INTERVIEW WITH GUS AMSTERDAM

INTERVIEWER: Today's date is 10/8/1996. I'm [Andrew Harrison] interviewing Mr. Gus Amsterdam. The interview is taking place in his office. It is approximately 2:09 in the afternoon in Gus's office.

Mr. Amsterdam, may I have permission to tape the conversation today?

GUS AMSTERDAM: Yes.

INT: Good. Thank you very much. I'd like to start off today by talking to you about your ancestry. How far can you trace back your family?

AMSTERDAM: Well, I recently received information that seems to trace our family back to the King David period. But as far as I personally know, only to my grandfather, who came to this country.

INT: And where did he come from?

AMSTERDAM: He came from Poland.

INT: Do you know which section?

AMSTERDAM:

INT: Okay. What did he do there?

AMSTERDAM: He was a student of the Bible, almost entirely, but he was one of, he had two wives and about 21 children.

INT: And what led him to come to America?

AMSTERDAM: The fact that several of his sons were here and brought him over.

INT: Okay. And what led to them coming to America?

AMSTERDAM: Oh, I would say that they, from what I've heard, they seem to think that there was much more ability to live decently in this country, and where they were there was always pogroms and various other things that made them uncomfortable.

INT: Do you know approximately when they came to America, or when he came to America?

AMSTERDAM: Well, the first uncle of mine came over about 1900. And the others came
shortly thereafter. There were a number of brothers and one sister.

INT: How did your grandfather make his living?

AMSTERDAM: That I really don't know. All I ever heard was that he was a student of the Bible.

INT: Okay. How about in terms of your father? How did he make his living?

AMSTERDAM: Well, he was in real estate, he was in moving pictures, a number of different. Actually, when he came here he was a cutter in the men's clothing area. But he never practiced that in the United States.

INT: Okay. When you said he was involved in the movie theater business, was he with the Stanley Company, or some of the other burgeoning companies at the time?

AMSTERDAM: He owned a number of theaters in a company that was called Stanley Warner. And his partners were the Stanley Company, and he had about 50 theaters around New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

INT: Did he at any point in time deal with Mr. Greenfield when he was building movie theaters throughout the city?

AMSTERDAM: Not really, no.

INT: How did your father meet your mother?

AMSTERDAM: There were various relationships, I don't know which came first, but a number of brothers married a number of sisters, and cousins of sisters. And cousins of wives, I should say.

INT: Okay. When were you born?

AMSTERDAM: August 25, 1908.

INT: And where did you grow up?

AMSTERDAM: In Philadelphia.

INT: South Philadelphia?

AMSTERDAM: No, Franklin and Marshall Streets, which is the center of Philadelphia, almost.
INT: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

AMSTERDAM: I had one brother who was born and lived a very short period of time, several days, and then died. That's the only one.

INT: Was he before or after you?

AMSTERDAM: After me.

INT: What type of neighborhood did you grow up in? Was it primarily Jewish?

AMSTERDAM: I'd say so, yes. I would say so.

INT: Did you experience any anti-Semitism as a child?

AMSTERDAM: Very little. None that I noticed particularly.

INT: Did you go to Hebrew school as a child?

AMSTERDAM: Yes, I did, for a very short time, and then we had a rabbi come in, and I learned whatever I know, and I don't know very much anymore, from a rabbi who came in and rapped my knuckles once a week.

INT: How important was Judaism in your family?

AMSTERDAM: Not very. My father was, had grown up in a family that had a great many rabbis in it, and for some reason or another, he didn't feel that was important, and he never went to shul or synagogue. And I just went once in awhile with my uncle, with one or two of my uncles.

INT: Were you Bar Mitzvahed?

AMSTERDAM: Yes, I was.

INT: And did your religious education pretty much come to an end after that?

AMSTERDAM: Yes, it did.

INT: What would you say the major influences of your parents on your early years as a child and as a teenager?

AMSTERDAM: Well, they were what we would call liberal today, and they had an interest in many, many different things, not necessarily Jewish, although they had a real interest in
Jewish affairs, but not in a religious sense. And as a result of that I think I was also, I would be considered a liberal, certainly by Mr. Dole.

INT: When you're using the term "liberal," where the Democratic Party in the turn of the twentieth century was relatively weak to nonexistent. Were you considered Democrats at the time?

AMSTERDAM: That's right. We were. And I was.

INT: Did that in any way hinder your father's business?

AMSTERDAM: I wouldn't say so, no. He was quite successful in almost anything that he did. For awhile, when he was here, he had a pack on his back and sold merchandise from that pack by walking through various parts of the South. He did that for about a year, and that was successful. And he also got into real estate, and then he got into the movie business.

INT: Were there any pivotal things, events in your childhood that shaped your adult life?

AMSTERDAM: Only education. That's all. I had a good education, when I went to high school, I went to Central High School in Philadelphia, which is a splendid high school. I spent four years -- actually three and a half years at Penn, University of Pennsylvania -- and then I spent a half year at the University of Berlin in Berlin. Then I came back and went to law school for three years, and then I was a Gallen Fellow in the law school. They paid me the huge sum of $1500 which enabled me to get married. That was a lot of money in those days.

INT: It certainly was. When you were at Penn, did you experience any anti-Semitism, or any problems because of your identity?

AMSTERDAM: I would say no. No. I was the head of my house in college, my fraternity house. But I never realized that there was any particular anti-Semitism. It certainly didn't affect me any. I had a little more notice of that in the army. I served for four years in the army, and there I came across a little anti-Semitism.

INT: Okay. I'd like to touch upon that in a little while. What led to your decision to go to law school?

AMSTERDAM: Simply that it was a way of getting additional education, and I was interested in getting into a profession that would continue to interest me, and I didn't know very many lawyers, so I decided that law was maybe the thing I ought to be doing. I had no interest in medicine, or any of the other professions.

INT: How did you get appointed to the Sundheim firm? Did you have connections there?
AMSTERDAM: My father knew one of the partners in that firm, Lou Batoff. And as a result of that, he asked them to let me be a clerk in the office, which I was, after I got out of law school, for about three months, and then they took me in. I took my Bars and passed. They took me in as a lawyer in the firm.

INT: What led to your interest in real estate law?

AMSTERDAM: Well, one of our clients was Albert M. Greenfield, who was a realtor of considerable note and importance in Philadelphia, and I handled some of his matters, and he got to know me, and I got to know him. And eventually he invited me to become a member of his firm, which I did. But that was the reason I was interested in real estate, because I had been doing real estate matters for the law firm.

INT: For awhile you left the Sundheim Firm to work for the Reconstruction Finance Corporation. Can you tell us a little bit of how you got that appointment?

AMSTERDAM: I was accepted, as I remember, in those days it was not too difficult to be accepted, and I was. I worked my way up from being a clerk in the office to being the head of the office eventually.

INT: Did you need political contacts to get that particular position?

AMSTERDAM: No, I did not. No.

INT: What type of work did you do for the organization?

AMSTERDAM: Which organization?

INT: The RFC.

AMSTERDAM: Well, I was a lawyer, and handled a lot of their mergers and they would review the activities of the bank, and if it was not a sound bank, they would close it. And I was a part of that. And then they would merge two or three banks in order to have a bank in an area that needed a bank, and I became the lawyer who put together the various banks, so I worked on mergers and so on.

