

ABSTRACT: George Anderson is a long term resident of Cottage City. His insight into the physical development of Cottage City is particularly interesting. He relates stories about an old tavern, a firehouse, a gambling casino, a mill, and other businesses that have come and gone. He speaks about transportation and roads in the community. Stories about news paper carriers, organ grinders, and vendors are particularly interesting. George has stayed in Cottage City and watched the little and big things change.

George Anderson on Roads: “Very few people burned oil. They burned coal. Oil was more expensive in those days. And it required different equipment. Everybody had a coal bin and a way for the truck to put coal in the bin. But, as you can suppose, there was a problem with ashes. And there was a problem with the mud street out front. Where did the ashes go? Everybody took their ashes and filled the holes out front. And for a while the street would be fairly passable. It would be passable anyway, because if a man wants to get home he’s going to drive through the holes. But the walking was terrible, very terrible.”

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George Anderson's House – Built 1906 for Thomas Ryan , County Treasurer.



Original Firehouse – Built 1923



Cottage City Neighborhood Park – Site of Former Mill – 1932



Cottage City – Site of former Friends House – circa 1930

Port Towns Interview Project
Suzanne Stasiulatis interviewing George Anderson Sr.
Interview at 3716 38th Ave., Cottage City (Brentwood), MD 20722-1816
December 3, 2007

Suzanne: Can you state your name, age, and where you're from?

George Anderson: George Anderson, age 85. I was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Suzanne: How long have you been a resident of Cottage City?

George Anderson: We first moved here in 1925.

Suzanne: What is your occupation or previous occupation?

George Anderson: Previous occupation...I processed health claims for the American Postal Workers Union.

Suzanne: And you worked for the railroad too?

George Anderson: I worked for the railroad previously.

Suzanne: What was that like?

George Anderson: Well, it was in a ticket office. First, I answered inquires for schedules. First I maked reservations, and then worked up to what they called information. Then, I worked with schedules and fares and then selling tickets. And during the war they always had lines of service people and others buying tickets. So, they needed plenty of ticket sellers.

Suzanne: What is your favorite childhood story in Cottage City?

George Anderson: I guess the story about the old mill in the northern part of town.

Suzanne: Can you tell me about it?

George Anderson: Many, many years ago, before I was even born, there was a man who had a mill down there. There was a port at Bladensburg and of course, they could connect. And right behind his mill, later I suppose, another man bought the property and put up a big house somewhere on it. I never saw it. But he built two lakes, with riding paths around the lake. We used to walk on those paths. But then later on, we found out why he abandoned them and destroyed some of them. It was because his daughter was riding and was thrown from a horse and it killed her. The remains of the mill were around for a long time. And the remains of the lakes and the bridle paths were around for a long time. But now there is a subdivision in there.

Suzanne: And where is that?

George Anderson: It's at the north end of town right off of Bunker Hill Road.

Suzanne: If you were writing a history of Cottage City, what would you include?

George Anderson: Well, of course, I would include that. I would probably mention people by name and things that I had been told by them or that we had discussed.

Suzanne: We want to know about history and development in the community. What were your experiences as a child or young adult in Cottage City?

George Anderson: Regarding development and regarding history.... Well, as far as I know, the town never had a historian. As far as I know, it still doesn't. Development was done by a commercial developer, who bought the land and divided it into 25 foot lots. Nobody tried to build on a 25 foot lot. Generally, if there was a notion to buy, they bought two. And that was ample. The sale of the lots kind of lagged a little bit. He had a contest, maybe weekly, maybe monthly. He advertised in the newspaper. Some of the old newspapers may have the ad. He gave away lots. But they weren't building lots. They were 25 foot lots. My house is on three lots. But he would give away lots. And the lot he gave away often was in between two double lots. In other words, the fifth lot, in between two lots on each side that had dwellings built on them. They weren't really useful for anything, but they were free. People took them. Then, it had to be decided later on as people in one double lot inquired to increase their property or split the 25 foot lot with the other people... people in the other two lots. That happened quite often. That was historical. Eventually, I suppose, he disposed of all his lots. I don't think there are any left in the town that were won. As matter of fact, there are very few vacant lots in the town. The developer did what he could and then he sold what he had left. Another developer came in and built bungalows. There were two maybe three different standard floor plans. We had one, originally two blocks down the street, which was one of the larger ones. Then they had a smaller one, and I'm not sure, but I think they had a smaller one yet. Then later on, after he moved out, people either built on them or sold them. And that's why we have so many miscellaneous dwellings. But mostly, it's Cottage City. The area was known as Highlands. Before 1924, I suppose, '23 or '24, somewhere in there, it was known as Highlands. And before that it wasn't known as anything, but that was way back. The original developer called it Highlands, because it was higher than the port. Of course, many parts of Bladensburg are higher than the port, but that was already a town. That's, to my knowledge, that is the extent of the history.

The rest of the history of the town, of course, is all personal. Families move in and have children. They grow up. Some of them you never hear of again. Some of them you stay in contact with. The rest of the history is pretty much personal. The fire department, of course, has a history in the town. There was an elementary school where the town hall is now. That had a history. The principal had been a principal there for years and years and years. And every child in town was afraid of her. She was very stern. Historically, the children from Colmar Manor came across Alternate Route 1, which is Bladensburg Road

now, to go to school. They walked, which they don't do much anymore. That was historical. We had some that lived nearer to our school than the Brentwood school. So, they came to our school. They didn't really form town borders for the school. I guess they were geographical to a certain extent.

Suzanne: How has Cottage City changed since you lived here?

George Anderson: Like any other town it has changed in its composition. The Black people, when I was a boy, lived in North Brentwood. And, of course, walking, they walked through the town, if they needed to get someplace on the other side. They were employed in the town for various purposes, I suppose, as their skills and needs required.

Suzanne: What's different?

