

Sam Fig, Montgomery Builder And Philanthropist, Dies at 83

Sam Fig, 83, board chairman of Fig Enterprises and one of Montgomery County's leading builders and land developers since the mid-1940s, who was active in civic and volunteer organizations, died of cancer Dec. 25 in his home in Gaithersburg.

Mr. Fig developed and built the 26-story Washingtonian Towers apartment building near I-270 in Gaithersburg in 1966. Ten years before that, he had developed the Washingtonian Motel and Country Club nearby. He also built the Shady Grove Music Fair.

He also donated land to synagogues and Protestant and Catholic churches, hospitals, and Red Cross facilities. He was a cofounder and trustee of the Camp Echo Lake for underprivileged children.

He was the recipient of a certificate of distinguished citizenship from then-governor J. Millard Tawes, and an interfaith award from the B'nai B'rith. He was a past director of the Red Cross and the Maryland Public Welfare Board, and past president of the Kiwanis Club of Silver Spring. He was past president and a life member of the board of governors of B'nai Israel Synagogue. He also had served on the boards of several Maryland banks and had been chairman of the United Givers Fund campaign.

In 1952, Fortune Magazine named him one of

the country's top 10 self-made men who had made outstanding contributions to their profession and communities.

Mr. Fig was born in Shmilyovitz, Byelorussia. He left Czarist Russia for the United States as a youth. He traveled this country from Seattle to New York City, working at odd jobs and learning English in night school. He came to this area about 1915, and worked in the kitchen of the Soldiers Home and was a butcher at Union Station.

In the 1920s, he owned and operated a grocery store near the intersection of 21st and K streets. After Prohibition was repealed, Mr. Fig established the Fig Liquor Store on Georgia Avenue in Washington. He ran the store until 1946, when he began to devote full time to his real estate interests.

He began his career in real estate in Silver Spring in the 1920s. He built homes in Takoma Park and northwest Washington, the Silver Spring Shopping Center, and the Fig Buildings, before expanding his work to Gaithersburg in the 1950s.

His wife of 46 years, the former Esther Koenicke, died in 1966.

Survivors include two sons, Dr. Blaine H. and Lawrence S., both of Gaithersburg; 11 grandchildren, and 10 great-grandchildren.



SAM FIG

DEATHS ELSEWHERE

Clara Malraux, 85, the first wife of the late writer Andre Malraux, died Dec. 15 in Paris. Mrs. Malraux herself was a noted writer. Her books included "The Sound of Footsteps" and "The End of the Beginning." She and Malraux were divorced after World War II. Survivors include their daughter, Florence, who is married to film director Alain Resnais.

Agnes Gardiner Mudd

Agnes Gardiner Mudd, 92, a member of the St. Jerome Catholic Church in Hyattsville, the Sodality and the Catholic Ladies of Charity, died of pneumonia Dec. 21 at Doctors Hospital of Prince George's County.

Mrs. Mudd was born in Bryantown, Md. She graduated from St. Catherine's Normal Institute in Baltimore and later was an elementary school principal in Charles and Prince George's counties. She stopped teaching in 1918 when she married Leo Summers Mudd.

From the late 1930s to the late 1950s, the couple lived in College Park. Mrs. Mudd lived in Greenbelt with a daughter until 1978, when she moved to the Villa Rosa nursing home in Mitchellville, Md.

Her husband died in 1966.

Survivors include three children, Eileen Mudd Labukas of Greenbelt, Anna Lee Mudd of Washington, and Francis Camaler Mudd of Mitchellville; a brother, A. Elbert Gardiner of Waldorf, Md.; three sisters, Marguerite G. Gardiner of Clinton, Louisiana; Alma G. Howard of Hampton, Va.; seven grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren.