INT: How did you attract the attention of Mr. Greenfield? Was it through the RFC?

AMSTERDAM: No, it was simply by being a member of the Sundheim fellows, and the Sundheim Firm, and they were his lawyers and I was assigned to do some work for him. And I enjoyed it. I began to feel that he was the person with some real merit, and therefore I was persuaded to work in his firm. Probably a very good thing.
INT: What was your initial impression of working for Mr. Greenfield?

AMSTERDAM: My impression of him originally? That he was very bright and very tough. And then as I got to know him better I realized that he wasn't as tough as I thought, but he was very bright, and he had a tremendous interest in people. In family, literally interested in that. That rather surprised me. He was far more kind in that regard than I was.

INT: When you went to work for him in the late 1930's his companies were in still pretty bad shape.

AMSTERDAM: No, the bank that he was interested in was in bad shape, it had been closed. And I was told many, many times that one of the reasons it was closed was because he was the head of it, and they didn't like to have a Jewish banker in Philadelphia. Whether that was true or not I don't know, but we certainly were told that many times. And it could very well have been one of the reasons.

INT: Did you ever know, did you ever hear of who may have led this attack against him? Newhall?

AMSTERDAM: No, I don't know any more. I have no recollection of that. I think at the time I heard a couple of names, Newhall may have been one of them. On the other hand, he became very friendly with the top bankers in Philadelphia, after that, so I'm not sure how true it was that he was really disliked to that degree. But we were told that he was by some other members of his firm. He never told me that.

INT: He didn't speak about it?

AMSTERDAM: No, he didn't. Not to me. He may have spoken to others, but not to me.

INT: How did Mr. Greenfield rebuild his empire in the thirties, considering that AMG & Co. had to default on its bond payments, and Bankers Securities had to omit dividend payments for a few decades? How was he able to rebuild?

AMSTERDAM: Well, he had a very splendid knowledge of real estate. He not only could tell when a piece of real estate was worthwhile, but he had a sense of what would happen in an area, so that he knew what it might be worth five or ten years thereafter. And he became an investor in real estate, relatively small, but in those days, because of the situation in Philadelphia, you could buy a lot of second and third mortgages for very little money, and he bought a lot of them. And the properties later became available to him, and they became very valuable because they were situated in key positions around the city. And he rebuilt them, and invested more in the properties. He was a builder all the time. And the result was that he was very successful. And then he got into the Banker Securities Corporation, which
had an interest also in real estate, but an interest in many other things. And he was a very knowledgeable person, and was very successful as a result of it.

**INT:** One of the insinuations was that the banking department in the 1930's under Dr. William Gordon and Luther gave Mr. Greenfield preferential treatment. Do you agree? Is there any truth to that?

**AMSTERDAM:** (laughs) I have no idea. Certainly not as far as I know.

**INT:** Okay. A few years after Governor Earl was voted out of office, or decided to run for the senate, under the James Administration, the Secretary of Banking was John C. Bell, and he renewed an investigation of Mr. Greenfield's assets, particularly the handling of Bankers Trust. Was that purely politically motivated?

**AMSTERDAM:** I really don't know. I was a pretty young man at that time, and I didn't know about them.

**INT:** Right around the time that Bell started his investigation, World War II broke out. Were you drafted into the army, or did you join?

**AMSTERDAM:** No, I was not. I went, tried to enlist in the Air Corps, and I was turned down because of my eyes, so I went and tried to enlist somewhere else, and they finally took me in the army.

**INT:** Were you married at the time?

**AMSTERDAM:** Yes, I was.

**INT:** Did you have children?

**AMSTERDAM:** One son.

**INT:** How did that play in, how did that factor into your decision to go into the military?

**AMSTERDAM:** It didn't. It didn't. I just felt it was important that I do what I felt was my duty, and I felt that it was America at war, and that I had to be a part of it. So that's what I went into.

**INT:** You mentioned earlier today that you experienced some anti-Semitism in the army. Would you care to elaborate?

**AMSTERDAM:** Oh, I don't think it particularly affected me, but I know when I would be in a group of a half-dozen people, I would hear somebody say, "The damn Jew," or
something else. And I would either keep quiet, or I would say, "I want you to know that I'm a Jew." And the result was not bad, but it was annoying to me, because I had never experienced any of that before, at least not to my then recollection. And I just felt that there were a lot of people who, particularly in the South in those days, that never met a Jew before. All they knew was that they had to say something nasty, and they did.

INT: What was your role in the army? Did you see any combat?

AMSTERDAM: Well, the first year I was trained for three months and then I was at the... in Denver for a year, and then I was in Amarillo, Texas, for about six months. And I did something rather unusual. We had, we trained people to fix airplanes at Amarillo Field, but we never had an airplane that was then being used. So I went out to California to visit a brother-in-law of mine who was in charge of all airplane motors and so on. A huge installation in California. And I convinced him that in fact it was absolutely essential for our group to get some modern airplanes, because we couldn't really properly train people to do the right thing by airplanes without having a modern airplane motor. So he arranged to send four of the motors to Texas, where I was located. I was then the aid to the major general, who was in charge of the field, and he soon left, and there was a colonel who was in charge, and I was his assistant. And somebody came from Washington to try and find a young man who had stolen four airplane motors. And at that point, he thought it would be a good thing for me to go abroad. So he arranged for me to go to Cleveland, where I learned, where I refreshed my French and German, which I knew rather well, and I spent two months refreshing my languages, and then I was sent abroad, and I never heard more about those motors, because apparently he made sure that nobody could find me. In any event, he was happy and I was happy, and we were all quite satisfied.

The war was then two years old, and I went to England, and that was before they crossed the Channel, and I was further trained. I was assigned to a British-American group, and my first training was to interrogate prisoners-of-war. And when they crossed the Channel they brought back a number of prisoners, and I was to interrogate them and find out as much as possible about what was happening, and they turned out to be Chinese. So my French and German didn't do me very much good. What happened was the Germans didn't have enough soldiers, so they had captured some Chinese in Russia, when they had some activity in Russia, and in order to make believe that the areas were manned, they put these Chinese prisoners in there and gave them fake guns. We all thought that they were real guns. In any event, they were the first people captured, and I wasn't very good at interrogating them.

In any event, within a month thereafter I crossed the Channel and went into France, and from there I went into Luxembourg, and stayed there with a civil affairs group. We ran Luxembourg, we ran the various parts of Germany. The I.G. Farben area, particularly, which was the largest corporation in Germany, and they used prisoners-of-war improperly and so on. In any event, I spent the next year and a half either in Germany or in France or in Luxembourg, depending on where the action was. I was assigned to the Second Army, and
I was a civil affairs officer in the Second Army.

**INT:** Did you come across any concentration camps in your...

**AMSTERDAM:** Yes, I did. We liberated several camps while I was with one of the units. It was at the front. My job at that time was supposed to be to tell the gunners what to avoid. I was supposed to know all about the territory by discussing things with prisoners that we captured, or by looking at maps and so on. I would point out that certain areas were not to be fired on, because they either had prisoners of war or they had other concentration camps and so on. So that when we captured an area that had a concentration camp, I was one of the first to go in.

