

Monday, March 24, 2014
15 Rounds Ave., Providence, RI
Interviewer: Becky Soules
Interviewee: Ed Hooks

Becky Soules: (00:00:00) This is Becky Soules and it's March 24, 2014, and I'm here with Ed Hooks. And if you'll introduce yourself . . .

Ed Hooks: Okay. I'm Ed Hooks. I'm a Providence native. In my adult life, while I was involved in insurance I am a bit of my own historian. I lived in the, what is now called the Industrial Park, as I have lived in other parts of the city. And I'm willing to share my little bit of history notes and experiences in the area with you.

Soules: Great. Wonderful. So perhaps you would start by telling us -- I know you grew up in what used to be the Industrial Park -- could you tell us when you lived there and sort of where you lived?

Hooks: Okay. Well, I lived there, I lived in the Industrial Park you'd have to say from pretty much -- off and on -- from the late 40s, that's 1940s, late 40s until the area's demise in about 1960. I went to school there briefly, and then of course we moved. But the period of time that I have the clearest recollections of are actually from about 1956 on.

Going to school, living in the area, being free enough to wander the neighborhood, and go to the pond which captures every boy's imagination of doing things along the pond. Of course there you could catch frogs, and peep toads at night. You could fish. You could build rafts and try to maneuver them across the pond. A lot of the times you built them and found yourself sinking. Swimming -- and we had, there was just regular swimming, and there were rope swings. And that was pretty much being drawn to a life in pond, or around the pond.

Soules: (00:03:08) Were there a lot of children in the neighborhood for you to play with and go to the pond with?

Hooks: Oh yes. There were children -- whether a lot of children, hard for me to really say -- there were enough people around so that you weren't lonely and you weren't by yourselves during the day. And of course, if somebody wasn't home you went to the next house, on to the next place. And then there were places where children gathered, or young people gathered. There was the ball field. There was always a few guys on the ball field playing baseball whether it was a game of home run with just three people -- a pitcher, a batter, and an outfielder -- or a mock game with five on a side. I mean there were always people there. There were always young people there.

You know, and surprisingly as I think of it now, while there were a number of policemen who lived in the area. I'm saying a number of policemen -- I knew of about four families where there were policemen -- and this was a small area, small geographic area. And while you had, while you were, if you walked on the other side of the tracks, you would encounter policemen walking the beat, in this area I don't recall -- maybe once -- seeing a couple of policemen walking the

beat. I don't know why that was. I really don't. I mean its just something that, as I think of it now, although I've seen a couple reports that indicate that the area was prone to crime, I tend to doubt that. As I read that report, I tend to doubt that because areas that are prone to crime, prone to juvenile delinquency and the like, you would have policemen walking the beat. And you would have a number of them. And it seems to me -- and I was going all over the place, I was a little vagabond, I walked the streets until 8, 9, 10, well after the streetlights came on -- you seldom found them.

You used to see people at that time that didn't live in the area who came in later at night. You'd find some of the people who had cars and would try to drive close to the pond and across Lowe Avenue, but that was -- there were no houses on there pretty much. They would use that as a lover's lane and we knew that, but that wasn't anything. But they said, you know, some of the reports that you read on the area that are written a little bit later, but they began, the reports are written to accommodate what you want to do.

Soules: (00:07:32) Exactly. If I can go back to the playing ball? Where were your ball fields? Were they where J.T. Owens Parks is now or were they . . .

Hooks: No. They would be a little further north. Maybe two ball fields north.

But that area, where the ball field is now, that was close to the brook. The brook was much wider [than] now and a little deeper that led to Spectacle Pond on the other side. Today that brook is no wider than maybe two feet, three feet at places, and the brook at that time was closer to -- I'd say it was about three or four times wider. Because we used to take canoes, small canoes, and some of our small, narrow, narrower, rafts -- with the rafts you could drag them through -- and end up on Spectacle Pond. And the small island in the middle of Spectacle Pond was of course a pirates' den.

But the landscape of the area has been smoothed and leveled. Where you had some hills -- I don't want you to misinterpret what I mean by hills; we called them hills but they're more mounds and they might have been maybe twenty-five, thirty-five feet, maybe fifty feet in height. And they were gradual. Around the pond there were streets that were quite steep. Jonathan Street which was one which we'd go sledding one. I noticed on the report they list the basin, called the basin.