George Anderson: The ethnic nature of the town composition is much different now. But you can't tell by riding down any of the streets. The town government has not changed. The officials, of course, have changed many, many times. There was talk a while back of buying a long strip of houses at the north end of the town, and putting a big school, a county school, in there. I think it was somebody's pipe dream. It wouldn't have been practical by any means. But it got everybody upset. And the town officials, of course, some got elected because of it and some didn't get elected also because of it, depending on their positions. It would not have benefited the town. The town annexed property on the south end, on the other side of the creek, which amounted to, I suppose, 1/7th of the area now. It became an industrial park. That was a change. That property formally belonged to a gambler named Jimmy LaFontaine. He had a casino there and big green wood fence all the way around. And part of his property was in the District and part of his casino was in the District, because there was no connecting road to cross his property, which there is now. It's called Eastern Avenue, but there was no Eastern Avenue then. He had a house on the north end of his property. I never saw him there, but I understand he had a sister that lived there. But he built a house in the District on the corner of his property. It is no longer there. Neither one of those houses are there anymore. He had a fleet of limousines that brought gamblers from an intersection or two in D.C., and when they were finished gambling, it took them back. And if a gambler lost the grocery money and his wife called Jimmy, Jimmy said, "You can't come to my place anymore." But he put her on the list for Thanksgiving and Christmas, as well as any poor people that he knew of. Thanksgiving and Christmas, all his limousines were busy carrying baskets to the poor. And the survivor of a poorly spent income, they would still be poor. But that was what he did. And he had friends. Not everyone liked the idea of having a gambling casino so close to the town. As far as I could ever see, it was not a nuisance. He was raided from time to time, but never by the District and Maryland. If he was raided by Maryland, by the time they got there, all the equipment was moved to the D.C. end of his casino. And the same way, when D.C. raided. He got wind of it, and all his equipment would be moved over to the Maryland side. Eventually, I think he just died of old age. He was famous. There were bookies in Washington. I think there are bookies in every town.

Changes: We didn't have a police force when I was a boy and for a long time after that. There was one enterprising young man in another town nearby, that said, "Well, if you want, I'll look after your town as well as mine." And so, he'd cruise around in his own car with a badge. I guess he got paid by a portion of fines or something like that. We have a commissioner type of government. We don't have a mayor and council. As far as I know, we're the only town around this area that has that type of government. Why we have it, I have no idea. I think it's unwieldy compared to the others. Still, it has worked.

The town has changed also. So have the state and the county, with regard to fireworks. When I was a boy the firework manufacturers from North Carolina would come up and open up stands. All the fire departments would open up stands, the American Legion or any organization or individual that wanted to sell fireworks. And the firework stands were almost solid from the District line to Peace Cross, including along Jimmy LaFontaine's property. And, of course, then they decided fireworks were safe. But the dogs crawled under the porch about the middle of May and stayed there till after the 4th of July, because you could get fireworks around the 1st of June, and people did. The kids did. They'd spend their allowance. Well, they didn't ruin their teeth that way with candy. They burned up their allowance.

Getting back to Jimmy LaFontaine, he allowed the fire departments to play ball on his property. And they had a grandstand. And they had a league. Every fire department had a team, a baseball team. And he made his property available for that. That's another point in his favor.

The community has changed: We never had semi-detached houses, like what you would call townhouses, until a good portion of the old mill and the lakes property got sold to some fellow. Of course, they fought over that. But there's no question the property belonged to him. He could build anything that was legal in the county, if we didn't have ordinances against it. And they were going to have a petition, and so forth. But his townhouses eventually got built and occupied. I suppose there are probably representatives in the town government from that area. We've had apartments. As long as I can remember, pretty near so, that would be from 1929 up. But most of them were built in those five or six years after 1929. How they could build when the economy was in such bad shape, I don't know. Historically, three apartments stand where...I'm looking out the window right now... there was an old inn that was on the post road to Baltimore or Philadelphia or whatever. Of course, we were very much out in the country then. And it had two porches, a ground floor and the floor above. It was a long narrow building. And this president or that president is supposed to have stopped there for food or lodging or something. Anyhow, eventually it burned and that's when they built the apartments. But that was called the Friends House. And it's hard to visualize which properties originally had tremendous pieces of ground around them. They were talked out of, I suppose, because the main road from Bladensburg to D.C. went right through Cottage City. That was Bunker Hill Road. At one time, it was called Rock Creek Church Road. It went from Bladensburg, through D.C., and north of the US Soldiers Home to Rock Creek Church Cemetery. It shows as Bladensburg on some of the old plats. I have gone to the library on Adelphi Road. There were others that said Old Friends House was a way

station on the Underground Railroad. Well, you hear that up and down the country. I think, by and large, most of the way stations were private homes. But after they tore it down, or after it burnt down and they took away the rubbish, the foundation was still there. It wasn't a single area. It was divided up into like cells. Of course there were no doors visible, just openings. The most popular notion was that it was wine cellars for the inn. Now, it could've been used for other purposes also, I don't know. That was an interesting development.

Now, elsewhere in the town, the building across the street from the apartments is an old fire house. That was the first firehouse in the town from, I suppose, 1927, in that area. Prior to that time, they had a hose wagon that didn't have horses or motor on it. They just pulled it. A bunch of guys pulled it. It had a big tank on it and they attempted to put out fires that way. There was a water tower in the other part of town that served the residents in that area until we had city water. I have a well right outside. See that concrete right outside my window? That was a well. We never used it. It was closed up. Under Maryland law you can't have a well if you have city water or city water is available. They make it difficult for you at the very least. This house was built in 1906. The oldest house in town is supposed to be right across from where the mill was. I knew a lady that worked at the town hall, she volunteered, she didn't really work there, who said she was raised there. She said, "That is the oldest house in town." I couldn't argue with her. It doesn't look old. It's a different style, a much different style. It could have belonged to the mill keeper. Somewhere, there is correspondence or other written documents that could shed light on it. But how do you find them. They're in somebody's old trunk somewhere, a journal, a diary. It's just lost history really. Everything else is conjecture.

We had a train station, right across the tracks from where the school was. That was a crossing for the students that came from that other part of town, or that other area. And they had a platform. The trains, the local trains to Baltimore, stopped and people rode to Baltimore on it or rode to Laurel on it or rode in to D.C. or rode into Fleischman's Yeast Plant. Fleischman's had a big yeast plant, where the bus garage is now. About, I would say, close to half way between here and the capital. If you go in Bladensburg Road and follow Maryland Avenue, it takes you right to the capital. I've ridden the train. I've ridden it to work, but not for very long, because it meant walking from here down to the train station. There was also a siding and freight was received there. When I was a little boy, friends of my parents in Uniontown, Pennsylvania, sent a dog for me, a pure bred Airedale which they bred. That was one of their separate activities. They picked one of their dogs and put it in a crate, and shipped it to Brentwood. And when the freight agent sent word to my mother... We never had a phone. I think in the whole neighborhood there was one phone. And everybody would get calls there, because money was scarce. Then whoever lived there would whistle or call somebody or put a sweater on and come tell you, you had a phone call or something like that. The freight agent got in touch with my mother and she gathered me up and we took my wagon down there and got the crate with the dog. But the dog wouldn't stay close to home and got on Bladensburg Road and got hit. I enjoyed it for a while.