**INT:** How did that affect your attitude after the war in terms of Judaism, or did it intensify...

**AMSTERDAM:** Not really, no. No. I thought it was pretty terrible, obviously. But I didn't... there were plenty of non-Jews. Of course the majority were Jews, but there were plenty of non-Jews also in those areas, and I just felt it was pretty horrible, and did whatever I could, which wasn't very much, to help the situation as much as I possibly could. But of course the thing we were interested in was to complete the war and get that over with. That was our main objective.

**INT:** During the course of the war you corresponded quite frequently with Mr. Greenfield. Was that out of friendship? Was it to keep a political contact alive or a business contact?

**AMSTERDAM:** You say I did what?

**INT:** You corresponded quite frequently with Mr. Greenfield.

**AMSTERDAM:** Really? I don't recall that I did. I may have. He had told me when I went into the war that there would be a place for me in his company when I came out. And if I did much writing, which I don't remember any longer, it was simply to keep the relationship alive. Just as I wrote frequently to my wife for the same reason.

**INT:** Right. Some of Mr. Greenfield's other executives then went into the war, such as S. R. Rosenbaum, decided to branch out on his own after the war. Did you ever consider that?

**AMSTERDAM:** No, I didn't. No. Rosenbaum was an unusual fellow. He was in charge of a radio station in Luxembourg, who spoke on the radio, both in French and in German. And when I was in Luxembourg, I heard him speak in French, and I recognized -- although I'd never heard him speak French before, I recognized -- that it was he. He was a colonel in the army, and I was only a captain. And I went over to the radio station and found him there, and we were very delighted to see one another. Because it was just so unexpected.
INT: Certainly. It's a small world.

AMSTERDAM: But he was a very bright, very bright person, and had a lot of background and experience. I don't think he got along with Albert Greenfield quite as well as I did, but he was a very brilliant lawyer, and a brilliant individual in many other ways.

INT: After the war, did you take part in the baby boom? Did your family expand after the war, or did you just have one child?

AMSTERDAM: No, I only had one child.

INT: How important was Judaism in your household at the time?

AMSTERDAM: Well, Judaism was important to my wife particularly, but not religious Judaism. She always was interested, always felt herself to be a Jewess, and was always interested in Jewish affairs, as she is to this very day. But religion was not a part of either her background or mine. We had our son Bar Mitzvahed, but that was almost a happening, nothing that we felt... We were married first by a justice of the peace, and the second time, when we made known that we were going to get married -- because we were privately married for a year and a half -- we got a rabbi in Wynnefield and he married us.

INT: Why did you have the secrecy for a year and a half?

AMSTERDAM: Because I was going to law school at the time, and my parents felt that I ought to go to law school or complete school before I got married, and since I didn't have any money to speak of, my wife and I decided that we would continue to live with our parents. And I was... wanted to make sure that we were married, so we went away one afternoon, got a justice of the peace, and he married us. It wasn't until a year and a half later that we married in front of a rabbi, and this was the first time our folks knew we were married.

INT: So you did tell them that you had already been married?

AMSTERDAM: No, we never told them that. No.

INT: Okay. In what capacity did you go back to work for Mr. Greenfield after the war?

AMSTERDAM: I was the chief lawyer for the enterprise, and...

INT: For Bankers Securities?

AMSTERDAM: For Bankers Securities. Actually, for Albert M. Greenfield and Company, and then from there to Bankers Securities. And when I eventually came back from the army, I became more important in those various activities, and eventually I became president of the
company of Bankers Securities Corporation, and later of Albert M. Greenfield & Company. And I was chairman of the board of the Greenfield Company, and president and then chairman of the board of Bankers Securities Corporation.

INT: What condition were the companies like after the war? Did you notice any difference?

AMSTERDAM: Well, they were in pretty good shape. They were well-regarded in the community. Albert had a number of critics, but by and large he was a part of anything important in the community. He was an important Democrat. He was an important leader in various activities. Had a mind of his own, so that if something came up that he didn't like, he said so very openly and loudly, thereby making some enemies. But he didn't care. He thought he had to do what he believed to be right. And he was, I think he was a genius in many ways. He was tremendously interested in everybody that was around him.

INT: One of the problems that the nation faced after the war was labor strikes. Bankers Securities hotels were besieged with strikes. Did that in any way affect your attitude, or Mr. Greenfield's attitude towards the Democratic Party? After all, labor and the Democratic Party...

AMSTERDAM: No. We had a very serious strike at Lit Brothers. And when he went to meet one of the top executives of Lit Brothers, one of his nephews was leading the strikers, but Albert didn't mind that, and it didn't affect his relationship with the Democrats, or mine.

INT: One of your retail operations -- Hearn's -- was besieged with a strike that was alleged to be Communist inspired. Do you believe that to be the case?

AMSTERDAM: Oh, I don't know. I was... I know the Hearn situation very well. In fact, when the strike was on, I went over there and actually worked in the store in order to encourage the rest of the top people to work in the store, and I was not too good a salesman, so I was mostly wrapping packages. And everybody blamed it on everything under the sun, but I never felt that it was particularly Communist, or Communist-inspired.

INT: At one point said that one of the union leaders, a man by the name of Osman, said to him that he was going to wage a war against Mr. Greenfield's class, being that is the capitalists.

AMSTERDAM: (laughs) Oh, really? That could very well... You didn't have to be a Communist to do that in those days. If you were a member of the union you were out to do in the management, and the management was there to do in the union. So there was no love lost between the two, I'm sure that's true in many ways. And Albert Greenfield was in the midst of a great many... He worked with the unions in many ways, and helped them, even though he regarded them as being badly advised when they wouldn't work with management, he still thought that they were important, much more important than most other managers.
thought at that time, and had friends among them regularly.

INT: I was told in an off the record comment that the way the Hearn strike came to an end was that Mr. Greenfield contacted Lyndon Baines Johnson, who used some kind of federal pull with the National Labor Relations Board. Do you know anything about that?

AMSTERDAM: No, I don't. I don't recall.

INT: There isn't anything in Mr. Greenfield's personal papers to indicate as such, but that's the type of thing I would think there wouldn't be a record of anyway.

AMSTERDAM: I never heard, I never remember, at least I don't remember having heard that. I remember having heard many times that Albert knew all the political people that were important, both in Washington and Philadelphia, and to a lesser degree in New York. And he, I'm sure, was not above asking them to help in any situation where he thought they could be helpful. It would not have surprised me one iota.

INT: It seems that after World War II City Stores targeted some acquisitions that would not be considered the lead stores in a city: R.H. White in Boston, Wise Smith in Connecticut, to name a few. Did City Stores target smaller operations intentionally that were not necessarily in the best financial condition?

AMSTERDAM: I would say that generally they would acquire operations that were worth more than it would cost to acquire them. If it were a large store, it would be worth more, obviously. If it were in good financial condition and you paid more for it. And if there was a smaller store, or it wasn't in good financial condition, you paid less, but you had to get your money's worth, no matter which one you buy. And that was my feeling with regard to City Stores Company, that they bought things that would have valued as compared with what it cost to acquire them. I don't think the fact that they were large or small made very much difference. They have to be worth what it cost to acquire, otherwise they weren't acquired.

INT: Do you think the company overestimated its ability to revitalize those type of stores?

