



Interview with Ed and Jim Lang

**Under the Auspices of the
Monmouth County Library Headquarters
125 Symmes Drive, Manalapan, N.J.
Flora T. Higgins, Project Coordinator**

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Name of Interviewer: Ellen Williams
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Birthdates of Subjects: Jim Lang, November 20, 1947
Ed Lang, May 31, 1916

Ms. Williams: Today we have a unique situation where father and son are being interviewed together. We have Mr. Ed Lang and his son, Mr. Jim Lang, and we will be doing a combined oral history with them. They both are very involved in civic programs and we will be hearing more about those. I think we might want to begin with the discussion with actually where Mr. Ed Lang lives. We were talking about Farmingdale and exactly what the post office is and where the Howell border is, and so maybe we might begin about that. What's the distinction about this?

Ed Lang: Well, to begin with, Farmingdale is roughly less than one square mile, and Howell Township is sixty-four square miles, roughly. First of all, our mail, going way back, used to come out of Farmingdale Post Office and was delivered into parts of Howell Township. We had to put our address down as Farmingdale, although we did not live in Farmingdale. And today it stands. This part of Howell gets all of its mail from Farmingdale from south of the Boro boundary line with Howell to the 195 overpass now, eastward to Wall Township and westward to within a mile of Highway 9. Even though these residents have to write "Farmingdale" as their address, they do not live in Farmingdale. Earlier, Farmingdale mail delivery extended even further across Highway 9 to the Jackson line. When I first moved here with my family around 1932, we heard how even earlier the part of Squankum that we lived in was called Lower Squankum, and that it had a post office with a Lower Squankum post mark and that Farmingdale, before it split off from Howell Township and was incorporated around 1909 or 1919, was called Upper Squankum. The roads in my earliest

days here were pretty bad. They were unpaved and a lot of them were of poor construction. It was an adventure sometimes to travel between here and Lakewood whether you lived on this road, or were passing through here. It is interesting that Lakewood and Farmingdale still officially refer to this road as Squankum Road at either end as we residents did for as long as I can remember, but that the county calls it Lakewood-Farmingdale Road in the middle in between the two ends that are still known as Squankum. They also refer to it as County 524 and County 547. Not very descriptive. Now the post office and the police department refer to it as Lakewood- Farmingdale as well, since the adoption of the 911 emergency phone service which was installed as well a few years ago. This road is said to have been originally named after the area of Squankum which was where the Native-American Leni-Lenape Indians once lived. It was here, somewhere near the Manasquan River crossing that the braves left their women and children while they went on hunting expeditions for food. The old Quaker Burial Ground is still there as well. Much of the original road was said to be original Indian hunting paths and horse and later horse drawn roadway. The renaming of the middle section of the Squankum Road to that of Lakewood-Farmingdale Road and 524-547 seems to be another move away from the early origins of the area and everyone's loss. During my earliest days here, Squankum Road had more business and traffic than the area that later became Route 9 in parts of Howell Township did in those times. There were hotels, restaurants, general stores, and taverns, and the Lower Squankum Post Office years ago, not to mention the General Store that housed the Post Office and the Squankum Inn, which was a little north of the Old Squankum Tavern and across from the Squankum Mill. The county developed the roads here then, and not the state. During the winters and springs, and sometimes during the often-rainy Novembers, the road would usually break up and become nearly impassable. This usually happened during the spring thaw. I remember down around Martin Nist's farm along the Squankum Road in Howell past where the New Jersey Natural Gas Plant is today that the road would heave and be almost impassable. Travelers and locals alike would get their cars and trucks stuck right in the middle of Squankum Road going to and from Lakewood. A couple of farmers earned money pulling out these vehicles for around two dollars or two dollars and a half and the traveler knew that that was a cheap price to be back on the way so quickly. I remember it; we almost got stuck ourselves different times, and we'd have to get out and dig ourselves through. And that was only from the mud. Now the snowstorms were really something. I clearly remember that after snowstorms this road was a very bad road. Different times, the county couldn't reopen the road because their equipment at that time wasn't up to the five and six foot snow banks. Some places had heavy drifting of over five and six feet deep. They did not use snow fences then either, which probably allowed the drifts on the road to get much higher. On those occasions when it was at the worst he county asked many local farmers to come out and shovel the snow off of the road. This was during the Depression and the pay was fifty cents an hour for shoveling snow. That was good pay then. Even with hand shoveling, there were different places where we had to cut off of the road and cut a new road, onto private property,

and ride on the land near the road instead. And you'd shovel and then drive maybe sometimes one hundred to two hundred fifty feet off of the road to avoid the worst drifts and to get to where it was higher ground and the wind blew, and the snow wasn't as deep, so you could get through. At that time, we were in the pig business, and it was hard to get into the driveways, hard to get into our own place, and it was a real struggle, and everywhere anyone did go, they used tire chains on the wheels. Today, you very seldom ever see tire chains used on the wheels. Most cars don't even have the clearance underneath to use them if they wanted to use chains. It's gotten to the point now where we use snow tires, and, of course, we don't have the winters that we used to have, we don't get the snow that we used to get, and the roads and snow removal equipment are much better. Now, of course, the traffic on Route 9 and the sections out there exceed by far the amount of traffic on Squankum Road today. And now, of course, you can get to Lakewood in minutes, unless you get caught in a traffic jam on Route 9. Then you may wish that you had taken Squankum Road.