So, eventually...the mail came into Brentwood station on the train. There was this big hook that the express train coming through could throw off bags of mail and grab others off of this hook without stopping. They had the hook and the post office guy had a wheel barrow. He'd bring his wheel barrow up over and pick up the mail, whichever direction the train was going, take it to the post office, and they'd sort it out. There were railway mail cars on most of the trains. A post office person or two or three would work the mail before the train got to that stop, put it in a sack, and off it went. Service was pretty good, I thought.

We used to be able to ride bicycles in the street. We used to be able to sleigh ride in the street. We used to be able to block the street off, so the cars had to go a different way. We could sleigh ride on the street. Cause we had substantial snows. There wasn't that much area to ride bicycles of fairly level nature. And besides that you're supposed to stay close to home.

But prior to that, when we first moved to Cottage City in 1925, the streets were not paved. There were no curbs or sidewalks. Very few people burned oil. They burned coal. Oil was more expensive in those days. And it required different equipment. Everybody had a coal bin and a way for the truck to put coal in the bin. But, as you can suppose, there was a problem with ashes. And there was a problem with the mud street out front. Where did the ashes go? Everybody took their ashes and filled the holes out front. And for a while the street would be fairly passable. It would be passable anyway, because if a man wants to get home he's going to drive through the holes. But the walking was terrible, very terrible.

We used to have a nursery in town. Not for children, for plants and flowers. And that was at the creek across from the Dueling Grounds, what they call the Dueling Grounds in Colmar Manor. Mr. Burton had a big house on Bladensburg Road. In front of his house, the ground dropped off, and there was a pool and a driveway. The driveway was closest to Bladensburg Road. He had a lot of trucks. He had growing property that ran almost the width of the town down in the hollow, behind houses. The property wasn't useable to the houses. Some of them had a little bit of that, but most of it was his. I went to school with one of his sons, and I knew one of his son's sisters. The family is all gone now. The house is still there. It doesn't even look like it did then. It was a grand place. You would turn off of Bladensburg Road, and go down a grade and around the driveway into the front of the house between the pool and the house. And then to get out there was another driveway that went up to Bladensburg Road. And, of course, then there was a place where he kept his trucks. It's an alley that is up in the other part of town. And he kept his trucks back in by his nursery. I guess he was a pretty smart fellow. Eventually, they built a flower shop on part of their property, next to the first street coming off of Bladensburg Road. It was the first street in the town. And they had a nice flower shop there. The building is still there, but it's some sort of automobile repair shop now. He had older boys, two, three, four older boys. He liked to have them working with him. But they fought. They fought each other all the time. I think only one or maybe two of them used the knowledge they got from their father. And they opened up nurseries, one way up in

Montgomery County and one quite a ways from here, still in Prince George's County. But they're gone now.

Well, we used to have carnivals. The Fire Department had a big area between the gas station and their new fire house on Bladensburg Road. But insurance got too high. People would get hurt on the ride. The carnival people didn't have insurance. They were transients. The sponsor was required to have insurance to cover injuries. And it got very, very expensive. And one by one they quit having carnivals. The property got sold and buildings got built on it.

Getting back to the old fire house, I can remember as a boy hearing the fire siren on the fire house. They had a big electric siren on it. And the first fireman there turned the siren on with a key. There was no central dispatch or anything like that. He turned the siren on and one by one, in cars or on foot, they'd get enough firemen. And they had an old fire engine that didn't even have an electric siren. It has a siren on a post on the running board. And one fireman had to stand on that running board and crank that siren. It had an exhaust whistle. An exhaust whistle is on the exhaust pipe. It meant closing a valve to the outside to make the exhaust go through the whistle. And in so doing it slowed the truck down. Until they got up speed they never used the exhaust whistle. But in the middle of the night, they'd get up speed when they got almost to Peace Cross and they'd turn on the exhaust whistle. You could hear it for the next 5 miles, if the fire was quite a ways out Defense Highway. That was quite memorable.

Like I say the development was slow and the government kind of kept up with it. They stayed slow until recently. There are some younger people taking an interest in the government nowadays. Most of the others, prior to that time, were just in it for their own self-aggrandizement. I was a commissioner once. My father was a commissioner. When he was commissioner, each commissioner was a policeman and had a little badge about the size of a postage stamp. We still have wards. I think we have four. And somebody would knock on the door if there was trouble and it's up to the commissioner to go settle it. But none of the troubles were ever very serious.

Very few people had a radio, when we moved here. But the streetcar came to Mt. Rainer, and when there was any kind of trouble the boys knew to come to the terminal or else they brought the boys with them. But you could hear them for a half a mile shouting, "Extra papers." Notably, was when Lindbergh's son was kidnapped by a German fellow, and also when the Von Hindenburg zeppelin exploded in New Jersey. That was an Extra paper. They'd put out extra papers and they loaded them on a streetcar with these carriers or picked up the carriers locally. I don't know which they did. Of course, nobody had storm windows in those days. There was no such thing as a storm window. So, you could hear. And people would open the windows for fresh air in the winter time. They would bank the furnaces and open the windows for fresh air and live right. And you could hear them. You didn't turn on your radio, because you didn't have one or else there would be nothing on there anyway. Stations worked in the daytime. Extra papers were mostly in the middle of the night. I never thought of it until just now. There could have been extra

papers in the daytime, but I would have been in school. I wouldn't have known anything about it. Some people saved their Extra papers. It just said extra. "Extra, Extra papers."