AMSTERDAM: Yes, I think so. I think, as many other companies did later on, we stayed too long with situations that were difficult, and the result was that we continued, when something became a problem, we continued to operate it in the hopes that we had enough ability to bring it around. But we weren't able to in many cases. That's why the company had problems, and serious problems. And later on, just about every other company in America found the same thing to be true. I think we were one of the earlier ones because we just never felt that we weren't able to carry on anything. We had a great regard for our own ability, both Albert and I and others. I think we thought we were smarter than we really were.
INT: One of the fateful decisions that Mr. Greenfield made had to do with Snellenberg's. A few years prior to the acquisition you had written a detailed memorandum to your boss, in which you said that Snellenberg's was in horrible physical condition, the merchandise was poor quality, and that it was going to require something like ten million dollars just to break even. And yet a few years later an affiliate of Banker Securities purchased it. Why did your company take on such a great risk?

AMSTERDAM: Well, I think Albert felt that knowing the city as he did that he could bring it around, he could give it what it needed in order to be a real success story. And he again bought it for a very reasonable sum. And he thought that with his ability to make things worthwhile happen, that he would make it into something much better. In fact, one of his top aids, Al Glasban, was put in charge of the activity. That's how much Albert thought it was going to be worth. And he convinced the others that that was a good purchase. It turned out not to be, obviously.

INT: The fact that you controlled Lit Brothers and Snellenberg's at the same time, did basically you compete against yourself?

AMSTERDAM: Yes, I would say so. You're competing against everybody else, so the fact that those two competed against one another was not... because you were competing against Wanamaker's and Gimbel Brothers, and so on.

INT: One of the criticisms of Lit's and Snellenberg's was that it attracted a blue collar, working-class type consumer.

AMSTERDAM: I think that's right. But that's good. That's not necessarily bad.

INT: No, it isn't. The problem is, should you have upgraded the merchandise in order to attract a better quality consumer?

AMSTERDAM: Looking back at everything you can always find something better that you should have done, or could have done. At the time I think we thought that was right, and we were satisfied that we could make it happen without going after higher income people. And to some degree we were right, and then things changed and we were wrong. (laughs)

INT: One of the trends in retail was towards the suburbs, branch stores.

AMSTERDAM: Right.

INT: Your companies definitely opened up quite a few branch stores.

AMSTERDAM: That's right.
INT: Bonwit Teller's, and quite a few others. Did your branch stores destroy your downtown stores?

AMSTERDAM: No, not at all. Not at all. I think they made the downtown store better known, and as long as there was business downtown, Lit Brothers store did reasonably well. It was the only unionized store in Philadelphia among the big department stores, and that was a problem. I mean, they eventually, that's what did it in.

INT: Quite a few of the other major department stores in the city, Strawbridge and Clothier and Wanamaker's, had penetrated the suburban markets prior to World War II. City Stores and Bankers Securities seemed to do it after the war. Do you think it was too late?

AMSTERDAM: I thought we did it at about the same time that others. I have no recollection that we were later. As a matter of fact, I would have guessed from my relatively poor recollection that because Albert was interested in real estate, that we were one of the earlier ones, rather than one of the later ones.

INT: I think Strawbridge got involved in the 1930's, as a matter of fact.

AMSTERDAM: It's possible.

INT: One of the interesting things that I found in looking through Mr. Greenfield's papers had to do with the Loft Candy Corporation. And at one point a memorandum was written by G. R. Frederick, who I think was president of the corporation at the time.

AMSTERDAM: Yes, he was.

INT: And he had written a memorandum that indicated some problems with the company, and you evidently had read it and wrote on the side that if anyone could come up with a good-tasting sugar substitute they'll make a fortune in this game. (Amsterdam laughs) In hindsight, do you think Loft should have pursued that a lot more?

AMSTERDAM: I knew much more about it then than I do today, and I think Loft was doing fine for awhile, and didn't keep up with the new things that were coming out, and the situation where we weren't really aware that we had to change that much. We thought what we were doing was brilliant, and therefore we didn't change. And I think that was one of the mistakes we made.

INT: Do you have specific ideas as to how you would have changed, either in retail or with Loft, in which direction you would have gone if you had to do it all over?

AMSTERDAM: Sure. I would have merged with a couple of other companies, and learned more about the candy business, because when you merge with another company, you learn
what they know, in addition to what you know. And we had an opportunity several times to take over other companies. We didn't do it. I think that was short-sighted.

INT: Do you remember which companies?

AMSTERDAM: No, I don't recall anymore.

INT: Prior to the modern civil rights movement, you had quite a few Southern retail operations in City Stores. Do you know if they adhered to some type of segregation in terms of drinking fountains or restrooms?

AMSTERDAM: I suspect that they did. I don't recall. I have a vague recollection that that was the case, and it was... on the part of Albert with a number of people down there, in which he suggested that things change, and they said that they couldn't run the store unless they were in a position to compete regularly with other stores, and therefore they would not make the changes. And change came, but it came very slowly. I don't know whether we were among the first that made a change or not.

INT: In the 1950's, Bankers Securities was approached by several different hotel syndicates to purchase all of Banker Securities hotels, or a portion of them. The hotels themselves weren't in the greatest condition. Some of them needed new elevators, wallpaper was peeling on some of them. Millions of dollars was needed to upgrade them. What made Bankers Securities hold onto those facilities?

AMSTERDAM: The locations. They felt that the locations were so good that they would improve, and that we could put in, I think we probably didn't recognize the amount of cost that was involved.

(END TAPE ONE, SIDE ONE)

(TAPE ONE, SIDE TWO)

INT: ...a business, the Elite Organization, the Greater Philadelphia Movement was established. They didn't include Mr. Greenfield in its membership. Do you know why?

AMSTERDAM: No, but... their obligation was to take on civic things that are important to the community where we lived. He made that clear not only to the Philadelphians, but to the various other people in this organization, and all of us felt that we had a duty to get into as many organizations as we could to help the city, help the community. That was one of the things he taught all of us. And he couldn't get into everything, so he designated others. I was designated in many cases where he either didn't want to or might have had difficulty getting in because of personal problem, or personal dislike. He had enough enemies, and he knew about it. He wasn't thin-skinned about that.
INT: Was he vindictive?

AMSTERDAM: I don't think so. At least, I never saw evidence of it.

INT: One of the big controversies in the 1950's had to do with the Food Distribution Center.

AMSTERDAM: Right.

INT: Did Mr. Greenfield oppose that strictly for economic reasons, or was there also politics involved?

AMSTERDAM: I only know the economic reasons. I don't know about the politics. He felt that it was going to be much more costly than it could ever be worth, and he thought that it would open up an area that ought to be saved for things that are better than what went in there, and he fought the food distribution idea for a number of years, and made a few enemies there, too, including, I forget his name, who was the head of one of the...

INT: Harry Batten?

AMSTERDAM: Yeah, Harry Batten, right. He and Harry didn't get along too well together because they were both very bright.

INT: Batten indirectly accused Mr. Greenfield of murder, because...

AMSTERDAM: Really? (laughs)

INT: Because in a way it was on the site where the Food Distribution Center was to be built, and Mr. Greenfield objected to it, several young children died, drowned in a pool of water. And the GPM issued a press release that kind of insinuated that if Mr. Greenfield would withdraw his criticisms these type of tragedies could be avoided in the future.