An Oral History Interview

with

S A M E I G

A Pioneer Entrepreneur

Montgomery County
Maryland

August 23, 1972

by John Robert Foley III

S A M E I G

LAST OF THE BIONEER ENTREPRENEURS

Merchant * * * Developer * * * Philanthropist

BIRTHPLACE: Smilovitch, Byelorussia

DATE: November, 1898

RESIDENCE: Left Russia, Summer, 1914. Arrived USA. 1916 or 1917

D.C.:	Soldier's Home	1920
	1525 8th St. N.W.	1921
	7301 Rock Creek Road	1922-1923
	4801 14th St. N.W.	1924
	5508 8th St. N.W.	1925-1946

MONTGOMERY COUNTY:	Rock Creek Gardens, Silver Spring	1947-1966
	Washingtonian Towers, Gaithersburg	1966-present

EXPERIENCE:

Education: No formal education after fleeing Russia at age 15

Business: Bussing tables at the Plaza, New York City
Construction work on government buildings, Washington, D.C.,
for two years
Cutting meat at Union Station and Soldier's Home
Grocer, 1922-1936
First Secretary, District Grocery Stores
Liquor merchant, 1933-1956, at 5416 Georgia Avenue N.W.
President, National Liquor Stores, 1937-1946
Land Developer, 1930-present: among his developments are:
Hillside Apartments, S.E., 1941
Rock Creek Forest, Silver Spring, 1939-1952
including Rock Creek Gardens
Northmont, Silver Spring, 1954-1957
Silver Spring Shopping Center, Georgia Avenue and Colesville
Road, 1945-1965. Bought the nucleus built by a
Mr. Julian in 1937, and expanded it, erecting the
Eig Building in 1952.
Washingtonian Motel and Country Club, Gaithersburg,
1957-present
Washingtonian Towers, Gaithersburg, 1966-present

Community Activities:

Member, Silver Spring Board of Trade and Montgomery County
Chamber of Commerce
Fund raiser, Community Chest
Past President and Director, Kiwanis Club of Silver Spring
Co-founder and Trustee, Camp Echo Lake for needy children
(in Frederick County)
Founder, Sam Eig High School and College Scholarships for
needy children
Past President and Life Member, B'Nai Israel Congregation
4606 16th St. N.W.

Donor of sites for St. Paul's Methodist Church, Christ the King Catholic Church in Rock Creek Forest, Silver Spring Chapter House of the American Red Cross, Silver Spring Y.M.C.A., and Boy's Club centers.

Awarded honorary citations for community service and brotherhood activities by Pope Pius XII and Paul VI, the Methodist Union, and many area synagogues.

Boards: Director, Suburban Trust Company, 1950-present
Vice-President and Director, Montgomery Federal Savings and Loan Corporation, 1959-present
Director, American Red Cross
Past President, Hillcl Building Corporation for the University of Maryland
Past Chairman, Advisory Board of the American Automobile Association
Past Vice President and Secretary and member, the Health and Welfare Council of Metropolitan Washington
Commissioner, State Welfare Board of Maryland, one 6 year term under Gov. McMillin and one 6 year term under Gov. Jones.

JRF: This is Jack Foley, I'm with Mr. Sam Eig at the Washingtonian Motel, Wednesday, August 23, 1972.

You said that back during the '20's, when you started building, you said that you built those homes in Takoma Park --

EIG: 6800 block 9th Street.

JRF: I was curious, because you said your first grocery failed, and then you opened another grocery store--

EIG: It didn't fail, I lost money. Fail means go bankrupt. I didn't fail. I paid \$2600.00 for it in those days, I sold it for \$1500.00, I lost \$1000.

JRF: I see, I see. I guess my curiosity is that: You came to this country, and you did not have much money, and the first few years here you didn't make much money, and you had a family to raise --

EIG: No, I didn't have a family then.

JRF: Well, OK, you had a wife to support --

EIG: I didn't have a wife. I was too young to get married. I saved up some money, before I got married.

JRF: I see. I was wondering--

EIG: I saved up some money, don't wonder. No miracles, nobody gave me anything. I didn't ask anything from anybody. You had to work like the devil and I did, and I saved up a dollar. And when I had money to get married I got married, and I was working the same day, I got married. I worked until 12 o'clock and at 12 o'clock I took off, and my wife had an uncle at the corner of Kenyon and Sherman Avenue, N. W. His whole house I think wasn't more than fifteen feet wide. It's a corner house, and they had about a dozen people. I took two days off I think and I went to work again.