We had traveling fruit venders, carried two big, flat baskets, board-like baskets and they would shout their wares all over town. We had an Italian scissors grinder and he came around and had a bell. He just rang that bell. And once in a while, we'd get the organ grinder. Not very often. He didn't get much money out of our town, the organ grinder and the monkey. They came around in the town. People didn't go to this place or that place, the enterprise came to them. Get the kid's picture taken on a pony. The guy would park his truck with the pony stall on it at one end of town, take the pony off, and start out with his camera over his shoulder and his pony. He'd work the whole town. And sell enough pictures to make his pay for that week or make money for the guy who owned the business at least. These different things, of course, have changed. Nothing like that happens anymore. People started building mental walls against solicitations, urging the town to pass an ordinance to make them buy a license. The Good Humor man has to get a license to sell ice cream in the town.

Social activities: We used to have a nice little church about 3 or 4 blocks from here. When I was a child, it was a church. There was one church in our town. There was one church in the town across Bladensburg Road. If people wanted to go to church, they'd go to the church in our town. Unless they were big shots and they'd go over to Mt. Rainer or out Hyattsville or something like that. But they would walk. It's too far to walk. A man and his wife have to work. And then they have to pay a babysitter and this and that and the other thing. It's terrible. There's no time for miscellaneous cultural events. I shouldn't say miscellaneous. Even on Sunday, the wife's not going to work and do the housework without help. And the husband wouldn't do it either. They have to share it. But that doesn't leave time for other activities. And that's still the case. And that became the case some years ago. And the churches felt more impact from that than other organizations. Probably, the PTA felt the impact of that. It's an economic situation. I can't change it and you can't change it either. But it's on the way with this mortgage flap we're having. People are in over their heads. It's going to take something big of that nature to bring the prices down to where a mother can stay home and raise her children the way she thinks they should be raised.

There's been little miscellaneous crimes, misdeeds and things like that around. Everybody is not of sterling character that lives or has lived in this town. Then, it becomes a juicy plum for gossip and so forth and it either blows over or they move away or spend the rest of their life in jail. That part didn't happen that I know of. I guess that concludes that.

Suzanne: Ok. So, you were born in Philadelphia?

George Anderson: I was born in West Philadelphia, right near to the University of Philadelphia, Wharton College, which is a business college, because my father was attending there and he wanted to be able to walk to school. He had a car, probably a 1924 or '25 Chevrolet, that we used to travel across Pennsylvania on the Lincoln Highway.

You know where the Lincoln Highway is? Route 30. That's the Lincoln Highway. Route 22 is the William Penn Highway. And of course, the turnpike. The turnpike was originally going to be a railroad. My mother and father were both, from western Pennsylvania. And of course Philadelphia is eastern Pennsylvania. We drove across there. On one of those rides, for some reason, they decided not to keep driving. It got dark and probably the car wasn't acting right or something. We spent the night in the basement of a garage. They kept hogs in the basement and the owner said, "Well, there's room for your car if you don't mind the hogs." Well, hogs didn't make any noise, but they had flies. And flies carry bacteria to this little two year old baby...me. So, that's how come I got infantile paralysis. Course, not much was known about it. I doubt that it was diagnosed right away. I'm certain there were no antibiotics then, prescribed treatments or after care. You can imagine distraught parents after that. Of course, I didn't care. I was only two years old. I didn't know what distraught meant. So, that's what happened there. And they moved to the Washington area I think in 1924 and bought the house down the street in 1925.

Suzanne: Why did they move?

George Anderson: Because he finished in college. He had a brother who was living here selling insurance. And my father sold aluminum cookware to get his way through college. His family wasn't rich and he was determined to get an education. His brother decided he needed help. So, they came here. The idea was not to remain in Philadelphia. The idea was to go somewhere where people had jobs. They were just coming off of a big depression then. It was the one before 1929. There was another one. So, they both wanted to go where people had jobs and therefore would have a little money to spend. And if a lot of people spend a little money it's the same as one person spending a lot. Except that one person's hard to find. We came here, my mother and I and my father. I don't remember very well, because I was too little, but I think they had an apartment in D.C. somewhere. But it was not for very long, just until this house was finished. We moved into a brand new house two blocks from here. By this second or third developer that came along. He was the last developer. I think I have seen the house where I was born. The doctor was about 4 blocks down the street. My father had to get up out of a sound sleep and get the doctor when I showed up. The woman, the landlady or somebody nearby was a midwife, and together they took care of things. That was the end of Philadelphia. Except when I became 6 or 7 years of age, I was in Philadelphia every summer for operations and therapies for the after effects of the infantile paralysis, which is muscular atrophy. Sometimes the atrophy doesn't set in right away and it's not uniform as to right and left. For some reason, it seems to attack the legs. Maybe, they're the furthest from wherever the headquarters of the infantile paralysis. But anyhow, I would go right after I got out of school to Philadelphia to Shriner's Hospital. They would do their assessment and operation and braces and all that. And by gosh, before school started, I'd be home ready to go to school, maybe on crutches, maybe with a brace. But I didn't miss any school. There were a lot of youngsters there for long term and they had school there. But they didn't have it in summer time. So, I didn't know how it worked. That went on till I was 14 or so and then I was too old for their program. So, we had to take what was left.

Suzanne: Why did you decide to stay here?

George Anderson: I didn't. My parents did. But after I graduated from High School, I went a year and a half to the University of Maryland. I thought I wanted to be an electrical engineer. It turned out they were a glut on the market. And the war came along, of course, I wound up with 4f. All my friends were 1A, which is the draft status. And I couldn't see staying there when it was kind of useless anyway, when I could be useful somewhere else. And all the young fellows at the train depot were being drafted. And they needed help. So, I went down there. That was the closest I could come to assisting in a war effort.

Afterwards, in 1937...my father always liked a big house. The other was a bungalow. And so, this house was under renovation. And he approached the lender, the mortgage people, to let him finish the renovation. They were down to things he could do. So, he made a deal. I don't think my mother ever liked the house. She never had this kind of a cabinet. It was a little 2x4 kitchen, with a cabinet, roll door on the front, a flour sifter built in. We didn't have a refrigerator for years and years, nobody did. We had an ice box. And the guy came around with an ice truck, threw a chunk of ice on his shoulder, and brought it in and put it in your ice box. Anyhow, my father always liked a big house. So, we moved here in 1937. And I was still living here in 1940, when I graduated from high school. I lived here until 1943. Of course then, my family came along. So, I was away until 1981. My mother was in a nursing home. A guy rented a room upstairs and he was getting tired of looking after the house. My mother died, so I moved in. But the house had been deeded over to my brother and me. In 1981, all I had to do was pay him for his half of the house. And here I am. My mother died in '87. My father didn't live very long. He died in 1960. But he had a rheumatic heart. It was somewhat same situation that I faced. He was a young boy on the farm and he got rheumatic fever. In those days, if they were properly diagnosed, there was a recovery period. It was total rest for like 3 or 4 months in a darkened room, so the aftereffects of the fever didn't attack the heart. He lived on the farm. They called it the grippe. They thought he had the grippe. A lot of people in Pennsylvania, if you get a bad cold, it's the grippe. Soon as his symptoms had passed, he was expected to get back to his chores on the farm. Well, that was the completely wrong thing to do. He developed a rheumatic heart later in life. He pretty much ignored it until it was so bad that he was too weak for an operation. Maybe, he didn't even know he had a rheumatic heart until he started getting weak. I don't know. But anyhow, he died in 1960. And I have lived 25 years longer than he did. And I feel kind of feel guilty about that.