Well I lived at the corner of Frankfurt and Balch Street. And when you came down -- if you were travelling on Niantic Avenue and turned down to Balch Street you came down a very steep incline. And of course they have that where Niantic Avenue was paved, when you turned down Balch Street maybe a third of Balch Street was -- don't want to say a third of Balch Street was paved, maybe about thirty feet was paved. The rest of Balch Street was dirt until you reached Calhoun Avenue. Calhoun Avenue was paved. And then the remainder of Balch Street was paved. So you had, you had quite a few, I mean you had a number of unpaved streets which Providence called "unreceived streets" and then you had the paved streets. The paved streets were closer to the railroad tracks and along the main thoroughfare which was Calhoun Avenue. Which of course included, Calhoun Avenue was the bus route into the area for public transportation. It was interesting.

If you came in from Dexter Street and you would go over the tracks the end of Dexter Street there was a railroad crossing with a small house that took care of the little track man there who would, when the train was coming, he would come and roll down the gates. To let the train go through and then of course, roll them up to let the cars through.

Many people today, when they look around, it's hard for them to envision an area, even the city, where traffic is about a third of what it is today. Fewer cars. Many people walked. And there were buses. Many people used buses. Today we walk almost nowhere. I was not alone in walking. Children were different then. Our homes were different then. Many homes only one parent worked, so mothers were, for the most part, mothers were home all day so when you got home from school you met your mother.

Children were outside most of the time. Whether you were a three to seven year old who had to stay in the yard, and longed for the time when you could go outside of the yard. And when you were outside the yard then you had bounds -- you couldn't go past that house on the corner to the blue house up the street. You'd better be in that area. And when you were a little bit older you could just, you were allowed to just wander. It is, and I said, neighborhoods were different, people were different. If people worried about child molestations and those things, I didn't know it. It didn't have anything to do with me, and maybe not the neighborhood because the neighborhood was more cohesive. Because people knew, not only their next-door neighbor, but they knew who lived on the next couple of streets. And probably that was the difference. As I said, my younger brothers and sisters, they pretty much had to stay between Frankfurt and Jonathan Streets. There wasn't much there. If I was around, they could go -- well, they could go around the corner to the Covingtons -- and a little bit later they were allowed to go further up Jonathan Street to the Holstens [sic].

I, of course, could go where I pretty darn well pleased. I was a paperboy. At age twelve I was a paperboy. And had my own paper route. And increased my route from about thirty-four customers up to 104 -- 103 or 104. I got a prize to go to Washington for that.

Soules: That's impressive. That's a lot.

Hooks: (00:17:45) So, the reason I do say -- that's one of the reasons why I recall 1956 so vividly. Because I recall picking up the paper and seeing a headline that read "Russian troops storm Hungary" and I remember seeing a tank, a picture of tank, seemingly rumbling its way, crashing through the border going into Hungary. And of course the Hungarian revolt was October 1956.

The following year we were building rockets. And when you think of these things, wow. We were using baking soda and these other things to build rockets that we were firing, that we were launching around the pond and the ball field. And that stems from Sputnik.

Soules: Yeah.

Hooks: 1957. Sputnik. So, I mean, I think that we were, as young people, we were much more aware of some worldly events and what was going on in the world around us. Maybe it was just me. I just read the paper and I saw a lot. But I couldn't do those rockets by myself. Many, I think one or two of them, we got up to about twenty feet off the ground. They were kind of fun. And we had dreams of we'd, we had ideas of going to -- what it would be like to go to the moon and like. I had taken a car dashboard and nailed it in a tree. And when we were playing rockets that was my tree. You know, for a while. After a while you lose that.

But the area itself during the spring, many people were cultivating gardens. One of my jobs during spring vacation, when you had that spring vacation out of school, I couldn't go anywhere until the garden was turned over -- what essentially is plowed, but you don't have plow horses or anything. And our garden spot covered an area of a regular house lot, which was maybe about 5,000 square feet. Which I think today "Ahhh, wasn't that big." So I would get up at five in the morning and I would start turning it over. And I would turn over so much, because they said that while, when it got warm during the day you didn't have to do it all day. But I was one of the ones that believed if you had a job to do, do it and get it done with and that way you don't have to worry about it anymore.