Ms. Williams: You know, it's interesting that you talk about the postal delivery, because your son, Jim, is involved in the postal system. So maybe he might want to reflect on that.

Jim Lang: Well, just to add onto what Dad just talked about, I was a part-time letter carrier in the Brielle post office in 1973. Brielle post office was and is still a very small office, and the likelihood at that time of advancing anytime soon from a part-timer to a regular employee was very low. There was a fellow ahead of me who did not become a regular employee until almost fifteen years after he was first employed because new regular positions just were not available. I had heard in the late fall of 1973 that they were going to open a Howell post office in the coming year. Since Howell was growing, besides moving my job to my own hometown, I would greatly improve my chances of becoming a regular employee by transferring my job to Howell. Before the June 23, 1974 opening of the Howell Post Office, Howell was delivered by Freehold Post Office in the northern section, Farmingdale Post Office in the Eastern and Central sections, and Lakewood in the southern portion of Howell Township. Adelphia, earlier known as Blue Ball, also has had a post office, but that's always been just post office boxes only and window service. There was no actual route delivery out of the Adelphia post office, nor is there even today. After an unfortunate survey was made of the public, the postal service opened the Howell post office on June 23 of 1974. I remember it well. The reason I call it unfortunate is that the survey caused a less than complete switch of service to all-Howell delivery. This decision was said to be based upon the response to a questionnaire or survey that was circulated. What happened was that the questionnaire basically asked: "Are you interested in there being a Howell post office? Would you like to be delivered by a Howell post office?" Well, the people in the Southern part of Howell were glad to have the opportunity because they were sick of writing Lakewood, New Jersey on their mail and knowing they were paying their taxes to Howell, and their emergency services came out of Howell, and they lived in

Howell. A lot of people in Farmingdale delivery area were a bit wishy-washy about it. They were used to being called Farmingdale, even though, like my dad said, Farmingdale is just a little island, less than a square mile, in the middle of Howell. The people in the Adelpia area and in northern Howell were pretty well aligned with Freehold. They felt that, "Well, we are really almost in Freehold anyway, so we're more a part of Freehold than Howell." What the survey did not ask was: "If there's going to be a Howell post office anyway, would you like to be part of it and part of Howell delivery? Would you like to have a Howell address if others are going to have one anyway?" I think if they had asked that question, the people of northern and central Howell would have been close to unanimous in saying yes. So while the southern part of Howell was completely redesignated as Howell mailing, and certain areas of the central part of Howell were recognized as Howell, North Howell unfortunately remained "Freehold." North Howell is still delivered by Freehold, and much of the Eastern and Central part is still delivered by Farmingdale. So, I guess there was less confusion for some people. For a while there we had the Howell Police, Howell Municipal Court, and Howell Library not in "Howell," and today we have two of Howell's schools plus the Board of Education, the Howell High School, and Howell Road still not in "Howell." These people must still answer the question of "Where do you live?" with another question: "Do you want to visit me, or do you want to write me a letter?"

Ms. Williams: That's great, yes. Well that explains a little bit why we get some confusion in the 4-H office, people who live in Farmingdale and Howell. Now that explains a little bit more why people say that they live one place, but mail me a letter somewhere else. What about the fire companies, how are they allocated here? Are there Howell and Farmingdale volunteer fire companies?

Ed Lang: You can talk about that. Farmingdale is an independent.

Jim Lang: Well, yes. The Adelpia Fire Company and the Southard Fire Company were established in the twenties and the thirties respectively. And that's Farmingdale's fire siren you can hear blowing right now in the background if that microphone can pick it up. And those three companies alone, Farmingdale from about the teens, and Adelpia from the 1920s, and Southard from the 1930s protected the whole sixty-four square miles of Howell Township. It was quite a haul for those old fire trucks to reach many parts of Howell and especially talking about some of the gravel and dirt roads that Dad was talking about riding over. During the period of 1948, 1949, and 1950, three new fire volunteer companies were started. The new people who moved into some of these areas, along with the people who had lived there all of their lives for years, felt that there was far too much exposure to fire danger. Life and property were too much at risk by their having to wait for the fire trucks to come such a long distance from either Southard, Adelpia, or Farmingdale to get to their emergency. Almost simultaneously these areas of Freewood Acres, Ramtown, and Squankum started to have meetings among the most interested local citizens of each area.