Suzanne: What was high school like for you? Did you go to school around here?

George Anderson: High school was a good 4 ½ to 5 miles from here in the District. But at the time, I and many other kids in this area got out of grade school. Maryland only had 4 years of high school. It went from grade school to high school, no junior high school. District had a junior high school and high school, three years each. You got an extra 2 years education in the District. The only requirement was that some member of your family was employed in D.C. Didn't mean that they were a tax payer or anything like

that. They changed it later, of course. There were very few who wanted to go to D.C. who couldn't. Now, a lot of them wanted to get out of school, grade school, 6 grades, four in high school and I'm ready to go earn the money to buy my Chevrolet and all that sort of stuff. A lot of my friends did go to Maryland high schools. But, by and large, they went to D.C. It was a big school. Junior high school was a big school. The only way to keep order in a big school is to have a certain amount of regimentation. I didn't really have any way to get back to school for extracurricular activities. They weren't immediately after school, most of them. They were like in the evenings. Or if they had an outing that they were going to meet and go somewhere that was the meeting point was after dinner. I had no way to get back there for those things. Extracurricular wise I wasn't in much. I wasn't too fond of school in the beginning. I didn't have sense enough to know that 90% to 100% of it I would need after I got out of school. I was told. But to me that was just a pitch. That was just a sales talk. But anyhow, I took an academic course. I managed to get my diploma on time. I was in the high school cadets, but of course I was in the office. They tried me at the marching thing. It didn't work. But I got that and I got hold of a second hand uniform. Uniforms in those days, there was a special store downtown. One uniform might go through about 8 or 10 cadets, before it finally fell apart. People bought them second hand. Anyhow, I liked this instructor.

Nature Club, yeah, I was in the nature club, but I couldn't always go on their outings. Climbing, forget that climbing stuff. That's not for me. Pool parties, swim, can't swim. Go skating, I can't skate. But I can go on weenie roasts. That's no problem. We used to have weenie roasts down at the lakes in Cottage City. I just happened to think of that.

High school: One teacher stands out in my mind. He taught physics. Most other courses I couldn't see. I couldn't tell the good from the bad really. There was no bad, but the useful from the useless. But everything that he taught clicked, fit in place, because he had a way of convincing. Well, different things that we learned, like heat rising, you can use. You can put them to work for you. Momentum, centrifugal force. All those things, they clicked in place. He told us, "Kids you can violate the laws of your country and the laws of your church and maybe get away with it. But if you violate the laws of physics you will not get away with it, whether you're rich or poor, pretty or ugly." He was a great guy. I've thought of him many times. And of course, sometimes I'll forget the laws of physics and I wind up with a messed up finger or something like that. I think everybody should be required to take it. But they offered chemistry or physics. Which do you want, "Oh, I like that idea of just mixing stuff up." Well, some friends of mine became famous chemists. One guy worked at Oak Ridge, in Tennessee, at the atomic plant. There were not many musicians. Actually, there were not many carpenters or brick layers. Mostly they were technical, because McKinley is a technical high school. A person going to a Maryland high school talks to the other one, "What are you taking?" Oh, starts telling him what all he's taking, because he wants to make him feel bad, because he wouldn't go into the District in the first place. By and large, the kids became involved not necessarily professionally, but in technical fields. The war made a big difference. It took all these young men in the town and in the next town and in the next town. We had a monument out here in the corner of our lot with the names of all the boys in town that went into the service. And then after the war ended, they replaced it with a bronze tablet of all the ones

that didn't come back. And that stayed there for several years, after I moved back in 1981. And by that time, the town had the old school property. The school building had been torn down. They built a nice new town hall, had plenty of room around it. I said, "Folks you need to move that monument off of my Daddy's property." Because the only reason it was there was because the town didn't own any property then. I said, "You need to take that monument off of my Daddy's property and put it some prominent place down here." And they did. And it's still there as far as I know.

Suzanne: What is your favorite spot in the community?

George Anderson: Right here.

Suzanne: Right here? Was there a place you liked to go when you were younger?

George Anderson: Yeah, sure. Across the street from my girlfriend's house. Well, favorite spot in the community. I suppose it would be the church.

Suzanne: Which church?

George Anderson: It was a Presbyterian church. It's the only one in town. There was nothing unusual. There were no playgrounds in the town. There was a ball field way down next to the lakes. Now it has houses on it. Part of the property Park and Planning has taken over for ball fields. They have a tennis court. They don't have a pool. That was a big question mark when people moved into town. "Where are the recreation areas?" "Well, we don't have any, sorry." The kids grew up anyway. I think, by and large, they turned out good. I don't hear from many of them. But I didn't have a favorite spot. I didn't go in people's houses. I rode my bike. I could ride a bike, how about that. I rode my bike, and so did all my buddies. And they rode their bikes and take off for the airport. There was an airport way over in Mt. Rainer and there was an airport out River Road past where you're living. They're both gone now. There was no favorite spot, per se. The spot where I consistently spent the most time would have been at the church or at home.

Suzanne: What is your favorite landmark or historic site in the community?

George Anderson: Favorite landmark or historic site. Well, I kind of like the new firehouse. The old firehouse is more of a landmark, but it's not at an intersection. A typical landmark is a place where you turn, alter your route. I can't say either one of the firehouses, but they're unique. The old one is about as small as it could ever be and the new one is about as big as it could ever be. Other than that no landmarks. We had one filling station in the town for years and years. We finally got another one, a Sunoco Station. But neither one of them are dispensing gasoline now.