I have a grandson who is like that today. They give him an assignment during school vacation -- he does the assignment the day after. He says, "okay, I'm done with my assignment, I don't have to worry about that all week.

Soules: It's a good habit.

Hooks: I said to him on the phone -- because he's in North Carolina -- I said, "Delson, don't you want to, are you sure that you're completed with it, don't you want to look at it a little more, maybe you can improve it in things." He said "Oh yeah, I do that. I look at it, and I might say well I can do this better. And I'll do this better and I'll do this better. But essentially, it's done." And I can't complain about him because he's the same one who when he got his report card complained, "Uh, I didn't get all As. I got a 94 in math." And in there area, 95 is an A and 94 is a B+. And he said "but next semester I'll improve that to an A." And I didn't want to tell him, I didn't have the heart to tell him, "Delson, you're in the fourth grade. You're doing algebra, with is middle school."

Soules: Doing pretty well.

Hooks: Yeah. They have a system there where they put them on, students, if you excel in one or two subjects they will let you go in those subjects but they'll keep you in the same grade for social . . .

Soules: That's good.

Hooks: I think, when I look at him, I says, "gee whiz, how did they come up with that system." In Rhode Island, it's fighting over whether you should have, whether someone should take a test to say that they're proficient enough to receive a diploma. And they complain about it.

That's another thing, schools. Everyone went to the same schools. You went to Calhoun, and then Calhoun was torn down. But everyone, everyone in the area, were bused, or most were bused, to Vineyard Street School. Vineyard Street School was a larger school. Providence had elementary schools, grammar schools, junior high schools, and high schools. Vineyard was a grammar school. Much larger, many more teachers, and the like. But everyone went to the same school.

The racial breakdown of the area was probably forty percent blacks and Indians, and sixty percent white. And of that sixty percent white probably a good ten percent was foreign born. If you wanted to go where did they live . . . Hamburg Avenue was primarily black. But the rest of the area you might say was of a mixture. If you got over to Sampson Avenue and then you got up to streets like Donald and Pinckney, and streets that ran off Niantic Avenue, closer -- in fact those streets that many of them you might see a semblance of them now by the ball field and going down -- they were primarily white families. And Calhoun Avenue was mixed but then you moved to the other side of Calhoun, between Calhoun and Niantic -- that was primarily white. But, as you moved in a southerly directions, say from the bridge south, you began to see more of a mixed neighborhood. But then again, that's more of an open neighborhood too. That's where you have a number of fields. That's where the houses are much further apart. That's where there are orchards.

Soules: (00:29:28) Did neighbors tend to congregate -- did they interact together a lot -- or did people sort of cluster by ethnic group or race . . .

Hooks: No. People tended to interact with their neighbors, whomever their neighbor was. As I think of it now, and I kind of chuckle about it, the people that lived next to us, they were the Whites. That was their last name. And I said, "yeah, that was the White family," and some people said "oh yeah." No -- that was their last name. And we always thought that there was some shenanigans going on their because old Mr. White . . . in the house was Mr. White, his wife, and his wife's sister. And his wife's sister had a baby. Well, I'm not going to take that any further. But then again, it's all so long ago who really cares.

Soules: Right.

Hooks: That's pretty much what it was. The one church in the area was the mission at the corner of Balch and Calhoun Avenue. And that was a brown shingled building which was a mission of the old Roger Williams Cranston Street Baptist Church. That church has now, well they went under -- not that they went under, they lost membership and they decided to close. They gave their building on Cranston Street to the Ebenezer Baptist Church, which was a black Baptist church, which today is probably the largest -- well it is the largest black Baptist church in the state. They have two services, etcetera.

So religiously everyone had to go . . . for church services everyone had to go outside of the area, or over to the other side of the tracks. Many people were Roman Catholics so they would have gone to Assumption, you know, the Church of the Assumption which is on Potters Avenue. The Baptists of course went wherever they could find a Baptist church -- there were several of them in

the area. Episcopalians went to Church of the Epiphany which now has closed unfortunately. And that was on Potters Avenue near Elmwood Avenue.