JRF: When you first bought land, those farms out in Silver Spring, did you intend at that time to develop them some day?

EIG: I was a young fellow, I believed in this country the moment I put my foot here. And I figured it out when I was a youngster, they can build buildings but they don't build land. (So I knew someday they'd be good.)

I'll give you another illustration. When I was in the Georgia Avenue business, my father-in-law had a tailor shop on 14th and Decatur, across the street from the car barn. He had some very fine customers. I used to take off Saturday afternoon, when I was assistant butcher in the Soldier's Home and help deliver clothes for him. Who were his customers? For instance..

Champ Clark, Speaker of the House -- his son became Justice of the Supreme Court. They lived in our neighborhood on 14th Street. Dr. Gibbs, the fellow who started the People's Drug Stores, was one of his customers. Shannon and Luchs, realtors, who built that subdivision down there on 14th Street.. they were his customers. And, Bob McKeever, John McKeever's uncle.

After dinner (this one night) I met an Irish salesman, a fellow by the name of Mr. Barrie, I think. And, I bought a corner of Gallatin and Georgia Ave. There was a hole in the ground over there. There was also a gas station on that corner of Georgia Avenue. I bought it for \$7,500. I had \$500. to put down. The rest, I gambled. I'd get a loan someplace.. a buyer somehow. I was a young kid. This fellow was much older, an experienced salesman, and sold me a bill of goods. So.. there was a gentleman by the name of Mr. (Barbucci?) who was a merchant from seventh street, who used to hang around my father-in-law's tailor shop all the time. And I understood that Mr. (Barbucci?) had retired with half a million dollars. Five hundred Thousand, fifty or fifty-five years ago was the same as having 5 million today. So I thought here would be the man who could lend me some money to settle for the corner of Georgia and Gallatin Streets.

They'd put up a sign to say they were going to build a movie across the street, the Colony, I think it was called. And there was nothing there. There was a golf course down in back; I was a caddy there for a little while. It was old Columbia Country Club and they sold it for a subdivision later. Columbia moved over to Connecticut Ave. So I took the old gentleman down there and showed him half a dozen other people's steam shovels which were already digging, building houses back there. And I sold the old gent a bill of goods. I said, "There's going to be a big city here; a lot of people; Georgia Avenue will have people, shopping... something terrific. We'll make money here." He listened to me, shook his head, and then went to see my father-in-law. He told him, "If I were you, I'd take this young man aside and give him some good advice. The things he told me won't happen in a thousand years."

So let's look back and see my prediction when I was a youngster. A fine community was built there; now the community has changed. I'm almost afraid to walk there in the daytime. See what's happened. See. All these things in my short lifetime. I saw these things. I knew they could happen.

I bought six lots and sold them. A fellow by the name of Day, who was the outstanding auctioneer in the United States at that time sold them at a public market on 14th Street. I wasn't old enough to buy real estate, so when somebody knocked on my door one day, offering me a profit, I sold them. I made a thousand dollars.. first thousand dollars I ever made. I sold those six lots.

JRF: Legally you weren't old enough...

EIG: I wasn't 21. And I sold my contract for a thousand dollars. And that was my first experience in buying and selling land.

Then I got hold of the nucleus of the Silver Spring Shopping Center, and I built the Eig Building, the Jelleff Building and some more stores in Silver Spring. Later I bought a farm where the Holy Cross Hospital is, and I built those homes over there. I built all over the county. Then I built some apartments and homes in Southeast Washington, near Pennsylvania Ave. Then I built on 33rd Place, also in Washington. Beautiful homes in Chevy Chase.

I kept on expanding all the time. I kept buying land at the same time. I never had money because I would always put it out, as soon as it came in. I was active then. I was a kid, 21, 22 years old. I was Vice-President of the Georgia Ave. Businessmen's Assn., collecting dolls and what-have-you for kids for Christmas. I did this, I did that, I was a busybody all the time, all my life. I did so many things for one person, I would come home two o'clock in the morning from 4, 5 of these meetings. One time, I remember, I went to a meeting, with snow on the ground, at the Methodist Church in Gaithersburg, and then to another the same night at the Lutheran Church on Colesville Road. When I finally came home my wife was very disgusted with me. (laughs)

I looked, I saw the opportunities and I became active in the community. I did all I could. I built Rock Creek Gardens, a five million dollar deal, then I built another five million dollar project at Rock Creek Forest Apartments across East West Highway. I built shopping centers and a gas station.