Suzanne: How do you feel about the term Port Towns? Is it effective in drawing attention to history?

George Anderson: I think it's commercialized. I think it's a CDC tool. Nobody wants to be called Port Towns. They'd be much better off to group all the towns and take a vote for consolidation, number one, and have a prime committee to pick a name, either a combination of one or two or three or a totally unique name and it wouldn't be Port Towns. It would be Port Towns if we still had a port. But we don't. I can't quite visualize big, wooden ships coming up the Anacostia River to Bladensburg. But times could have been a whole lot different. The channel could have been a lot deeper then. You didn't have defoliation in the form of construction and asphalt and so forth. And an original deep channel would have stayed that way. I can't quite visualize it as a port. Of course Peace Cross was not there then. And there must have been a bridge of some sort between Cottage City and Highlands and Bladensburg. There had to be a bridge of some sort for Route 1. Route 1 has always been Route 1. It went past Peace Cross. Whether Peace Cross was there or not, we don't know. That was US 1, because people in Maine went to Florida on Route 1. People in Florida went to Maine in the summertime. Of course, it was three or four days to get there. They had their camping gear or favorite tourist homes. In those days it was all tourist homes. You put a sign out with a light in it even if you were a block away from Route 1. And people watched and if they saw a sign they'd come in and for a couple dollars a night get a place to sleep. I'll show you on this plat when we get done with the recorder.

Suzanne: How have gender roles changed? For women and men?

George Anderson: Oh, gosh you're getting on a sensitive subject now. Well, when I was a boy, the girls did the same thing as the boys if they felt like it. It's not to say that the boys did the same thing as the girls if they felt like it. But they were gentler. If they were playing ball and the girl was playing with them, they didn't try to make her wish she hadn't started playing with them. Now, that is gender roles as children. Now, are we talking about gender roles as adults? Ok, gender roles as an adult. Well, I can remember instances where women lived together, bought a house together. Men lived together, bought a house together. Never gave it a second thought. Don't have time to get married. Got a rough deal from a girl when I was in high school. Turned me against women. The transgender idea never occurred to me, until recently. I doubt if it hasn't existed in some form for centuries. Sissyfied. We called it sissyfied, because the mother wanted a girl and she got a boy. And she never did get a girl, so the last boy she made a girl of him. Or she wanted a boy and never got a boy, so she made a tomboy out the last girl or first girl or somebody. Or the father did.

Suzanne: How have conceptions of race changed?

George Anderson: Conceptions of race, ethnic origins you mean? When I was a boy, there was a lot of people at work, top notch white people in the town. And my parents would say, "We'd just as soon see you let him find his own friends." Or, "They won't be around very long. We'll tolerate them." See good in everybody. But there were, and the older you got, the more you could see that in the White race there were crumbs. And all the elites lived over in Chevy Chase. We were kind of in the middle. And a lot of people never made it to the middle, or never tried or didn't want to. Now, the same thing

happens in other minority races. So called minority, we're minority now. They were united, apparently, to promote. When they got an idea of what each other were really like, then they started becoming discriminating. There are a lot of minorities that won't have anything to do with each other. Because they set standards, whatever his color. If he doesn't meet that standard, we don't want anything to do with him. It's the old caste system. It shouldn't be. Middle class. Working class. Rich class. The class system was supposed to be out the window when the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. Who's to say the Indians didn't have a class system. But greed, greed leads to class.

Suzanne: Let's talk about children in Cottage City. Do children who grow up here stay in Cottage City?

George Anderson: Well, I personally don't think we can do enough for the children, if we do it the right way. But we can't do it much. I'll put it that way. We don't do enough. We don't see what's being done either. The sanctity of the home. We don't know if children are being corrected or not. Until about two weeks ago, one or the other of a couple old people would walk a little boy up here to wait for the school bus, because the school bus travels 38th. And they'd stand there, not really close, not too much talking, just on guard or on duty and so forth like that. The old man, has to be as old as me, and this young boy that could be a grandchild or great grandchild or somebody that they adopted or foster child. But anyhow, they'd walk. And then another time, maybe the man wasn't feeling good, a little old woman also old. But you can't help that women's age. You don't discuss that. She'd walk with him up ahead. Well, the last week or week and a half, that young man has walked up by himself with his book bag. And put the backpack down and sit on it. Or stand with the backpack and danced around. He's probably going to be a dancer or a musician or something. You can see him getting bigger. I figured it was going to happen sooner or later. Now, that's children. We had streetlights for years in the town. And they'd come on when it got dark. Most everybody had a rule, said at home, "When street lights come on, you come home." Well, some of them were strictly enforced, and some of them weren't. There were stragglers. But the smaller the group gets, there is less desire to remain. Everybody gives up finally and goes home. Curfew. You need a curfew in a heavily populated area, because of people coming in from outside. The better you are the more people want to tear you down or rob you. You can't do it on your own. Kids are the same way. If you've got one person in the group that's smart, but not smart enough to keep it to themselves, then first thing, instead of the others trying to climb, they try to tear that one person down. Equality. That is not equality. Equality is striving. And it doesn't mean striving to keep from being torn down. You've got human nature involved in a lot of this. But it can be guided. You can't tell the kids, "As soon as you get off of the school bus, you go to the town hall and you stay there till supper time and you do whatever they tell you to do. Whatever program they've got going that day, I want you there." It gets tiresome after a while. Television hasn't helped, but the internet is far worse. The radio is nice. When I was a kid, out playing with a scooter, wagon, bicycle, whatever, I'd hear the Amos and Andy theme song come on the radios. Now, it was in the summertime. People didn't have air-conditioning. They kept their windows open. They had these radios with great big speakers on them, because they were the only speakers that worked for them. And you could hear the theme song coming out. "Uh oh, Amos and Andy. It's time to go

home.” Now, air-conditioning comes along. Fine. Cool. No, I don’t have air-conditioning. I don’t want air-conditioning. I grew up with natural temperatures. I’ve got this ceiling fan. All that does is circulate. In the wintertime, it draws the cold air off the floor and drives the warm air down the side. In the summertime, I turn it. It pulls the hot air down when you don’t need it, but circulates it, because you don’t want it to accumulate up there. I know people whose windows haven’t been open for years, summer or winter. My mother used to open the windows to air out the house. I said, “Air what?” She said, “The bad air.” I said, “Doesn’t smell bad to me.”