People, 'cause there were people from outside the Industrial Area, especially children, who came to the pond, and you know, and played at the pond. There were boys from the other side of the pond. We would have -- they built rafts -- we would meet them with our rafts and try to dump them. And they would do the same to us. Of course they had the steeper edge of the pond where the waters were deeper. From our side of the pond, if you walked in, you walked in gradually -- I mean you could walk in and you walked in on a slope. On their side there was a big drop off. So you could have rope swings and the like. And that's where the rope swings were. The rope swings were fun. I mean there was one -- and I think of it now -- it was actually by the cove near the Gorham factory. And of course today they tell us, "Well you know that was all polluted. Ah Christ, I don't know how you guys ever did that." Well we didn't think it was polluted then.

I think one of the things that happened when they took the industrial area, termed as the industrial area, and they flattened all the hills, and they changed the water table, and underwater brooks that fed the pond. I think by doing that, they left only what was available on the opposite side [east] and that which wasn't enough to sustain the pond. And the pond eventually died. No frogs. You do have some fish in there, but they are the . . . you're not finding as many bass and perch. They're more fish of the carp family. Of course, they don't need as much oxygen to live. Many of the them are ground feeders. As a result they stir up this sediment on the bottom portions of the pond to eat, and in so doing, if you're dumping sludge and stuff in there, that slush is no longer settling, and it's now being constantly thrown into the life of the pond.

And I said, we used to go fishing. I mean, the lily pads and everything at one end of the pond. To go frogging, ah gee whiz. I mean, there were three types of frogs. How I learned to distinguish frogs -- because if I say to the regular, ordinary person: "Well there's a green frog and oh and there's a bullfrog." And they're gonna say: "Oh yeah, well that's a male frog." Yes and no. There is a species known as the bullfrog. And there's one that's known as the green frog. "Ohhhhhh. I didn't know that." You know. And the leopard frog. I mean, that's where I learned it. And I learned it from one of the old guys who was sitting there. And I said, "Oh boy I've got a bullfrog." And he said, "No, that's a green frog."

Soules: (00:37:43) So, there were older people who would go and sort of hang out at the pond too?

Hooks: Yeah. Well there were enough people. There were enough, you know, older guys who would go there with a pole in the water to, you know, pass the day, who you could sit and talk and tell you stories of the old days, you know, or when they . . . since the time that they were there.

There was one guy that was on my paper route who -- I remember his house, I can see his house now, and I can't think of the name of the street he was on. His street led into Calhoun Avenue. He was a man probably about seventy then, maybe seventy-five or eighty then. And I remember he said to me, "Oh, I know your family." And he said, "You're part of the Indian family. Your family's Indian." And one day I went with him and we walked down to the grounds where they

had the powwow. In fact, he was the first one to tell me that a powwow was not an event, it was a person. He says, he said, "Oh white people," he says, "they got it wrong." And he says, "Indians today they got it wrong." He says, "The powwow was the individual in the tribe who talked to the people and was more of their spiritual leader." I thought, boy. I thought later, why would this guy come up and tell me something like that. Him being of native heritage and myself . . . [inaudible] one person said, "Ahhhh, they're right." And then as I did a little bit more, went around and found out that's actually true, the powwow was the individual, not an event. But today, when you have an Indian, a gathering of Native Americans, it's called a powwow. And I learned that actually that came about from that old guy Elliot way back in the seventeenth century. You can't let those Indians have those powwows because he wanted to convert all of them to Puritanism. How you leave one place because you're being religiously oppressed, 'cause you can't get your way with the regular Church of England, so you come here and you -- everybody else will be that way.

Soules: (00:41:39) I wonder if we could go back and talk a little bit more about the neighborhood and the houses and what they looked like and what you remember of that.

Hooks: Well the houses, were along -- say Sampson Street or Pinckney, along Hamburg -- there were houses that were built probably around the turn of the century. Many of them had coal furnaces, some that had been changed to oil or gas by the mid-twentieth century. They were basically two or three bedroom houses with a kitchen, dining room, and parlor, probably separated by glass doors, glass French doors, or sliding doors. Most of the other houses were individual, individualized.