Then I decided I wanted to move higher up into the county. I wanted to move further from Washington. And I came up this way and I bought several farms here. That's quite a story. And this was a tough one. I was already fairly well fixed at that time. Well, I lost two and a half million dollars here the first five years. It was so bad I can't describe it to you. The mortgage men wouldn't even take it.

JRF: But you had good business didn't you?

EIG: No, hell no. 70-s was just opening. I used to stand here with my wife fifteen minutes before a car'd pass. Nobody travelled on it but me. So instead of walking away, I had capital so I kept on buying land.

JRF: I read in the newspapers that the Washingtonian Towers is supposed to be the first of several buildings.

EIG: That's right. There'll be six more buildings; we own the land. It's zoned and we've got sewers and water there. Oh yes.

JRF: And it said -- which was also on my mind at dinnertime -- that you also planned in the future to build a convention center.

EIG: That's right.

JRF: Do you still have that idea?

EIG: I do .. after all you must remember I'm not a youngster anymore. I'll be 74 in December. My grandchildren will carry on. I've got a baker's dozen, thirteen of them. Ten Boys and three girls. So there'll be a lot of little Eigs here 100 years from now. And, thank God, they have nice parents -- not speaking about their grandfather but their parents, and they have brought them up right, and they will carry on.

JRF: One thing I'd like to do is nail down some dates, so I can have some sense of the sequence of things. In the '20's you had already begun building homes in Takoma Park, and in the District. I guess. And you'd started buying the farms out in Silver Spring. When did you first start building in Silver Spring?

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I'll give you an idea. I told you that the other day... I believe... I sold a house to a fellow by the name of Meyer Brodie. He was a whiskey broker. When I owned the liquor store I used to do business with him. He bought a house from me on East-West Highway, one of the first houses I built. He said to me, "I just married a Baltimore girl, and I estimate it will take me five years to get her to move out here in the woods of Silver Spring." Silver Spring really was the woods. I said, "How much rent do you want?" He said, "Hundred Twenty-five dollars." I put an ad in the paper and I got 20 applicants who wanted to take it. One couple came, just married, a stunning looking couple. I liked the way they talked. I remembered how it was when I first got married and was getting started. He just got a job at \$85 a week, and with his commission, he made \$125. So I let him have the house for a hundred a month, taking a gamble on the other \$25. Maybe I talked Mr. Brodie out of it, maybe I took it out of my own pocket. This young man was my neighbor for five years, and we talked together a great deal. He would ask me questions and we enjoyed our little talks. One day his company took him away from this area. He wrote me a letter, telling me he learned more from me than he did from college. Today, this \$85 a week clerk is President and Chairman of the Board of IBM. T. V. Learson is his name.

When I talked to him in those days, I would tell him "Montgomery County is God's Country." So after hammering away at him all that time, his company came to Montgomery County, made an analysis of 25 sites and picked my golf course as their choice. When they came to me with an offer, I said, "Look, I'm building a golf course and I have bulldozers in there." "Yes," they said, "We saw them. We'll buy them too." That was their answer. So, I was responsible for putting them here in Gaithersburg. Then in Bethesda, and all over. They are the biggest employers, next to the Federal Government and I talked them into coming here.

Then, oh, about two years ago, a Mr. McCurdy called and wanted to have lunch with me and said he was going to bring an educator. Well, everybody was supposed to know who Mr. McCurdy was, but I didn't. I knew a McCurdy I used to buy tires and gas from fifty years ago and I thought it was a great grandson or something. Here comes a Mr. McCurdy..the same one. He is president of a seven billion dollar company, Shell Oil Company. We had a nice lunch; and he brought Dr. Elliott who was President of Hood College at that time. It's a girls'school, about hundred and fifty years old, I guess. I was nice to him, but I thought I'd turn him down when he asked me to be on the Board of Trustees. He was Chairman of it. He had a daughter here and another one that had graduated. I told him, "I just don't take any more appointments." I had just resigned from some boards and I just don't take any more jobs. I said I've a few left in Banking; I'm a Director of the Suburban Trust Company and one of the oldest living depositors, fifty-four years. And, I'm Vice President and Director of Montgomery Federal Savings and Loan.