Among these volunteers was, of course, my father, who is a charter member of the Camp Houseman Fire Company Incorporated (which in 1954 legally changed its name on the incorporation papers to the name Squankum Fire Company Inc.) My wife Judy's father, Alfred Kleban, was a charter member of the Freewood Acres Fire Company Inc. Freewood Acres is the area north of Southard along the Route 9 corridor. It got Howell's first housing development, which was built by Richard Windler in the area surrounding the northern end of Windler Road. Windler started building and selling houses in 1947, the year that I was born. The area was known as Freewood Acres and the new Fire Company took the same name. Alfred had purchased a home on Helen Avenue and moved there with his family in 1948. Judy was born in 1952. Southeastern Howell in the area once known as Brushy Neck started the Ramtown Fire Company Inc. This was also around the time of Ramtown's first housing development. Of the three, Squankum was the only one that did not have a housing development going up, so it remained the most rural and is the most rural even to this day. Dad is the last living charter member that we know of, definitely the last one that's still active today, still attending the fire meetings and drills after fifty years. Squankum Fire Company was aided in its establishment by, I don't want to use words that are going to offend anybody, but you could say a few disaffected Farmingdale Fire Dept. members. These were fire department members who, at the time, decided to help some local Squankum people to establish a Squankum fire company, and they became members themselves for a short time. I don't know what their motives were, of course, but they were members long enough, at least, to get us established as a Squankum fire company. I believe that they were then given an ultimatum by the remaining members in Farmingdale to either remain a member of the new fire company or of the old department but not both.

Ed Lang: When, the Camp Houseman Fire Company started in 1949, and then when we changed the name in 1954 to Squankum Fire Company, we did not have a fire house. Instead we started over at the old Boy Scout camp off of Hurley Pond Road which is now state parkland. We started there and we had about twenty members, and it worked out pretty well.

Jim Lang: The Boy Scout camp was called Camp Houseman Boy Scout Camp and the Ranger at the Boy Scout camp: do you want to tell about him?

Ed Lang: Yes. He was one of the fellows that helped us, I just can't think of his name right now -

Jim Lang: Carl -

Ed Lang: Carl Thunnell. And he helped us to organize a fire company in the beginning and he was the Scout Master -

Jim Lang: The Scout Camp Ranger, I guess -

Ed Lang: The Scout Camp Ranger. He was in charge of the whole works over there.

Jim Lang: He was the Live-in Scout Camp Ranger.

Ed Lang: And he would record and supervise the different troops that would come down there and they'd stay in the woods. It was very nice place, and he was a very nice man to do business with. So now we still didn't have a building, but they had a building so we went over and talked to them and he said, "Okay, you can put it here for a while."

Jim Lang: First fire truck.

Ed Lang: And that was the first fire truck that we had, a 1949 Studebaker pick-up owned by the Boy Scouts. It had no top, and had single rear wheels and all we could carry on that was like five or six Indian tanks, and maybe one or two hand fire extinguishers that we could use. So this is how we started.

Jim Lang: For those who are not familiar with the fire service - Indian is a brand name of the backpack tank capable of carrying five gallons of water. It has a hand-operated pump and a hose attached that you can swing around from the side and hold in front of you. By using a pumping motion, you can direct a small stream of water at a fire. Most of them nowadays are higher tech, lighter weight, probably a little more efficient and are used now almost solely on grass and small light brush fires.

Ed Lang: So then after that we started, oh, we really got big then! We went for another truck. Now that truck that I just spoke about, we could carry roughly five Indian tanks and we had about four and five men, and that's all we could carry on that. That's it. And in the wintertime if there was any ice or snow on the ground, the wheels spun whenever we started and it was really rough going. Then we started to get into different other vehicles. We had a 1925 Ahrens-Fox. This was a true fire truck with a two or three stage piston pump capable of high such pressures. We had to be careful not to burst the hoses. We had another one that was a former fuel oil truck. This was a 1936 Dodge Brothers' tank truck. This one carried more of the water that we needed so badly. It had a thousand-gallon tank and with the dual rear tires and extra weight, could travel under almost any conditions. But we still didn't have a firehouse of our own yet until after we left Camp Houseman in 1955.

Jim Lang: I was about seven years old then. Restrictions were much less. I can remember that when they were still at Camp Houseman I would accompany my Dad to the "Firehouse." I remember being able to look down between the joints of the floorboards (real wooden boards) of the fire truck and watch the pavement race by underneath the truck from where you would be sitting. Dad would get practice driving and checking everything out and filling the gas tank at either the

Squankum Service Center, which was Chet Hayes' gas station and welding shop or at Lou Poline's general store, which was located at the old ending to Allaire Road (Atlantic Avenue). The store also had a gas pump.