They were -- our house was built in the year 1926. I had to go back and check this, because everyone said, "When was your house built?" "I dunno." So I went back and I checked it. It was built in 1926. The, where we had our garden, there had been a house there. That house burned. So they built a new house on the lot in back of it which they owned, and that was our home. That was more of an individual house.

Cross the way, the Roses had an individual, you know their house . . . The style was typical of, what you wanted to say, late eighteenth[nineteenth?]-century, early twentieth-century style with a number of the houses had big pilasters and some of, you know, the triangle things at the top . . .

Soules: Like a pediment?

Hooks: Yeah, pediment. So it was that style. Kind of like an early American Greek Revival style. Whereas your tenement houses -- as I said -- they were typical for the late nineteenth century - early twentieth century where Providence thought it was booming ahead with these wooden structures that you say pictures of in the magazines: "This is the glorious home. Three tenement house. Some of them four tenement." And you'd see many of the houses, you see more of them -- 'cause you don't see that many on the East Side. You go to Benefit Street you'll see maybe a stretch of two of them. But you go up Eaton Street towards Providence College, towards Oakland Avenue, you take a look -- you look at those houses, you can say, "That's what Providence looked like." But that's what it did look like. Many of the houses that the Providence College students now live in . . . Which they could not live in up until about 1975. What was it

1980, Providence College allowed students to now live off campus? Everyone had to live on campus -- Providence College was very, very, very, very tough. But then as Providence College students got to live off campus, people moved and kaput went the neighborhood.

Soules: (00:46:46) Yeah. Were a lot of the homes in the neighborhood owner-occupied or rented?

Hooks: Most of the homes were owner-occupied -- was greater than fifty percent, that's for sure. Yeah, it was greater than fifty percent. You didn't have . . . there were, you had tenants but you didn't have that much movement, there wasn't that much movement of people. So the area was owner-occupied and there were more owner families residing in the same house. So, if -- I'm just thinking of my paper route now -- so you might have Mr. Horace Jones on the first floor, and Irving Jones on the second, and then you had Mr. Arthur Sampson on the third. Well, the Joneses were brothers and the one on the third was the sister. So you had quite a bit of that. And I guess that that added to the cohesiveness of the neighborhood.

People would, you know, most people would talk to their neighbors over the fence, go over and share a cup of coffee in the morning, or you're see several of them gathered at a place -- you know, all go over to one person's house for an activity. Cook-outs were not a big neighborhood thing then. Cook-outs generally you had a few of them. We had a couple of cook-outs and everyone from the neighborhood would all come down, but they weren't a big thing then. Today everybody has a cook-outs. Everyone has a grill. We were . . . we had enough property as such so that we could have and we didn't have to worry about people trampling in the garden and things like that.

And again, people . . . I mean there's no work in area, well except you go up along on Niantic Avenue. So most people worked outside the area. There were a number of people that wore suits to work. Wilson Williams of course worked for the school department. There were a number of ladies that worked as domestics on the East Side so you saw them in their distinctive uniforms boarding the bus. And then you just had a number of laborers who were headed to their work, wherever it might be. But the area itself had no discernable industry and most people worked out.

Traffic school guards of course came from the neighborhood. In fact, Catherine Edmonton [sic], who now lives in Florida, she was a traffic school guard. And, actually, they didn't have any in that area, you did have them . . . Catherine was at the corner of Huntington and Calhoun. So as soon as you came over the bridge there she was. Okay, now you got more traffic there. Huntington Avenue, Potters Avenue, Cranston Street, Elmwood Avenue, that's much more traffic.

And of course, you saw the uniformed kids going to the Assumption School. Some of them walked over the tracks to the elementary school. Others walked over to the junior and senior high school which was, you know, further up. Other kids, a couple of others, went to St. Charles [Borromeo School] and they had to take the bus to school. So they walked up, to take the bus, the Calhoun Avenue bus 'cause that went up Dexter Street and they would get off there to go to the St. Charles School. Most other students again went to Vineyard or Gilbert Stuart and high school students went -- I would assume most went to Central. Although high school students could go to

any school that they wanted to. Hope, Mount Pleasant, and Classical -- why you did have to take a test to enter. Hope, Mount Pleasant, Central, and Central Commercial. I can't see any of the students in the area going to Mount Pleasant. Mount Pleasant was probably at that time fifteen percent Irish and eighty-five percent Italian.