So I asked Mr. McCurdy, "What do you know about me anyway? Why'd you find me? A country boy like me." "Oh," he says, "My neighbor thinks the world of you." I said, "Where do you live, sir?" He says, "In Connecticut.? I say, "Who is your neighbor?" "Mr. Learson, President of IBM." (Laughs)

President of a fine company...

JRF: He was your first..?

EIG: Then I bought in Mr. Bechtel over here. I sold Mr. Bechtel a ^{1/4} acre of ground about 12 years ago, for 35 thousand. Seven years later I sold him an addition for 90 thousand, and five years later, I sold him some more land for a million, 339 thousand. And they put a big building up, then they put another up, and this institution here will serve twenty states east of the Mississippi. They started with five thousand employees, eventually they'll go to ten thousand employees. I brought them here.

JRF: Right here, right here in Montgomery County? (Meaning, but not getting it across, (All the 5000 are employed here in the county?"))

EIG: Gatty corners from here, my land across the street. I sold it to him; it was my land.

JRF: And you say they'll have 10 thousand jobs right here in the county?

EIG: That's my opinion. They've got 5000 now. See, Mr. Bechtel's the largest contractor this country - this world's ever known. They've got one job in Louisiana, over a billion dollars. They're finishing up a job in Pennsylvania, five hundred million dollars. They did work for Potomac Electric Power Company.. I don't know.. I guess it would be seven, eight hundred millions dollars worth already, but they've got another billion, billion and a half they're going to do for them. This is the kind of work they do. There was a full page ad two months ago in FORTUNE magazine, and they're in 25 different foreign countries. It's a father and son proposition. I had dinner with the father. I had dinner with the son. That was in San Francisco. Now when you bring such people here, they have the highest paid salaries. That's what has made this county number ONE richest per family income in the United States.. Montgomery Co. is. Politicians can't do that. It takes salesmanship.. honesty and faith.

JRF: When?--

EIG: When they put the addition on the IBM Building over here, two years ago, there were a couple thousand people there for the dedication. The Governor was there; and on the platform they had two seats for us, one for Buddy Eig and one for me.

JRF: You told me that when you first came to the United States, right then you decided you would invest in land.

EIG: No I didn't say that. I didn't say that at all. When I came to this country I was a kid. I didn't know anything. I got a job as a bus boy.. then a waiter, then a helper. I can tell you a story. You know, I worked in the Plaza Hotel in New York. The hotel was just a few years old. It was Number ONE then. When the customers were sitting there, the waiter and the bus boy had to be on the job. A boy and girl were sitting at the table. They stayed until four o'clock in the morning. No one would tell them to leave. I was dying for sleep.. I had to be back at work at nine in the morning. Finally they left and went upstairs. I'll tell you who they were.. Charlie Chaplin and Mary Pickford.

JRF: No kidding.

EIG: Yeah.

JRF: Well I made a mistake then, when I said you said that. You said maybe it was when you left New York, or coming into Washington, that you thought you'd start putting your money inco'--

EIG: I didn't have money. After I started making the first dollar, then I started thinking.

JRF: OK

EIG: When I got a little older and I became more acquainted with Washington, I took a ride on a street car. I didn't have a car. And I discovered Silver Spring. I said.. that's a nice place to settle.. before I was married.

JRF: What I'm driving at is that from the time you started really building in Silver Spring, did your plans or your visions develop, say, day to day, or did you have from the start this vision which has been borne out in the last few years of bringing all this industry into the county. Did you think at that time that you would be able to do all this?