AMSTERDAM: I never knew that, I don't think. I certainly have no recollection of it today. But he and Harry disliked one another quite vehemently.

INT: Supposedly they made peace at Frank Meyer's funeral.

AMSTERDAM: They made peace eventually, yeah.

INT: When Mr. Greenfield was appointed to the chairmanship of the City Planning Commission, how did that advance his own economic interests, or didn't it?

AMSTERDAM: I don't understand the question.
INT: When he was appointed as chairman of the Planning Commission, how did it affect his own real estate interests?

AMSTERDAM: I don't think it affected them particularly, except to the extent that benefitting the city would benefit his interests, because his interests were in the city. But other than that, I don't think there was any benefit, any more than there was when I became chairman of the Redevelopment Authority. But to the degree that we built up various parts of the city, it helped the city, and anything that helped the city was good for us, obviously. That was the nature of the training we all had.

INT: When Mr. Greenfield took the chairmanship position, he sold AMG & Co. to you and to a few other executives. He provided a very generous purchase plan. Was that out of admiration and gratitude, or was that because he had no better offers, or a combination of both?

AMSTERDAM: You got me. I don't know. I do know that we were given an enterprise that was very well-financed as far as he was concerned for us, for our benefit. And that's the reason we went into it. If he hadn't, we wouldn't have been in it. And he knew that because he had trained most of us, and he knew what would interest us and what wouldn't. I think he had a certain amount of gratitude towards his top executives. In fact, he seemed to have an interest in all of his executives, whether they were top or bottom. He was a very unusual person in that regard. As far as the ability to carry it on was concerned.

INT: What condition did you find Bankers Securities and City Stores when he stepped down and you took over as chairman?

AMSTERDAM: Well, I had known them both for many years, so I didn't find anything there that I didn't expect to find.

INT: How active politically were you in the 1950's?

AMSTERDAM: Reasonably active. The years all blend together to the point where I can't say it was 1945 or '55 or whatever it was, but I was quite active, and I was... he even suggested that I run for Mayor in Philadelphia at one time. And I knew all the top Democrats around, and was friendly with a great many of them.

INT: What happened to that potential mayoral bid?

AMSTERDAM: I didn't win.

INT: Did you run?

AMSTERDAM: Yes. I ran, in order to be the nominee of the party, and the board leaders
who made the decision didn't make the decision in favor of me. They made it in favor of another board leader.

INT: Of Payton?

AMSTERDAM: That's right.

INT: What led to your appointment to the Redevelopment Authority? Was it a friendship with Dilworth?

AMSTERDAM: Not particularly. I had been active in a great many things in Philadelphia, and the mayor asked me to serve, and I thought it was an important activity, whereas the real benefit was ensured to the city, and I knew the then chairman, who was departing. And when I was asked, I first went on not as chairman, but as a member, and then later became chairman.

INT: What were some of your objectives in getting that post? What did you hope to accomplish?

AMSTERDAM: Well, I hoped that we would save various parts of the city by building them up, by making available funds for reconstruction. The Federal government was very active in making funds available to Redevelopment Authorities around the country, and those that took advantage of that benefit did their cities a tremendous amount of good. And we were at the forefront of that. We always had been, from the very beginning. And I thought that that was tremendously beneficial to the city, and I wanted to be a part of it.

INT: Was there ever a plan to incorporate Philadelphia County with some of the outlying counties?

AMSTERDAM: Oh, yes. It was called the "Green Grab."

INT: And what happened to that?

AMSTERDAM: Bill Green who was the mayor at the time, the father of Bill Green. I guess he was a member of the...I don't know exactly what he was. But in any event, all of the counties around Philadelphia were hostile. They thought that was terrible, that's why they called it the "Green Grab." And they defeated any possibility of that happening, as they defeated many things that were good for Philadelphia, because they were, the legislature in Harrisburg was made up of a lot more people that were outside the big cities than those that were in the big cities. So they made it uncomfortable, or unpleasant to the big cities as much as they could. That was one of the problems we had.

INT: In certain capacities Mr. Greenfield was not appointed to some civic boards, in part
because of his Jewish identity, but it seems that in many ways he paved the path for you. A good example would be with Thomas Jefferson. Do you think that would be a good characterization, that in some ways he set the standard, and then some of his predecessors [sic] were able to capitalize?

AMSTERDAM: I'm not sure it had to do with being Jewish, because they knew I was as Jewish as Albert was. I would say there were a number of areas where he was disliked, and he knew that he was, and therefore he would not try and get into a situation, and he made it possible for those of his executives who were equipped to handle it, to take on the responsibility, would push for them to be a part of it. And it wasn't Jefferson at the time. It was Einstein.

INT: I actually was referring to Thomas Jefferson, and not Albert Einstein. But you served on Thomas Jefferson's board, didn't you?

AMSTERDAM: Oh, I was on the board originally of Einstein. And Albert's lawyer, Solis-Cohen, was the one, he was on the Jefferson Board, and he convinced me that I could be more helpful by becoming a part of Jefferson, so I resigned from Einstein and became a director at Jefferson. And I served for a great many years. And I'm the only life trustee that's left. Everybody else is... there are no more life trustees. They're in for six year periods, and then they have to be re-elected. In my case, I don't have to be re-elected, because as long as I am of sound mind and reasonably healthy, I can continue to be a director there. I spend a lot of time there, and a lot of, I'm very, very interested in everything they do. And I make a reasonable contribution.

INT: How important is, or was class in Philadelphia? E. Digby Balzell talks about the Protestant Establishment. How accurate...

AMSTERDAM: I think it was important. I think people who were not able to finance things because they were Jewish, or they were Black, or they were something other than the man who was in charge of the bank. I think that kind of thing made a big difference, until later on in the history of the city, when that became reasonably unimportant. But in the early days that you're talking about, it was important. It was difficult to get into an enterprise that had no Jews in it. The first Jew that got in was sort of a token Jew, as I was in a number of cases.

INT: Could you elaborate, in what capacities were you, say, the "house Jew" or the "token Jew?"

AMSTERDAM: Well, that meant that they wanted to -- I don't want to name names -- but there were several companies in Philadelphia that were utilities, and so on, where they handled everybody's business, and yet they only had white Protestants on their board. So
they decided they wanted to have other than white Protestants, so I would go on as a Jew, and another fellow would come on as a Black, and so on. And we made the first entry into those enterprises, and then finally more of them came in. After awhile it didn't make any difference. Nobody cared whether you were a Jew or not.

INT: Did you see yourself as a trail-blazer? Did you resent it?

AMSTERDAM: No, I didn't resent it. I liked it. (laughs) I thought I was doing something worthwhile, opening it up to everybody else.

INT: In the early part of the 1960's, in 1963 and 1964, City Stores lost two million dollars. Was that the beginning of the end of the chain? What were the factors that were leading to that type of economic loss?

AMSTERDAM: Well, what happened was, as near as I can recall we had a number of losses, as things turned around, and we were not strong enough to operate without having bank back-up. And the banks became concerned that we might not be able to pay off our debts, and they then refused to give us additional capital that we needed, and then that caused the problem to occur, which made it necessary for us to go into the courts and try and resurrect the company and get it out of its difficulties.