Soules: A little different.

Hooks: You weren't welcome there. But I think, so most of them probably ended up at Central. But even then, as I recall, in terms of education, were you gonna get the best education or not? Central was not very high on the list. Classical of course was tops. Hope was second. And Hope was a regional high school. It was a city, but regional high school, because it took students from Smithfield, some from Seekonk area because they didn't have their own high schools. So they all crowded into -- why they picked Hope, you knows. Well Hope actually had a very good mixture of class, of racial breakdowns, of class breakdowns, of class differences. While Central, almost like the old caste system remained.

But as I said, during the summer, during the spring, the huckleberries all kinds. And you could fill your stomach and then fill your pail. And depending on the flavor that you wanted or the type that you wanted, they were there. You know, you couldn't eat them all, the birds couldn't eat them all, but they were there. And there were raspberries. And there were some -- along the pond -- there were some native strawberries in the spring. I always like them. And then of course there were the trees, the fruit trees: apple trees, there was some peach trees, there was some plum trees. So you could pretty much eat your way through the neighborhood during the spring and the summer. And then during the fall if you wanted to raid somebody's -- in the late summer if you want to raid somebody's garden. Gardens had everything from corn to, you know, corn, tomatoes, radishes, carrots, squash, you know, zucchini squash, summer squash. You take your pick. It was there.

Soules: (00:58:34) And these are mostly personal gardens or did people sell what was left over or . . .

Hooks: Most of them were personal gardens. People did sell what was, what they had extra, and they did it in a couple of ways. Some people would set up a basket, couple of baskets, on the side of the house and people would come walking around, and riding around on Saturday afternoons or something, and you'd sell it. We sold a lot of our extra produce to the Potters Avenue Market who purchased it from us and of course then resold it. And there were a couple of other families did that as well. I think this was beneficial . . . The old man who ran the market, last time I saw him I think was in the 80s, and since then the market reverted to other people and it hasn't been the same. But the market was different.

Again, not everyone has a car. People shopped differently. There is, there's a First National Market on Elmwood Avenue. There's probably about five mom and pop stores . . . Would there be that many? One, Cahhoun Avenue. Two, Pleasant View, Pleasant Street. Three, Sampson. Four, corner of Faith . . . yeah, I'm gonna say four or five, that I can remember now, mom and pop stores. I think out of the mom and pop stores only the one -- no two -- I think maybe three of them sold meat, you know, hamburger, pork chops. You get on the other side of track, of course,

Potters Avenue Market did and of course the First National store did. First National store you weren't gonna sell them anything because they were national brand. There's a church in that building today. Some people are gonna refer to it as old United Camera, but when the First National moved out, United Camera moved in. Then United Camera of course left, and now there's a church, a evangelical church there.

So that actually worked out for everyone. Onions, and everything. I remember gathering up our onions. And I'm putting them in the basket, cleaning them off, putting them in the basket. And they said, "Well that's good. Okay. Now, you take those down to the store." So I said, "I've gotta carry these down to the store, oh you gotta be kidding me?" So I built a wagon. It had only two wheels, but I threw that things together. I was not gonna be carrying those -- you gotta go all the way down Calhoun Avenue, you gotta go up over the bridge. Naaaa, carry something, un-un. So, you do that, people, you know, did that to supplement their incomes.

But Potters Avenue Market would of course deliver. Shopping was . . . we lived further up, so our shopping was done maybe once a week. When you got to a lot of other people would do daily shopping. Of course, we, and others in the area, canned a lot of our produce. Not only a lot of our produce, but we made jellies and the like from the apples and the grapes that abounded in the area. Now, this was not something that just the girls did. I did it as well. In fact, a lot of people are amazed today when I could tell them exactly how to make a preserve, how to prepare a, you know, a preserve. "Oh, you wanna do that? Well you gotta do it this way. You wanna make jelly, well you gotta do this, and this, and this, and this? You want apple jelly, you do this and this and this?" People are surprised that I know how to do that. Well, I did. I grew up knowing how to do it. And I think most, a lot of other -- as far as cooking and the like -- a lot of other boys knew how to do it. It's just the way that we were taught then. I think a little bit later people became more, they became a little bit more definitive in dividing what were girl activities and what were boy activities. And now I think that they're going back to saying, "Hey, you know [inaudible] great idea."