Suzanne: How is the town connected to other communities? Through transportation, through road networks, or different families living in the same general area around here?

George Anderson: Well, of course, relatives are a connection, whether it’s Bladensburg to Camp Hill or Cottage City to Philadelphia or western Pennsylvania. I used to have a lot of cousins. Now, I have 3 left, one way up in New York State near Erie, one in Pittsburgh, one in Georgia. It’s kind of rough. I haven’t seen any of them for years. That’s too far away. Now, my son’s family or my son and his family or his wife are about 4 miles from here in north College Park, what they call Hollywood. So, he can get down here to see if I’m alright, when he feels like it, which amounts to once every 10 days or 2 weeks. I can get out there to visit with them, if I call first and they’re not doing anything else. Kind of bad. But still it’s a connection. Now, if we are talking about the old days where a member of the family took a walk to see if there was a place to live within walking distance, even if it was a different community. Yes, that would be affected.

Now, how is this community connected? It is connected with a bridge here and a US highway running this way. When Highlands was in existence or before that even, when Bunker Hill Road went from Bladensburg to Rock Creek Church it went across the railroad on a grade crossing – no bridge. You have to have a bridge across water unless you ford it. You still have a grade crossing in Bladensburg. They fought for years to get that overhead. But anyhow, sometime before we moved here, there was a wooden bridge, up here where the concrete one is now. It’s been replaced a couple of times. Our connection improved when they continued Eastern Avenue across, when Jimmy LaFontaine sold his property or his heirs or whoever. Yes, that was an improvement. The interstates, I think, have made more impact on small communities than they realized. Now, I travel down to Virginia, I could go out Route 1 and get on the interstate, which is the beltway, and go all the way around to Route 66. I don’t want to do that. Number 1, I’m not in love with the beltway. And number 2, it’s going the wrong way to get on it. I drive down into D.C. I know my way around D.C. I should. I’ve driven in D.C. since 1940. What’s that 60 or 67 years, something like tha?. That’s older than you are. I know my way, if traffic backs up and it’s obvious there’s an accident or road work or something, no problem. Swing off, because the streets are laid out in a grid pattern. And those that aren’t are the only ones you need to remember about. The rest of it, you have to read the sign. You know if you’re going east or west or north or south. If you don’t, shame on you. But some people don’t. I asked a woman one time, “If your traveling south and you turn left, what direction are you going?” “West.” No, not so, right? So, the question was connections. The town would connect commercially. Shoppers food

warehouse is in the next town. People walk from the next town the other way, across our town, which doesn't hurt anything, and go to Shoppers. And they come back with 8 plastic bags on 8 fingers.

Suzanne: What are the major political issues in past or today?

George Anderson: Well, they're certainly not sectarian in any way. Ego trips. That's not a political issue. They try to make an issue out of the police department. Recreation is quite often an issue. And if something pops up like the county wants to put a high school on part of our town and tear down 13 houses in the meantime, that's a temporary issue. But ongoing political issues, I don't think they have anything to do with religion. I don't think they have anything to do with national politics. We don't have all that much contact with the county politicians. They represent us, but they also represent the area around us. And course, the big joke is the redistricting thing. It's a joke everywhere. Now, I read on the internet where district 1 in Virginia is Stafford County, Fauquier County, and Fredericksburg, which are all right together, and Northeast Newport News, which is way off somewhere. Now, that's carrying redistricting too far. There is no connection between those two areas. But we don't have that problem.

I know the state senator, because she came by here when she was running for office and asked me if she could put a sign up in my yard. She introduced herself. She had the mayor of Colmar Manor, they're both Black ladies, with her. And I had a nice chat with them. I didn't know it, but Gwen's husband was in the car ready to put the sign up. But it didn't matter. I hadn't really met him. Gwendolyn Britt, I don't know if you know her. I said, "Go ahead. Put the sign up. That's fine. It doesn't make any difference to me." She said, "Well, it's just a nice corner. People will see it." So, he put one sign on the fence where people coming from that way and see it and put another sign out front, double sided where people going this way could see it. I said, "That's fine." When it comes time for next election, which I suppose is 2 years, maybe 4, I don't know. Doorbell rang. I went, "Hi Gwen." She said, "You remember me?" I said, "Sure. I remember you." She had a young boy with her. I think he was the son of somebody in Colmar Manor. We had a nice chat. And she's a state senator now. Of course, she voted for the slot machines. Slot machines are sort of like selling your soul. I don't know. They have a lottery now in Pennsylvania now, haven't they?

Suzanne: Yeah.

George Anderson: Well, lottery is one thing. Slot machines are totally different, totally different. You get frenzy. We don't need frenzy in people's lives. They are going to have enough of it. It can't be avoided. Frenzy loses all reason. Frenzy, reason, they don't get along together. No way. I get along with Gwen. A lot of my friends are up in the graveyard. And it's just across the road up here, Ft. Lincoln. It was never annexed. Maybe, they tried. It's on the Colmar Manor side of Bladensburg Road, but it was never annexed by Colmar Manor. They go by a Brentwood address. I go by a Brentwood address, but I don't live in Brentwood. The post office is in Brentwood. Ok, now, connections.

I can't remember ever hearing any kind of controversy in the town about politics. Most everybody knew the political inclinations of the others. But they didn't say that, "I'm not going to associate with him, because he's a Republican or I'm not going to associate with her, because she's a Democrat." They put it all aside. They did their voting. They accepted the outcome. We got to live the rest of the time ourselves. Don't count on the politicians. People learned a long time ago you can't count on politicians. My friend down in Virginia, she bellyached about something. I said, "It's your fault for voting for Bush." And man, she gets all excited. She says "I did not vote for him and you know I didn't." But anyhow, if you belong to the club, they kind of make it their whole lives. When there's no issue involved, no election involved, then they can have a good time together. But they're still all Republicans. See what I mean? You stand two people together you can't look at either one of them and tell what they are. So, politics, yes, when we have an election. When we have a commissioner election and it's contested, yes there's politics. All the politics consist of beating the bushes, making contacts, hopefully no promises.

Suzanne: What economic changes have occurred in the past 10 to 20 years?