Ed Lang: That's when we got the new name over here on Squankum. And we had to put the truck in different garages. We did not have a firehouse. Maybe it was over in this one, that one, oh, I know there were about five of them where we used to put the truck, and then we had problems: "Who do you call when you get a fire?" Then sometimes we would give certain firemen the number, but maybe they wouldn't be home. It was rough going. But after a while we got settled a little bit more. Then we built, as I say here, the firehouse in Squankum, and I think that was a three bay or -

Jim Lang: Two bays.

Ed Lang: That was two bays with a kitchen and all facilities.

Jim Lang: Uh, uh, uh, not at first.

Ed Lang: Well.

Jim Lang: It was just two bays.

Ed Lang: There was two bays and -

Jim Lang: A utility room.

Ed Lang: A utility room. So then, after a while, we had, well we had trouble with this truck or that truck, but as an example we had some old stuff. We would back the truck in the fire house and then sometimes we'd go to leave and maybe this tire was low and that tire was low, and we'd have to pump it up before we could leave. So then we got wise to ourselves, when we'd back the truck up, we put a jack under the bumper. The jack that was under the bumper took the weight off the truck tires. Then when enough weight was off of the tires they would continue to hold the air and you could get in the truck and drive off the jack and be on your way to the fire. And you'd have your air in your tires. You didn't have to look to see if you had a flat tire. So we did that for a while, and it worked pretty well. Then we'd come in, come off a fire, and we'd jack it up again and take the weight off the wheels. Now this is going back. And we had this for some time and then finally we started to get better equipment, and when we had our own firehouse with heat we no longer had to worry about trouble in freezing weather with some of the trucks freezing up. But we were always fortunate and we did pretty well, and the people were with us a lot. And we'd get this and get that, and we'd say, "Hey, we gotta get over here and work on this." And as I say, the Squankum Fire Company sure has advanced. We have practically everything that is needed, almost. Although as time goes on, there's always something else needed. We

have a good group, we have a lot of them, they're all experienced now and they went to the classes and they're doing very good in the Fire Company. I think we're doing very well for what we started with. In this business with the boundary lines today, there are five companies in Howell Township plus the Boro. The way that things are organized today there are five fire districts. The six, as you know, are Adelphia, Freewood Acres, Southard, Ramtown, and Squankum and the Boro of Farmingdale. So we have our own boundary lines, we get along well, and we also have a system made up that when we get a call in the day time, two fire companies go out to ensure coverage and not be short-handed. So we give very good protection. And the fire companies do very well in getting to alarms. And we also have different procedures where our boundary lines are and we cooperate very well and we cooperate with one another, and if there's anything that comes up, we settle our little difficulties once in a while. But everything is working pretty well as far as the fire company in Squankum. Nobody gets paid for fighting fires. We are free, as far as getting this, or getting that -

Jim Lang: Volunteers.

Ed Lang: All volunteers. We do appreciate what the people do for us when we need help. The cooperation and the men are good, and it's got to the point now where the roads are good, and we're getting more hydrants in. We do have a tank that holds six thousand gallons, and whenever there is a structure fire, or a fire that's going to need heavy duty water, where there's no fire hydrants, we take that tanker. Sometimes, we take that even when there are fire hydrants because you can get to the fire immediately, you don't have to lay out a thousand feet of hose before you can get the water up there. We can make a quick fire knockdown.

Ms. Williams: You certainly have shown a lot of dedication in your own work with this, but also dedication seems to be a part of your whole family background. What about your dedication to farming in this county? Both of you have been involved in that, and that takes a lot of persistence and dedication. Do you want to talk about your history with farming in Monmouth County?

Ed Lang: I was always a farmer at heart. My father was, too. So we always had a big garden and if we didn't, sometimes we used other grounds that we would make a deal with the people, and they were only to glad that you could come in and plow up the ground and plant it. So with that there it increased the production in Monmouth County. And it was good because you couldn't always go to the store. You couldn't always go to the market easily because your main market was like Freehold and Asbury Park. Once in a while there was maybe a little road stand here and there. But as far as big stuff, you had to go to Freehold or Asbury Park. Now you know, in a lot of cases the distance was great, but today you can go anywhere and get almost the same thing quickly. In Farmingdale and in Howell Township, you have to remember, each year, as the time goes on, there are less farms and people are putting up more buildings. And the farming

business is going out of New Jersey, if you ask me, it's going too fast. I'd hate to see some of these farms, fifteen, sixteen, seventy-five or a hundred acres, and less or more, being sold to developers. Let them go to a state where they need buildings. I think that New Jersey has enough of them as it is now. And on top of that, your taxes increase heavily, your schools are heavily taxed, it's big money. The impact is very unfair on the people who have been here to have the town provide service suddenly to hundreds of people. So I think if somebody wants to start a development, do us a favor, as far as I'm concerned, take it out of New Jersey and go where you like. But I think New Jersey's got enough of them now.

Ms. Williams: Do you echo that sentiment also, Jim?