INT: One of the decisions that you made concerning Snellenberg's was to make it a division of Lit's. What led to that decision?

AMSTERDAM: I don't even remember that.

INT: Is that right?

AMSTERDAM: Yeah. I'm sorry. I don't recall it.

INT: It was towards the tail end. And what you did was you had Lit Brothers executives actually running Snellenberg's. It was just for about a year or two, and then Snellenberg's shut down.

AMSTERDAM: You got me. I really don't know. Al Blasband would have been in charge of that decision.

INT: Right. Also in the 1960's, City Stores took on W.J. Sloane, and another company, Wolf and Dessauer, is that the name of it? Yet the company was having trouble paying dividends. Should you have expanded at that time? Was that the appropriate time to expand, or did you see this as helping to...

AMSTERDAM: You're asking me whether looking back? Looking back I think we did
make some mistakes. That was probably one of them.

INT: One of your directors was John Bunting.

AMSTERDAM: Right.

INT: He had suggested that perhaps the way to change Lit Brothers was to make it a branch of Maison Blanche.

AMSTERDAM: Did he?

INT: Yeah. This goes back a few decades. Did you ever...

AMSTERDAM: To whom did he make the suggestion, do you know?

INT: No, off the top of my head I couldn't tell you.

AMSTERDAM: I don't know what that was about. I can't respond to that, because I have no recollection that I ever knew about it. John was a very bright fellow, and he made a great many suggestions, so he may very well have made that one, too.

INT: Right. I'd like to talk to you about the Drexel Building. I've read that the building lay vacant for twenty years. Is that true?

AMSTERDAM: Yes.

INT: What factored into that?

AMSTERDAM: I would say that the cost of rehabilitation was so great, that it wasn't justified by what could be done with the building. The building was a difficult building to make economically sound. It was very costly. It was large, and open, and it would have taken a great deal of money to make it successful as a building, as an office building, which it should have been, and was. And it was a lot of open space, and the cost of putting it all together was not justified by what could be the result of that expenditure, and therefore we had it for sale for a great many years, but we didn't put any money into it.

INT: Did you have any good offers for it, or were they insulting?

AMSTERDAM: No, we weren't insulted by any offers. We didn't have many offers for it, because everybody knew it was a problem area.

INT: Did you acquire it, or was that acquired under Mr. Greenfield?
AMSTERDAM: I think it was acquired under Albert, as I remember.

INT: Perhaps this is one of these things that gets invented over time, but the story goes that when Mr. Greenfield acquired it, he went into the board room where the bankers met to discuss Bankers Trust, and supposedly he relieved himself in the room as his mark. Do you know if that...

AMSTERDAM: No. It sounds wrong to me. It doesn't sound like anything that he would be doing.

INT: It's out of his character, but I was just wondering if you knew.

AMSTERDAM: No. I don't believe that. You always find that there are people that make dumb remarks like that.

INT: I don't give any validity to it, either.

AMSTERDAM: No. I don't think there's anything to it.

INT: I want to talk to you about something that perhaps you may be a little uncomfortable with, and that has to do with the National Land and Investment Company, which in 1963 got involved in a managerial contract with AMG & Co. to build a building at Fifteenth and Market Street. Do you remember the incident? It was to build some type of new office building. Are you familiar with that?

AMSTERDAM: Just I have a vague recollection that George Johnson, who was the president of Albert M. Greenfield and Company, had a client whose name I no longer remember, who bought some of the properties, and wanted to build a fine new building there, and he had to acquire other properties. And I know that George was responsible for buying some of these other properties and making... My recollection was that it was successfully put together, the real estate. And the chap who brought it to George's attention, I think got out of it about that time, and some new owners came in and financed it, were able to finance it, and it became a really important structure in Philadelphia, from Fifteenth to Sixteenth on Market.

INT: Well, during the course of the early negotiating, the Redevelopment Authority had to get involved in, I guess, condemning the property.

AMSTERDAM: That's probably true.

INT: You were chairman at the time, and you also had a financial interest in AMG & Co. Was there a conflict of interest here?
AMSTERDAM: If there was, I would have made known the conflict, and I didn't act on a number of things where we had an interest. I would tell the board, and usually their minutes would so reflect that I would indicate that we had an interest, and therefore I would not act in connection with the matter.

INT: What led Bankers Securities Corporation to purchase AMG & Co?

AMSTERDAM: It was instrumental in starting, it was starting Bankers Securities Corporation, and therefore he just simply had the Greenfield Company as a part of the total structure. It wasn't as though Bankers Securities went after Albert M. Greenfield and Co.

INT: Bankers Securities purchased it in the late 1960's, and I was curious as to what finally led to that purchase.

AMSTERDAM: I really don't know. It was something that Albert put together, I'm sure.

INT: He was already passed on by this point.

AMSTERDAM: I don't think we bought it after that, did we?

INT: Mm-hm. That was in the late '60's.

AMSTERDAM: I don't recall that. I thought we always had an interest in it.

INT: You did in terms of stock, but I'm talking about complete control, and actually purchasing it.

AMSTERDAM: Oh. That's altogether different. I don't know. That was probably the time when I became chairman of the Albert M. Greenfield Company.

INT: That's right.

AMSTERDAM: Those of us who were in charge thought that they needed more relationship, more open relationship, and I undertook to become chairman of it, and others went in and helped with various other parts of the enterprise. That's just an operational matter. I thought we had the financial interest in it in the very early stages.

INT: You did.

AMSTERDAM: The stock and so on.

INT: Sure. What was your relationship with Arlen Specter, who was District Attorney at the time?
AMSTERDAM: Well, I didn't have much of a relationship with him until he alleged that I was doing something through some of my affiliates, and that he was going to put me in jail as a result of it, and I grew to dislike him very greatly as a result of that.

INT: He had convened a grand jury investigation to look into possible criminal activity, and one of the things that he discovered, or at least the grand jury discovered, was the use of straw men, particularly in this case, a man James Hickey, who was a straw man for Banker Securities a few times. And it involved a property again at Fifteenth and Market. What was your recollection of that development?

AMSTERDAM: Well, a straw man was used by every real estate company, because they wanted to put mortgages on the property without being liable for the amount of the mortgage in case the property went bad. So somebody in the organization who had no assets at all became a so-called "straw man." It was a normal and usual activity. It wasn't anything. And Jim Hickey was known by everybody in Philadelphia who was in the real estate business as being the nominee for Albert M. Greenfield and Company, and for Greenfield's clients. And he made, I don't know, either millions or billions of dollars worth of mortgages as a straw man. They would put the title in him, he would put the mortgage on, then he would convey the property to whoever was the real owner. It wasn't anything unusual. It was done, nobody considered it as unusual. When they later talked about it, it made it believe as though we were doing something that was terrible, and that we were breaking the law, etc., etc., none of which was true, because everybody knew exactly what the situation was with straw men. Later on it became possible to make mortgages without, by putting in the mortgage itself that there was no liability for any deficiency, and therefore it was no longer necessary to have a straw man. But in the early days, nobody even thought of that. So they used a straw man to do exactly the same thing.

INT: Do you think that Arlen Specter at the time was a Democrat, he had become a Republican. Do you think this was purely out of politics, the grand jury investigation?