George Anderson: Well, it's not an issue really, but beautification. Now, they're not fooling anybody, because if you beautify property it's going to sell for more. If you wanted to sell your car, or SUV, you'd get it painted or wax it or something like that. Now, what happens with houses? My house is livable. It's crummy on the inside, because my housekeeper quit 28 years ago. I've been living by myself ever since. And I'm limited. Anything big that needs to be done outside, I have to pay for it. You can only do so much of that. But the state assesses properties for taxes. I know how they used to do it. A tax assessor came around and looked your property over, checked the roof for how many vents. We know how many vents, we know how many kitchens, and how many bathrooms. That's code. You've got to have vents. There are indications of value. "You have a dishwasher?" "No, sir." "Ok. I'll take your word for it." I don't have a dishwasher. But now, since I've been here in 26 years, I've seen the tax assessor once. Once, I told her so. She says, "Well, there are not enough of us to go around." I said, "Well, how do you assess my property?" "According to what is sold in your area." "Ah, you mean, because Jack Sprat dolled up his house and got two prices for it, I'm going to pay more taxes for it?" She says, "Well, that's about what it amounts to."

Suzanne: Yeah. Ok. Let's go on. Ten years ago the concept of the Port Towns was created.

George Anderson: How many?

Suzanne: Ten years.

George Anderson: Really that long.

Suzanne: Has anything changed since the creation of that concept?

George Anderson: Yes. We have an island in the middle of Bladensburg Road that keeps people from coming out of one of our streets to make a left turn.

Suzanne: Anything else?

George Anderson: Well.

Suzanne: I'm guessing you don't like that?

George Anderson: It doesn't matter. It doesn't make sense. But it's stupid. This woman that got ousted was bugging the county for this that and the other thing all of her time. And I think they got tired of it and they say, "We'll fix her. She wants an island we'll forget where she said she wants it and we'll put it where it irritates a few people." Now, I dealt with the same county agency when I was commissioner. I got back with him when he said to get back with him and in between I waited. The neighbors that wanted a sidewalk and a curb in front of their house eventually got it. They were happy for a short while, and now they're irritated with something else. Some people are never happy. I'm happy. I don't have any reason to be happy, but I'm happy. I shouldn't say I don't have any reason. I'm here. I'm vertical.

Suzanne: Do you know anything about the Port Town Community Development Corporation, the Anacostia....

George Anderson: I've heard about CDC.

Suzanne: What are your feeling about them?

George Anderson: Well, the big developers like the Michael Company have pretty much run this county for a long time. I think the county executives are getting away from them into some bigger ones. I don't know. But anyhow, it's along the same lines as what I was just saying about the properties, except as far as community development is concerned all they're interested in is the commercial properties. Now, instead of calling it community development, why don't they call it commercial development corporation? And why in the name of common sense do they need a corporation? It could be a committee. You see what I mean? It's the old thing. Years ago the manufacturers would go to the distributors and say, "Look if your going to distribute our product, you're going to have better looking trucks. You're going to have a better looking warehouse. Your employees have got to wear uniforms with our logos on it." Wielding their clout. So, what does the distributor going to do? Gets better trucks, uniforms, etc. And then he starts going to the people that he furnishes consumer products to. He says, "You've got a pretty shabby store here. If you don't shape up, I'm going to wholesale to the guy down the street. And you'll be out of luck. You'll become a poor mom and pop store." That's what they're trying to do by various means. And in so doing, they come up with some grandiose ideas. Who knows where they get their designers and their architects and their planners. We've got a whole string of bungalows down on Bladensburg Road that don't look like commercial, but they are. They're not store fronts. They don't have parking lots. Some of

them have a driveway and you can park in the back. People don't want to do that. People don't want to even walk across Shoppers parking lot to get into the store. They drive around and around and around until they park right up front. It makes sense doesn't it? CDC has kind of made a bad name for themselves. They put up signs. Yes, fine. Beautiful sign. Here's a paint job goes up this on this place and maybe a surrealistic do-dad up on top of the CVS. That's not really community improvement. Anything that happens that wasn't before is a development, but it's not an improvement. I don't know if anybody ever told you, the town of Colmar Manor got a big grant, years and years ago from the federal government, to improve the commercial part of the town. The idea was to put a real nice strip mall, cause that's all there was then, strip malls. When does a strip mall stop being a strip mall? That's an academic question. Nothing happened. Come to find out, the mayor made off with the money. They got rid of him. Oh, big fuss. I don't think he was ever penalized in any way. I doubt if he even had any of the money left. They got somebody else who said, "You won't have to worry about me." Took him 7 months to get hold of the money and take off. Twice it happened. Until they got smart and put in enough safeguards that it couldn't happen again. You got people without brains, because there are no people with brains in the town. When I say brains, I mean leadership, governing, preventive oversight and all that sort of stuff. You've got to have a certain amount of background in that. They started developing and Burger King came around. "What do you got left?" "We don't need that much." "That's all right." So, made it out to fit what they wanted to pay and what they thought they were getting. When they got the deed, they got the whole big piece for the whole little price. You'll see it when you go by it. They didn't bargain for that whole area. They didn't pay for that whole area, but they took it, because it was legal. Why did they get it? Because someone didn't have the brains and the oversight to make sure it didn't happen. We go to Colmar Manor to vote. That's fine. If they get money from the state for using their quarters to vote, fine. We've got a town hall. We could vote over here, but we don't. We go over there to vote. I haven't heard anybody complain about it.

Suzanne: Ok. Last question. In what respects is Cottage City unique and how is it unique among the Port Towns?

George Anderson: Well, you can walk one block to get to the railroad, one block till you get to the highway. We know it's unique in the form of government it has. It has a commission type of government rather than a charter. How is it unique among the other towns? Well, it's smaller than the other towns. I think we have something like 600 households, maybe less than that now. Everybody doesn't vote, but that doesn't mean anything. We are right up against the District line. That's one reason my father bought where he did. He could get from his home to his place of business in 20 minutes, and not many people can do that now. Not many people could do it then, because they were buying in College Park. They were buying in Bethesda. They were buying over in Virginia. Virginia is fine. I still think they should put the ownership of D.C. back in Maryland. And the part of it that's in Virginia, make that Virginia again. Separate it by the Potomac River. And let them administer their part, south D.C. and north D.C. But they're not going to do it. Too many millions of dollars have been spent in the District of Columbia.

