I’ve given Moravian, say, $200,000 up to date. I’m committed now to give them 50,000 a year for the next five years, so there’s another quarter of a million. But I can see what that money does out there. I have some control over it. I don’t give them a nickel for buildings. I’m opposed to over-expanding on buildings, and somebody gives you the money to put up a building, but they forget to remind you that once you have the building, you’ve got to maintain it. That costs money and it doesn’t bring in any additional income.
When I’m doing, I think, is, first of all, it helps them get good students. It provides a community. For instance, when we have an outstanding lecture, we hold a meeting at the Hotel Bethlehem and invite numerous people in, and we pay for their lunch and everything, and in that way I think it helps the community. I think every student that goes to school should know something about investing, because when he gets through school, whether he goes into the banking business or the security or anything, he should know how to handle his own money, and if he’s going to make any mistakes, he’d better make it with somebody else’s money rather than with his own. So by the time he gets out of Moravian, he’s had some experience.

So I think that the little money I have to contribute to charity will do more good there than maybe the ten or fifteen other charities that I contribute nominal amounts to.

Simon: Did you get involved that through—you said you became a Moravian after you married.

Amrhein: I got involved in it. I was a member of the Rotary Club, and Ray Haupert, who at that time was president of Moravian College, he was a Rotarian, and Harvey Neville was a Rotarian. He was president of Lehigh. Harvey was chiseling me to give Lehigh some money, and Halpert, instead of approaching me for money, asked me to serve on the board. I said, ‘Look, Ray, what good can I do?’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘leave that to us. We think you can or we wouldn’t ask you.’

So after I was on the board for a while, getting money for Moravian was a darn sight easier than Harvey getting money for Lehigh, and I contribute to Lehigh, but it’s nominal compared to what I do for Moravian. So it’s just a question of trying to do as much as you can with little money. Now, that 50 million dollars, I’d probably buy Lehigh a new building and say, ‘All right, now you guys raise the money to run it.’

I have pleasant recollections of Lehigh. I mean, there were some outstanding—there was a fellow in the Physics Department at that time, Benny Franklin (sp?). He was an outstanding man. I think that—oh, what the heck. I mentioned his name before in Economics Department. I thought he was outstanding. There were a number of outstanding people over there. I presume today they’re even better. I think that anyone who teaches has to have a different view of life than most people. I don’t think you go into the teaching profession to become rich. I think that you must be interested in youth and interested in helping the country, and you’re trying to do by teaching what I’m trying to do by not being able to teach, but by getting somebody else into school. It’s a very interesting world, and I’ve enjoyed every bit of it.

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61 Raymond S. Haupert was president of Moravian College from 1944 to 1969.
62 Harvey A. Neville was president of Lehigh University from 1961 to 1964.
Simon: I think that probably covers the ground.

Amrhein: Oh, boy, that covered more ground than—

(End of recording)