Jim Lang: Well, I wouldn't exactly say echo, but I definitely understand and feel in a similar fashion about it. I think back especially to when as a kid, and I was going to school. I went to the brick Ardena School, when it was the only grammar school in Howell. It was built sometime around 1938, according to the cornerstone. On the school bus, you would mostly pass farms and a lot of them were chicken farms in Howell. There was a lot of produce grown as well. We grew lot of sweet corn and a lot of vegetables in this area. This soil was very rich and very good, especially in the northern part of the Township. When you see these developers now with their earth moving machines, they're cutting through sometimes twelve inches of top soil - big, heavy, rich top soil. Of course, they have their plans, and it's not called mining, but this top soil goes away, and when people buy their houses they end up with a couple of inches of top soil and that's their lawn. The very best soil and farmland in Monmouth County, perhaps in New Jersey, gets consumed by developers. I think a little planning to the future 30 years ago might have said, "You know, once we destroy, or change the character of our best growing ground in the county, it's going to be gone for good. "They're not making any more of it", as Will Rogers said. Maybe, at least, they should have planned to dedicate a major portion of the poorly soiled areas to development. We should have tried to at least build on some of the ground that won't support vegetation or agriculture well anyway.

Ms. Williams: You had a pig business, you were mentioning before. How did that work?

Ed Lang: Before I get that, Jim was talking about the different things that took place here in the Squankum part of Howell Township. On the Squankum Road at the Manasquan River, the bridge was built, back in the Depression by the Civilian Conservation Corps, I remember that CCC engineers decided to put a little island in the river there sometime later. The island was like maybe, thirty foot wide, by a hundred feet long. And then they paid the CCC guys to go in there and plant shrubbery. You could row or canoe over to it and you could walk on it--until we got a heavy rain. Then the river just carried the whole island away with it. Not a trace was left. But it was nice until the first major rain.

Jim Lang: I think it's interesting; obviously some engineer in CCC or someplace thought this was a workable thing in the 1930s. Approximately forty years later, on the other side of town on the northwestern section, instead of learning from history, a developer was allowed, by hook or by crook, to build houses in the meanders of the Manasquan River. There's probably still litigation going on about this, so I won't name any names of the development or anything. People moved down here from New York and North Jersey and bought these houses, and I guess some of them must have come in the middle of the night or something or never were taught earth science in school. They could never really have looked at these houses, except to think that it was quaint to have the river so close. They did not know that the meanders of rivers occasionally overflow their banks when a river rises after a rain. The river takes a shortcut and goes through the meander. And, unfortunately, I think some of those houses even had to be purchased back by Howell Township afterwards, because they were not habitable, although the sites had been approved by engineers. I had a few thoughts when my dad was talking about the Fire Company. I don't come anywhere near the time that he's been a member, he's been a fireman for over fifty years, I've been one since I was eighteen years old and I'm fifty-two now, so that's about thirty-four years. But I did want to make a couple of observations. In Dad's fifty years he's been President of the fire company numerous times, he was Fire Chief for a couple of years, he was Assistant Chief, he was and is a Trustee, and has held quite a few other offices. He's been Chief Engineer, keeping the trucks maintained and running for almost all of that fifty years. And he was a Fire Commissioner for -

Ed Lang: Twenty-eight years and one month.

Jim Lang: And just for people who may not be aware of how that Fire Commissioner thing is organized, as I mentioned to you, back around 1950, we finally had five fire companies in Howell. These are five non-profit, incorporated volunteer organizations. Each of them responsible at that time to raise their own money through donations, to purchase property, build a building on it, buy the fire trucks, buy the fire equipment, and put them in the fire house and keep enough heat in the place so that nothing would freeze. And this is, as you can imagine, a very tough thing to do, whether you're talking about the 1950s or today. It's an expensive thing to do. So from roughly -- well Adelphia was in the 1920s, Southard in the 1930s, through 1960, all five of these fire companies that would have at one point come into existence, were faced every year with very demanding financial needs. The volunteer members not only had to respond to all the emergencies, but also had to collect enough money from their neighbors to keep the Fire Company going. When Camp Houseman was established, of course I was only about three years old, so I don't have any specific recollections of the very first fundraising, but I probably have the advantage over Dad in the time after that. As a kid, things really impress you and stick in your mind, because they're new and fresh. And these impressions are of different proportions in a youngster's mind than to an adult. As I said before I have some

very specific recollections of Camp Houseman, of riding in a fire truck with wooden floorboards with my dad, the Chief Engineer, over macadam and more often, over the old concrete roads. These were, as I understand now, poured during the Depression. They had the washboard type of dividers for each section of concrete that was poured. I fondly remember riding along in those fire trucks with my dad. He was the chief engineer. He had to make sure the truck was running right and ready to respond to a fire. He had to make certain that everything was ready under the hood and that the fuel tank was full. I remember going to Chet Hayes's gas station in Squankum, which was called the Squankum Service Center. He was also a welder. The Fire Company had accounts with Chet Hayes and with another store, further down, which used to face on the old outlet from Allaire Road, which is also called Atlantic Avenue. At Atlantic and Squankum there used to be a blinker light and Lou Poline's Store which was called the Squankum General Store in the 1950s.

