

Wilmette Historical Museum
Oral History #94

Abstract

Interviewee: George M. Carpenter

Interviewer: Patrick Leary

Date of Interview: April 1, 2014

General Topics: Grandparents, growing up in Wilmette,
Wilmette Fire Dept, Yule fire, Wilmette Water Plant, Village of Wilmette technology

Minutes into
Interview

Topics Discussed

0 to 5 min.	Mother's father, Dr. Upson – early dentist in Wilmette at 1159 Wilmette Ave. Upsons lived at 607 Washington. Parents married in 1941 & lived at 1514 Wilmette Ave and owned by George until 1999. Father worked in Chicago
5 to 10 min.	George spent a lot of time with grandparents – chores, meals, radio. Some memoirs of WWII – making butter. Has 2 brothers & 1 sister.
10 to 15 min.	Dentist offices – Paul Bass & Grandfather's – many years later saw door with his name on it. Went to St. Joe's then New Trier. Was active in Scouts and Explorers. Canoe trip in Indiana adventure
15 to 20 min.	1950s Wilmette – steam engines – smoke, cinders, man at crossing gates; North Shore Line. Family outing to Walnut Room is a tradition. Neighbors on Wilmette Ave. – Schopens, Starks, Figlies, Grondice, Lindstrom, Hoffmans, etc.
20 to 25 min.	1221 Cleveland (Yule) explosion March 17, 1979; the Wilmette firemen have an annual reunion; Harper School evacuation; injuries
25 to 30 min.	Jack Lindstrom was in charge at Yule event, Yule was burned, others were injured. Firefighters were very skilled in the old days unlike today
30 to 35 min.	After high school, one year of college, then worked at post office (1961-63), then was in the Air Force (63-67), then back to post office then took exam for fire dept. Liked the Wilmette Fire Dept. & ambulance duty
35 to 40 min.	After 7 years –trained in 1st paramedic class (1975). 1967 started as fireman, got 2 weeks of training. Experience is tremendous. Got married in 1973.

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- 40 to 45 min. Paramedic training at St. Francis Hospital. Switch from paramedic to firefighter at scene as needed. Big fire – Evanston lumber yard – used by-standers to help
- 45 to 50 min. Evanston lumber yard – spraying by-standers, explosion; house (8th & Washington) fire experience – help from neighboring towns’ fire departments
- 50 to 55 min. House fire experience. Had to live in Wilmette to be a Wilmette fireman; some second-generation firemen. Rankings – rookie, fire fighter, Lieutenant, Captain, Deputy Chief, Chief. 13 people per shift with 2 paramedics.
- 55 to 60 min. A lot of firemen he knew from St. Joes. Culture changed – more toward education – dive rescue, below ground, paramedic. Equipment changes & rebuilding truck
- 60 to 65 min. Learned computers in Air Force (nuclear missiles)
- 65 to 70 min. Late 1980s fire dept got a computer. Set up roster (Word Perfect); spread sheet of 900 hydrants info - identified Kenilworth Gardens hydrant problem
- 70 to 75 min. Early 1990s specific fire dept software. Handled computer stuff until retired. 1990 became a Lieutenant then promoted to Duty Chief (appointed position). Moved to North Barrington after retired
- 75 to 80 min. Retired in 1997 from Fire Dept.; then worked as instrument technician at Water Plant, did Autocad designs of piping
- 80 to 85 min. Then moved to part time tech person for Village of Wilemtte & set up data base for Village stickers – a big time saver
- 85 to 90 min. 2002 put in Dell network which solved a lot of problems. Retired in 2014. Worked as life guard – 1st job in high school. Met wife rolling skating in Elmhurst.
- 90 to 97 min. Wife (Nancy) married within a year. Nancy went to Northwestern, then masters at Lake Forest, worked at businesses in Chicago. Retirement plans – travel, air shows. Owned a plane with Bernie Thalman of Wilmette for awhile.

End of interview

11/2/2020 drs