AMSTERDAM: Oh, sure. It was out of politics in the sense that he was always trying to become more important. He was thinking of the next election. And any time he could put somebody in the middle of something that sounded bad, who was an important person in the community, he did. That was Arlen's ability.

INT: How did this grand jury investigation affect your reputation?

AMSTERDAM: Oh, I don't know. I don't know that, the fact that it may have, it just disappeared. Finally nothing came of it, as I recall, as near as I can recall. And it sort of faded away by itself.

INT: When Specter reopened the investigation, you decided to resign from the Redevelopment Authority instead of perhaps fighting. What led to that decision?
AMSTERDAM: I have no idea. That is a fact, though, that I felt that it was difficult for the Redevelopment Authority to proceed properly with somebody who was chairman and who was alleged to have done something improper, and I thought I could defend it better without being a member of the board of the Redevelopment Authority, and I decided that I would resign, which I did.

INT: Looking back on your tenure on the RA, what would you say your major accomplishments were?

AMSTERDAM: Running a good organization, and running one that was not, even though it was civic, it was not stirred by politics. We didn't make a difference between Democrats and Republicans. Everybody was treated equally, I think. And I think we ran a good organization. I was part of it, part of running it. I think I know how to run an organization, knew in those days how to run an organization, and I think I did a reasonably good job. At least everybody seemed to be satisfied with it -- except Specter maybe. (chuckles)

INT: In the early 1970's, Bankers Securities in its hotel division decided to invest in the Hilton, which was at 10th and Packard.

AMSTERDAM: Right.

INT: What led to the decision to invest in that hotel? Did you think that because of the sports arenas that it was going to be popular?

AMSTERDAM: Yes, we did.

INT: And it quickly didn't succeed.

AMSTERDAM: That's right.

INT: Why? Why do you think that was the case?

AMSTERDAM: Because the area didn't build up as fast as we thought it would, and the costs were greater than we anticipated.

INT: ...thinks that probably was the death that literally at that time was the American Legion Convention at the Bellevue.

AMSTERDAM: Oh, that was considerably later.

INT: Yeah. We're like in the mid-1970's now. Was that hotel already on its last leg prior to the convention?
AMSTERDAM: No! Not at all. It wasn't making a lot of money, but it was running along reasonably well, and we certainly never thought -- in fact, we had been given various opportunities to sell it, at very substantial figures, which we didn't take because we thought we could do better by owning it, continuing to own it. It was only when the situation became unbearable, with the Legionnaires' Disease, and people afraid to come into the building. And I finally had to close it; that was my decision. We eventually sold it for a pretty good figure at that. But nothing like we would have gotten if we had not had the Legionnaires' Disease.

INT: Certainly. One of the things that has been said about Mr. Greenfield as well as yourself was that the hotels were not just important in terms of their business, but in the real estate that they occupied. Do you think that is true?

AMSTERDAM: Yes, that's true. Location was the most important item in our consideration, because we felt that a property that was best located would do better, far better, than a property that was poorly located, even though they might be exactly the same, their looks were exactly the same, and cost and so on. So we were always looking for fine locations.

INT: Do you think Philadelphia hotels, especially in the weekend, suffered because of the fairly close proximity of Washington and New York?

AMSTERDAM: I think so, yes.

INT: Did you ever consider, perhaps, building hotels out in the more suburban areas such as Cherry Hill or Willow Grove?

AMSTERDAM: No, we didn't.

INT: Was it because you were committed to the downtown?

AMSTERDAM: Well, I don't think we thought that those locations were as good as we were able to get in the city. We thought the city was a far better place to put a hotel than the outskirts, which was, in those days, rather thinly settled. And settled by people who owned homes there. There was no particular reason in those days to go out to the suburbs.

INT: Critics argued that in some cases you held on to some equity a little too long.

AMSTERDAM: I think that's very true. (laughs) Very true.

INT: Well, I'll give you a few examples, and then you can either counter them or agree with them. One critic says that you could have sold the Loft Candy Corporation for $5.00 a share and held out for $7.00 a share. Is there truth to that?
AMSTERDAM: It could be. I don't know. I don't recall. But it's possible. I'm sure that that's the sort of thing we might very well have done.

INT: Well, one of the critics that you're very much familiar is Gordon Greenfield.

AMSTERDAM: Right.

INT: He claims that you could have sold City Stores for something along the lines of $50 million dollars to a New York syndicate. Is there truth to that?

AMSTERDAM: It could be. I don't recall.

INT: Did you ever get a serious offer for City Stores?

AMSTERDAM: No, I don't think so, no. No.

INT: The other controversies in the mid 1970's had to do with the voting trust agreement, in terms of Bankers Securities Corporation, and the Albert M. Greenfield Foundation, and it pitted you against Elizabeth Petrie, Mr. Greenfield's last wife, Elizabeth Zeldman, and Gordon Greenfield.

AMSTERDAM: It did what?

INT: It pitted you, you were at opposite ends to one degree over stock voting. Do you recall that?

AMSTERDAM: Well, there was a controversy that Bruce Greenfield and I were on one side, and they were on the other. And the nature of it, I don't recall anymore. But that is a fact. In fact, they had lawyers that began a suit as I remember.

INT: That's right.

AMSTERDAM: I guess it may very well have involved the voting trust. I just don't have a recollection anymore of that.

INT: Well, one of the things that they alleged there was that Albert M. Greenfield Foundation drew heavily on the stocks invested in Bankers Securities Corporation. They felt that the corporation was losing a lot of money, thus endangering the foundation, so they were trying to at least gain control over the board of directors, or have more influence in it. Does that strike a bell?

AMSTERDAM: Vaguely, yes, it does. I don't think they wanted to take control, I think they wanted to have more representation than they had, as I recall it. But I really don't... there
are papers through the courts that will probably give you the information that you want. And it may very well be that Bruce Greenfield, if you haven't already spoken to him, would have a recollection of that far better than mine.

INT: How would you characterize your relationship with Gordon Greenfield? It seemed it was very adversarial.

AMSTERDAM: I would say it was adversarial, yes.

INT: What was the nature of that? What caused it?

AMSTERDAM: Well, he was in charge of the company in New York that we had an interest in, and I didn't think that it was proper, and he and I were, became with one another as a result of it.

INT: Are you referring to Oppenheim Collins, by any chance?

AMSTERDAM: That's right.

INT: It seems that your specialty stores did not do particularly well from the beginning. Would that be a correct assessment?

AMSTERDAM: I think they became less good, but there came a time when they were not very well, the result was not as good as we thought it should be, and to some degree, I have no doubt we felt the management was inadequate, I think. That's one of the things that causes problems.

INT: Did Gordon Greenfield lack his father's genius?

AMSTERDAM: I think he has a lot of genius. Pardon me. (Phone interruption)

INT: You were talking about Gordon Greenfield.

AMSTERDAM: You were talking about him.

INT: Okay. (laughter) I asked you if he lacked his father's business acumen, basically.

AMSTERDAM: That's a matter of judgement. I didn't think he was by far as good as his father. On the other hand, I thought he was very bright, and I still do.