Ed Lang: Combination gasoline and eats.

Jim Lang: I can remember when the firehouse was being built in 1955. It's a concrete block structure. As a kid, this work was very impressive to me. The guys would come home from work, and they'd lay a couple courses of block, maybe before dark. In the summertime they ran little mortar mixer, a gasoline engine driven cement mixer, and they would mix little sections of the floor at one time and frame them out and pour into the forms. If you look at the old floor, even today, you can see how much of a section they could mix and pour at one time. I remember specifically they had, at that time, a really new looking truck. It was a 1942 Ford fire truck that they had bought from the town of Princeton. Princeton had bought it new and hardly used it at all. The firemen of Squankum used the tank and pump on that truck to drive the well which still tests out to have good water today at sixty-five feet. The way that they drove that well really impressed me as a kid. At that time I must have been about seven years old. They used a special nozzle that I believe that they made, attached it to the booster line hose and ran the pump. The pressure forced the water down through the center of the well casing and as the dirt would be washed out from under the well casing the well casing would lower itself into the ground. And they just kept doing that and attaching additional lengths of casing until they hit water. Then they ran a pump on that strata of water for at least, it must have been at least twenty-four hours, I know it was quite a few hours, to see how it would continue to run clear and steadily. Then they know that they had a good source. And like I said, we had the water tested even a year ago and it's still better than most of the bottled water that you buy today. I didn't understand that these things were going on as a kid of course, but I know now that they organized the fire districts in Howell in 1960. I have heard from different old timers that at one time or another almost every fire company in Howell took the opportunity to reject the proposal to organize fire districts in Howell. The way that the state law is set up, the fire district is a voting district that represents the people within that district. The taxpayers of the district pay, as part of their property tax, a fire tax. The initial establishment of fire

districts where existing fire companies already exist pretty much has to be unanimous within all of the fire companies of the town or township. All the fire companies involved have to agree that they want to form into fire districts. So each of the other fire companies seemed to feel that they might be in danger of losing some autonomy in the process of establishing fire districts. To an extent this is true. Finally though, due to financial burdens, which were becoming unbearable, all five agreed, and in 1960 the fire districts were established. What is significant about this is that for the first time, no longer was one hundred percent of the monies that paid for the building and maintenance of the firehouse itself, the fire trucks, all the equipment, the fuel utilities etc coming from public donation sources. Now the burden would be shared more with all of those who benefited from the volunteers extinguishing fires and responding to emergencies. And, little by little, a larger percentage would come from property tax, the fire tax portion of property owner's property tax. A smaller percentage would come from donations. And just to give you a little insight into that, our old minutes of fire company meetings show that sometimes the members had to pass a hat around at the fire meeting. They would have to collect a few dollars so that they could put some oil in the heating oil tank so that the fire house wouldn't freeze up between meetings. They would pass the hat and collect two or three dollars or five dollars amongst the guys and buy some more heating oil.

Ed Lang: I'll interrupt for a minute right here. I remember on one occasion we had our insurance to make sure guys were covered and we had to have this insurance because you know you can always get hurt and killed or something and of course liability even then and there was no Good Samaritan laws then. This time we had the insurance bill come in to us when we were just starting. The bill was due in two weeks. Well, it got to the point where we only had some of the money. I think we needed thirteen dollars more. This was on a Friday and the insurance expired on Monday. So we passed the hat that night in the fire company and we got enough to carry on for another year. And still today I am very proud that we are all volunteer and are able to save the district money and provide the service to the town and district.

Jim Lang: I think that we should mention the impact of Cold War on Howell firefighting. The Cold War, of course, had some terrible effects on many people. You have to look hard to find a positive here. The Cold War did offer a bright spot to the volunteer fire companies of Howell Township in the fifties. This was before the time of fire pagers and home alert systems. Instead dispatching was done by a combination of audible sirens and phone chains started by the members wives who lived closest to the sirens and could hear them the best. Married women who were not strictly homemakers in those days were the exception rather than the rule. If they had jobs outside the home, that was more the exception. So they could be counted on to usually be home. And if somebody would get the phone message about a fire and get on the phone chain and several women would be calling all the rest of the firemen, "You have a fire." When the fire district was formed, suddenly there was a little bit of money to do something. Difficult