But basically, that's what it was like to grow up in the area. I recall seeing articles in the paper saying they were going to take the area as an industrial, and make it an industrial park. Today, I kind of think of it as . . . With the swiftness that they took the area, and people were out of the area, while I really don't know -- and you could probably find this out quite easily -- how quickly it took for people to move out of the area, I know it was a lot swifter than it took people to move out of the Lippitt Hill area, or out of Central-Classical. This area was fast. It's almost like old Tevye was faced with in *Fiddler on the Roof* when he was told -- when they came to him and said, "Look it, you got three days to get thee out."

Soules: (01:07:49) And did the neighborhood do much to fight the removal, or do you remember much about that?

Hooks: Well, there was limited opposition. But I think a lot of people just saw it as fait accompli. You know, they saw what happened in Lippitt Hill. People were not stupid. They saw what was happening in other parts of the city. Earlier, one of the earlier things that we don't hear too much about, when they took the great stretch of Huntington Avenue to make the Huntington Avenue Expressway. We don't hear much about that. But there were loads of houses and homes .

. . and expressway? Then you see this other section coming in and its no longer called Huntington Expressway. In 1960 it's called Dennis J. Roberts Expressway. And then you hear, oh no, that which was going to be Route 95 -- they changed the route to go through the city, to go through South Providence. "Oooo, wow." Because the expressway, that was to be part, that was initially the interstate highway. What we call Route 10 today was to have been actually the route for Route 95. Downtown Providence was not gonna be touched. Although they had already done the -- Weybosset Hill and the Met[ropolitan] Theatre. Ahhhh, nobody wanted them to tear down the old Met. But the Met was gone. You know, it didn't matter. They were gonna do what they were gonna do and you just had to live with it. When you stop to think that between 1950 and 1960, the population of Providence dropped by one fifth. One fifth of the population. 248,000 to 207,000.

Soules: (01:10:47) It's insane.

Hooks: That is . . . that is . . . you just go, "What? You gotta be kidding me." But the area was taken. They came in and tore down the houses, bulldozed the hill [cell phone rings]

Interview restarts after a brief pause for interviewee to answer his phone.

Soules: (01:11:18) Let's see, where were we? I wonder if you could sort of -- since we're doing this audio installation, we're trying to sort of recreate, we're not sure what we're gonna recreate - - but what did the neighborhood, do you remember any sounds of the neighborhood? With the trains going by, and other things that would be memorable about the sound?

Hooks: Well the trains, you know, it's funny. I often wondered how those people on Burrington Street, how did they sleep with all those trains -- a lot many, you know, many more trains than there are today. They said at one time there were 300 trains that went in and out of Providence. So, I would say, if there were a hundred trains a day . . . I mean, you did have a guard at a crossing station, and he earned his keep. It wasn't that there was one or two trains a day. But you did hear the trains.

Other than that, sounds of the neighborhood. Cars, more occasional cars. The roads that were . . . Okay, we lived on the corner, on the corner again of Frankfurt and Balch Street. And of course Balch Street is dirt, Frankfurt is dirt. I don't think, I think, I don't think I ever . . . maybe I saw one or two cars travelling Frankfurt Street. But it was a street. You saw more cars going up Balch between Calhoun and Niantic. And a lot of cars avoided it because of the incline going up to Niantic. They would catch their mufflers or something as they were driving. Some cars actually got hung up on the -- and we would all laugh and we would go up and we would push them over the hump. But others would go up there and their mufflers would be left behind.

But there weren't many other sounds. I mean, outside of birds. It was -- you didn't hear . . . Well, you heard the noonday whistle, you know, the twelve o'clock whistle, Providence still had that on. Yeah, and you heard the seven o'clock too. You know, you heard seven, twelve, and then it was five. But then they stopped that. They stopped the five o'clock whistle. I guess that was a leftover from the war. But they had that for awhile. But that's about all you, all that you heard.

During the summer you would hear cicadas, which was nice. A nice hot day you'd listen to them. That was about it.