INT: That you basically forced him off the board of Banker Security Corporation. You don't think so?
AMSTERDAM: I don't believe so, but if I felt that he was a detriment, I would certainly have done so. At 88 years of age, I don't remember some of the things I probably should. (laughs)

INT: Right. Well, that's okay. That happens to the best of us, even when we're a lot younger. One of Bankers Security Corporation's investments was a development corporation in New Hampshire, was to build some kind of vacation homes.

AMSTERDAM: Fort Washington.

INT: No. New Hampshire. It was a Mt. Washington Corporation.

AMSTERDAM: Yeah, Mount Washington.

INT: I thought it was in New Hampshire. It did not pan out. Do you know what went wrong there? The company lost something in the neighborhood of a million dollars. Was it the recession at the time?

AMSTERDAM: My recollection is that we owned, with a partner, a ski resort and Mount Washington Hotel, as I remember. And it did not, eventually did not make the kind of return that we thought it should. In fact I believe it lost money eventually. And our partner was the one who got us into it, and he was the operating member, and when we had a chance to get out, we did. That's all I remember about it.

INT: Okay. I'd like to talk to you a little bit about Lit Brothers. Why do you think Lit Brothers eventually had to be closed?

AMSTERDAM: (sighs) Why, why. Well, certainly one of the important things was that we were the only store that was unionized. I'd say that was a substantial part of the problem. We felt that Albert particularly, originally felt that he ought to encourage unions rather than fight against them, and I think that he made it possible for the union to represent employees at Lit Brothers, and that was a mistake, because if all of the other stores had been unionized, that would have been one thing. But we were the only unionized store, and the result of that was that we had to pay more to our employees than the other stores did. We had less control over them. We had more fights with them. They hurt us materially by having a relatively long-time strike, and all of it together spelled defeat, and we were defeated there. There was no doubt about it.

INT: Did location have any role in it?

AMSTERDAM: I don't think so, no. Eighth and Market was considered a top location.

INT: I'd like to talk to you about another investment that Bankers Securities started in the
late 1960's. You formed a corporation called Barco, and Barco was involved in building some low-rise condominiums in Atlantic City. This was before the days of casino gambling. The early low-rises were not very successful. When casino gambling was passed on a referendum, you had an option to continue to build and you chose not to. What led to that decision?

**AMSTERDAM:** We had other properties, because we felt they would increase substantially in value, and we bought some, and we were in the courts with the authority in Atlantic City, trying to get them to pay the amount of money that we thought they were worth. And we lost the lawsuit as I recall it.

**INT:** Supposedly Resorts International offered you somewhere between $5 million to $20 million dollars to buy the option that you had on some territory there. Was there truth to that?

**AMSTERDAM:** I don't recall anybody offering us that kind of money, no. My recollection, as I say, is that we thought the properties were very valuable, and when they were taken by the city, as I remember, we sued to have them valued at what we thought was the value, and we lost the lawsuit. So apparently we were, either we had the wrong lawyer, or thought they were worth a lot more than they really were worth, I don't know which.

**INT:** Right. Could you take us through the chain of events that led Jack Barber to gain control of Banker Securities?

**AMSTERDAM:** The investors in Bankers Securities, although I can't think of his name right now. He had a securities office at Fifteenth and Walnut. I should remember. Farber was his accountant. And since Jack Farber, he made Jack Farber the president of the company. And either Farber decided they wanted to buy Bankers Securities Corporation, and eventually did it, because the negotiator for Bankers Securities was Bruce Greenfield. And we got what we thought was a reasonable price, and we sold.

**INT:** Was it painful for you to see Farber liquidate a lot of Bankers Securities' assets?

**AMSTERDAM:** Not really, no. I didn't keep up with what was happening in Bankers Securities. It wasn't my property. He could do anything he wants with it.

**INT:** After you stepped down from control of Bankers Securities, what type of projects did you get involved in?

**AMSTERDAM:** ...I practiced law. And...

**INT:** What are most of the projects that you're involved?
AMSTERDAM: Well, I'm chairman of the board of Diagnostic and Rehabilitation Center, which is a drug abuse, the largest drug abuse activity of its kind in the state of Pennsylvania. And maybe 35 years ago I was interested in getting rid of the parts of eastern Philadelphia, around Fifth and Vine, Spruce, Vine and Race and so on. That area was, had a great many people who were either drunkards or some other, had other problems, let me put it that way. And as part of the, one of the activities that I was interested in, we decided that it would be very beneficial to clean up that neighborhood and try and make it into something really worthwhile, instead of giving it the bad name that it then had. And we got a young man from Temple University, by the name of Irv Shandler, to write a dissertation on how to clean up the area and make it available for worthwhile activities. And since he had written the dissertation, we suggested to him that he set up an organization to do what he thought was necessary in order to accomplish that, which he did. He was made the head of that thing, it's called the Diagnostic Rehabilitation Center, located at 2nd and Arch. And he was a member of the board for many, many years, and later became chairman of the board of that company. That takes Pennsylvania to put up a substantial sum of money for the building of it. We get a lot, it runs about $6 to $7 million a year of cost, and we have the city and the state and the federal government to make funds available for our various activities, drug and alcohol, both. And that takes a fair amount of my time.

And I was vice-chairman of the board of Thomas Jefferson University for many years, and am still on the board, and that took a fair amount of my time. I'm a life director at the University of Pennsylvania, and that took a fair amount of time. And I was on several boards, like Comcast Corporation, and so on, all of which took time, and they were all civic matters when I originally went into it. In the case of Comcast, it also is something that I'm very interested in, and have a substantial stock interest in now.

INT: What would you say your most important accomplishments, looking back on your life, what would they be?

AMSTERDAM: Be a good company, and making many friends, both in the companies and outside. And making (?) activities that were good for the community. And [that was] among the things that I was able to do.

INT: Any major regrets?

AMSTERDAM: Not really, no. Not really.
INT: If you had your life to do all over again, is there anything that you would change?

AMSTERDAM: Yeah, I would have sold out sooner. (laughs)

INT: Bankers Securities?

AMSTERDAM: Well, many enterprises. I think I always kept them too long.

INT: Do you have any immediate plans for the future, or anything that you plan to do?

AMSTERDAM: No. I'm just going to continue doing what I'm interested in.

INT: Are you actually practicing law, or serving as a counselor of sorts?

AMSTERDAM: Not really. I don't take on new clients, and the few that I have are more friends than clients. And I don't think I have to charge anybody anything for several years. And I enjoy very much what I'm doing. I'm in every morning by 9:00, I'm out by 5:30 or so, and enjoy it all, otherwise I wouldn't do it.

INT: What type of law are you presently working?

AMSTERDAM: Well, I would say corporate finance mostly.

INT: Is there anything that you'd like to put on the record that we have not discussed today?

AMSTERDAM: I don't think so, no. I think we've gone...

INT: We certainly do appreciate very much you taking part in the project. If there's anything at all that you'd like to add in the future, you can do so. The way it works is a transcriber will type this up and send you a copy, send me a copy. We both read it, make any corrections. If there's things that you do not want on the record, you can indicate as such, and send it back, and you will get a bound copy at the end, when this is all said and done.

AMSTERDAM: Okay. Fair enough.

INT: Well, thank you so much for taking part.

AMSTERDAM: Right.

(END OF INTERVIEW)