decisions had to be made. Would it be money towards a new fire truck bond or a new siren or other equipment? So I remember specifically that the fire commissioners were looking to buy a used siren and they had a fellow in our fire district named Harry Mills who was in the construction business. He had a crane and a business called Mill's Crane Service. The fire commissioners were considering buying this twelve horsepower siren and hadn't figured out exactly if they would or would not buy it. Harry Mills and his brother came over with the crane and they lifted this twelve horsepower siren and they put it on the corner of the new firehouse, which as I said to you, was a new masonry firehouse. And they temporarily wired it up, and the salesman was there. Well when they turned it on, this thing shook the fire house so much that little pieces of masonry plaster started falling on our heads, and we were worried that it was going to start cracking the joints in the cement blocks. And the fire commissioners wisely decided not to buy that siren. Right after that, the Township Clerk, John R. Miller, heard about a federal program whereby all the fire companies had an opportunity to get a civil defense siren for free from the federal government. These had a pretty loud tone. It is a very characteristic twin tone. And of course the purpose of these sirens was to warn of an impending air raid from the Soviet Union. All five township fire companies got them and used them for official air raid drills that were held for a couple of years. We are still using that siren today here in Squankum for fire calls during the day. The motor has had to be rebuilt only one time in forty years.

Ed Lang: The next improvement came when we got a tavern halfway between Farmingdale and the firehouse to take our fire calls for us over the phone. It was called the Farmdale Inn. Later it was known as Kiefer's Inn, and now and presently it is Mulligan's. The proprietor there, Joe I can't remember his last name now, also lived there. He could take fire calls 24 hours per day. This was HIS volunteer work. We had a phone installed at the firehouse and Joe had a button at the Inn that would set off the siren at the firehouse (which the phone company charged to rent the phone line for). If Joe got the call in the middle of the night, or any time that there was a fire, he would press the button, which would blow the siren at the firehouse through the phone line and a relay. The first man to get to the fire house had to pick up the phone, dial Joe, or sometimes, I think later on they had it where Joe had dialed the fire house and he just let the phone keep ringing until the first fireman arrived at the firehouse. The first guy there would pick up the phone, Joe was on the other end, hopefully, and he would say, "The fire is at such and such." The fireman would then write it down on the blackboard and off he'd go with the crew on the fire truck. And of course it got interesting the very first time that we had rented the fire house for a small party for someone and a fire call came in. The phone was ringing, and one of the people at the party picked it up and didn't know what was going on, and shouldn't have picked it up, but didn't know any better. After that we put a sign on the phone - Do Not Pick Up The Phone If The Siren Blows. Then, of course, as we got more modern, and as technology developed, we ended up with home alerts. These came in the 1970s after the Howell Police Department was established

and the State Police barracks was closed. Personal pagers. The police had the capability of transmitting a tone that would turn on your radio and then they would speak over the radio and tell you that there was a fire call and the location. These things had a battery back up and were later made the size of a pager, which we have today.

Ms. Williams: I think anyone reading this transcript is going to have a fuller appreciation of what the fire department has gone through to be available to the public. I think it's taken for granted sometimes all that's gone into that, so we've given a very full picture of that. You had another unique experience besides the fire department: digging graves. What was that story about?

Jim Lang: What was that like in general?

Ed Lang: Oh, yes, every once in a while when I was a teenager in the early 1930s, they would, at the cemetery, ask if someone might go over and help dig a grave for this one or that one -

Jim Lang: Was that the Quaker Cemetery by Squankum Road and the Manasquan River or the one further up on Squankum?

Ed Lang: Yes, right near the Manasquan River. And that was interesting, sometimes you would dig a grave and you'd get into it and you'd have a hard job and you'd say, "Gee." You'd hit maybe pieces of iron, and maybe sometimes there would be bones in the ground. In the old days they often used wooden markers or field stone, so there was often nothing left of the markers. You would get a little funny feeling sometimes when you'd do that, but we used to help out to dig them because sometimes the people didn't have the money.

Ms. Williams: Did the families ask you, or the churches?

Ed Lang: The undertaker would take it. So everybody cooperated pretty well. There's different stories that could be told-- once we found a Civil War soldier buried in his uniform, but we replaced the earth to leave him there undisturbed -- but we're not going to go into that - that's a little deep. Also, the time of the year and the time of when we had to dig sometimes made very hard going. You never knew when you could get up to the gravesite. If there was snow on the ground, you had to clear the snow first and get in there. We almost always knew where the old graves were and we tried to make sure that there was no mistake of where the stone should have been or anything like that. The problem of an unmarked grave was due to the fact that they used fieldstone in the 1700s and the weather just wore them away.

Ms. Williams: And was this all Howell townspeople?

Ed Lang: Yes, all Howell's people.