Soules: (01:15:26) What about the neighborhood's relationship with Gorham? I mean, you're on the opposite side of the pond, but did many work there or ever go there?

Hooks: I'm thinking that there had to be people that worked over there. I wasn't, I didn't pay that much attention to it. But you know, you don't have work uniforms, so you can't say who's working where. But I'm sure that there were people that, you know, that worked there. Gorham's . . . I think most people just viewed Gorham's as being the factory on the other side of the pond.

We, I think when we did hear that, from people, that well, you know, Gorham's polluting the pond. But you didn't have too many ecologists back then. You didn't have too many people that were concerned about that type of thing. Because after all, you still had raw sewage going into the Providence River. And at two in the afternoon on a hot summer day you did not want to cross the river. The smell was so horrid. You didn't find that around Mashapaug Pond. So if people said Gorham's was dumping stuff in there, so what, everybody else is.

But I think again, because of the underground water system, the pond was able to clean itself enough to keep ecological things growing. Reeds -- you walk around the pond today, there's no marshland near the pond, which helps clean the pond. That's something that you did have before. So, when it comes to Gorham, people just saw Gorham as probably a place for employment more than anything else. If they're dumping stuff in there, so what. They'll give me a paycheck today. And Gorham's was good for giving a paycheck.

Soules: (01:18:36): So you've been, you've had such a wealth of stories to share, this is really wonderful. When my classmates and I are sort of thinking about this installation, we wondered if you might have any questions that you would like -- if someone's experiencing what was, what used to be your neighborhood and is now the industrial park. Would there be questions that you'd want them to think about?

Hooks: Well. The first thing that I would want people to think about is -- they took the area, they learned later, they said, you know the big thing about ye old tax dollar. And I look at the area today, the same area, and I go, are the taxes garnered today equal to the taxes that were garnered by the city in 1960. Or in 1959 -- well, I guess you have to go back to '59. Is the rate of delinquency more today than it was in 1960. Those two questions would come to my mind.

And I'd also ask the question. Is the quality of life for the individual, was it better served by taking an area, flattening it, and ruining the experiences of being able to see butterflies, see turtles, hear birds. To -- I know some people do not want, do not like boys playing war games and cowboys and Indians -- but to watch them play their games and be imaginative walking over the hills, on the small hills, go up hiding from one another, have little encampments. Was it worth taking an area that, in my eyes, there was low crime. I never once heard of an incident when someone was shooting up anything. You don't have people shooting one another. And again, was it worth, was taking the area actually worth it for destroying the education that guys

like me got from the old people in the neighborhood who taught us about nature. And a little bit of history. You know, personally, you know my answer.

But that's something they should think about, and if the group, and if they heard that the city was going to take another area -- for whatever means -- would it destroy the fabric of life in that area of the city? No matter what it is. Even if they're gonna retake the Kennedy Plaza. It's been made over so many times, and now they're gonna make it over into a plaza of shops and what have. I think maybe they're planning to put a couple of apartments in the old train station. Which might have some advantages. May not, you know.

Then again, people can be walking in between something and on the end you see the Federal Building that looks more like the Alamo than it does something . . . Be careful crossing the street in front of the Federal Building. I mean, walking the sidewalk on the Federal Building. One of those people might come out and tell you, "Get off the sidewalk." "Why?" "We got some people coming in here." That happened to me, you know. I'm walking on the sidewalk, he says "Get off the sidewalk." And I looked at him and said, "Where the hell do you think we are? This is not 1963 Jackson, Mississippi." He turned around and he says, "I told you to get off this sidewalk." He says, "This sidewalk is federal property." And I says, "Well, I support you. My sidewalk." And I started to walk. He says, "No, you get out." I says, "What? I'm gonna go out into the street and get hit." I says, "You give me your name so I can have it on me, saying that you told me to get out there to get hit so I can sue you." I ended up walking down -- he just figured it wasn't worth it.

But, I mean, those are the questions you got to go for. Is the fabric of life gonna change? Is it gonna be better for everyone? Or for most people? Or are you gonna destroy what's actually there? Many times we destroy things and we don't look at what's actually there.

And I guess that's all I have to say.

Soules: This has been wonderful. Thank you so much.