Jim Lang: The cemetery he's talking about has been really dwarfed by time, by changes. I-195 came through Howell around 1978 I think, and what they tried to do is have the other roads be overpasses over 195. They tried to make 195 straight and as flat as they could. So there's two overpasses at Squankum and 195, you know one is northbound and the other is southbound. And these things just kind of surround this little cemetery now, go around it and so it's like skirted on all sides either by the overpasses, the ramps themselves, or 195 and of course the remains of the 1930s concrete Squankum at the Manasquan Bridge. If you don't know enough, you might not even know to look down to see this old cemetery with graves in it or the remains of the old bridge. You see the bridge was dismantled when they built the overpasses. I guess, what's left there from the early 1700s on up, is just surrounded by the future now.

Ms. Williams: That's kind of a contrast of the old and the new.

Jim Lang: Yes. Really.

Ms. Williams: Your stories have all been so rich and bold, and I think that they've been enhanced by the fact that you've been able to talk father to son over the generations. We have about ten minutes more in our tape, and I wanted to make sure that we've had enough time to include any other stories that you might want to make sure are included.

Ed Lang: I would like to add at this time a couple minutes more, because by this time you're probably getting sick of hearing us. To begin with, when we got the first truck that had a draft, that was one major improvement. Before this we had to fill tanks either from a well pump or from a two cylinder gasoline engine driven portable pump that was hand carried by the firemen, through the mud sometimes. In other words now we would go up to the brook with the truck, and draw water from the brook through the suction made by the fire pump to fill up the truck tank. If you had enough hose (several hundred feet at least) you could now feed the water directly to the fire through the hoses. Today's Squankum fire trucks (by contrast) carry 1000 to 1200 feet of large diameter supply hose alone on each pumper. Then, we always had to worry about clogging the suction hose strainer with mud, leaves or other debris from the pond or brook. Today most of our water supply is relayed to the pumper at the fire either from the 6000 gallon tanker that we use or from the closest available high water flow hydrant, which could be up to a mile away for a major fire like the Collingwood Auction fire. We've gone from using wells, cisterns, ponds, swimming pools, and brooks as our water sources to high flow pressurized hydrants or tankers.

Jim Lang: I guess the last thing I should say about any of this is there's a few people in our area who are interested in history and have probably a very rich and colorful family history of their own, including the Ira Matthews family that lives on Asbury Road. They apparently had relatives who were buried in the Revolutionary War cemetery. I know that there's a Captain Matthews buried in

one Revolutionary War cemetery in town. The Matthews family has always had an appreciation for history. They were the ones that renovated the old Tennent church years ago. They restore things in the most accurate way possible, while adding to the structural strength and the integrity of the historical buildings that they work on. I know that a couple years ago they were working on a church on, I think it's on Sycamore, in Shrewsbury, or right in that area. They had to remove some rotted wooden beams and they were going to slide in and install replacement beams and they also had to do something with the steeple. While completing the work they discovered that one of the additions to the church had been built over an eighteenth century portion of the cemetery. There are no records of these graves being there. They were verified as being from the earliest era of the church and the remains were moved from under the building and laid to rest in another part of the cemetery, followed by a memorial ceremony. If anyone from this library oral history project has an opportunity to talk to members of the Matthews, including Ira Matthews Jr., and Ira Matthews III, father and son, I think you can get a wealth of information from them about the different facets of Monmouth County history. Another person that you should talk to is Isabel Kittleson, who moved from Squankum to Allenwood and still lives there today. She has some great recollections as well and lived in Squankum during some of the same periods that my father talks about. Another thing I had thought of was that, if we have time, Dad was around during the time, before and after they poured the concrete for Squankum Road and for Highway 9. I'm not clear myself which one was done first. My time in this area, my lifetime, I remember Squankum Road being concrete sections and Highway 9 was single lane concrete sections as well. So I don't know if you remember when they poured the concrete for that.

Ed Lang: I don't remember the years, but I do remember this - that Squankum Road was sometimes busier than Route 9, and I also remember, too, that after they developed Route 9, of course, that took the load off of Squankum Road. But on Squankum Road, as I mentioned before, it was common that certain times you could get stuck between here and Lakewood before they paved it because the road was so poor and the road was down as low as the brooks were. There are several little brooks going between here and Lakewood, and when you got a heavy rain it froze and the roads broke up. It was rough going. And also, when they put in the electric utilities, sometimes the electric was out for a couple of days. But anyway, we'd be out of electric for a while. This is going back when electric was new in the area. But I'll tell you this, the Squankum Road today is very busy, and of course, Route 9 is very busy. And all the roads are getting pretty heavy. And they're paved pretty well. They continue to make improvements. Farmingdale just did quite an improvement on their main street to the town. And it makes it nicer when you go in and out and the roads are better. I think it helps business a lot, and people have a better feeling towards the town when they see that the roads are halfway decent.

Ms. Williams: Well, we certainly want to thank you for giving the time to this project because your stories have really added a lot to the knowledge of Monmouth County and particularly of the post office and the fire companies, and I know the readers and listeners will really benefit from your recollections. And also particularly that you were able to speak about these as father and son, which is really a very unique and special perspective, so thank you for your time.

Jim Lang: You're welcome.