EIG: No, I was a small fry. All I was doing was buying all the land I could. Just a little bit.. I had no money. I was raising a family and had a small business. But at the same time when I made a dollar when I was a youngster, fifty center I gave to charity, the community, and fifty cents I invested. And it was tough times. It was rough. I'll never forget one time a mortgage was due, on two farms. I had to have \$12,000. I went to a banker, in Washington, where I had an account. And I wanted to borrow some money. He chased me out. He said, "Ain't got any money to put in a place called Silver Spring in the woods." And the same banker, years later, told the story on himself at the Greenbriar Hotel, at the D. C. Banker's Convention. He himself told the joke on himself. How stupid he was.

JRF: Did you get the loan? (Remembering a story as it appeared in Fortunes the bank President, hearing Eig, granted the loan)

EIG: NO. That's why he told the joke on himself.. how dumb he was. I was Chairman of UNITED Givers Fund, years back. Ten bankers sat at a table. I knew nine. I didn't know the other guy. They introduced me to him and I looked at him and said, "Where were you? I borrowed money from all these guys. They must have had you hidden in a closet someplace." They all had a good laugh. (Laughing; clears throat)

JRF: The development of Silver Spring. What I want to do is get your opinion of this. I've heard that one event that was considered important to the commercial development of Silver Spring during or after WWII was the widening of the B&O underpass.

EIG: That was later. I was very active on the Board of Trade already. I owned the Silver Spring Shopping Center, and Pres Lane was Governor. That's when we put in that thing, the underpass. We had a parade. And I'll tell you who was in the parade now. Walter Cronkite, Ed Sullivan, that girl who was married to Eddie Fisher--

JRF: ~~Debbie~~ ^{Debbie} Reynolds?

EIG: ~~Debbie~~ ^{Debbie} Reynolds. This fellow Charlie Kopeland was Secretary to Board of Trade. He got them together you know. We had lunch in the old Indian Spring Country Club in those days. Oh, that was a parade! Boy! This Walter Cronkite and Ed Sullivan.. they were nothing then.

EIG: (continuing)

Years later, I had some friends, Charlie Rose from Philadelphia. He's dead now. And he had an Irishman, a brother-in-law, forgot his name. He's still alive and works in Washington. So there was a big to-do going on in the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami. And Ed Sullivan was there and, oh, that guy from California, what's his name--

JRF: John ~~Carson~~ Carson?

EIG: No, the fellow who was up all the time, to all the wars -- he's a multimillionaire. Oh, what's the name of that guy, that guy? You know the fellow that puts on all these shows for the Army.

JRF: Bob Hope.

EIG: Bob Hope. He was there and so forth. So I took ~~this guy down~~ ^{CHARLIE ROSE} there, and Ed Sullivan remembered right away. Met his wife, by the way -- his wife is Jewish -- and that fellow shook hands, and he said, "Nobody can touch that hand." And Ed Sullivan rightaway asked me, he said, "Is Charlie Kopeband still around?" I remember distinctly, exactly what happened.

JRF: And this was a parade celebrating the widening --

EIG: Yeah, the underpass on Georgia Ave.

JRF: What was the problem before? Nobody came out because it was too narrow? It sounds to me like too small a thing to make much difference.

EIG: Ah, come on, come on. You come down there. A train parks right in the middle of the street and you sit there for a half hour waiting to get across. Don't you see?

JRF: I didn't live here then.

EIG: Look, when I got my first car and I drove around here.. this place right in Gaithersburg. That bridge over the B&O wasn't here and I remember (thumps table) I sat there for a half hour, sometimes, it was raining, and I couldn't go on. It was not good.

JRF: No kidding.

EIG: Yeah.

JRF: An that's the way it was in Silver Spring? There was no trestle?

EIG: No, No, no. You stopped there, brother. Boom Boom Boom Boom, the train comes up there like thunder.

JRF: Well, at about the same time. I read, that Col. Lee or somebody got the idea of buying up a lot of land and making free parking lots. Do you remember about that?

EIG: No he didn't buy up any lots. You know when he came here after the First World War, at the age of 23 he was Speaker of the House at Annapolis. I remember, I had a cocktail party one time, Brooke Lee was there, Judge J. Prescott, who's dead, Governor Pres Lane, who's dead, Captain Hewitt, who's dead, and Senator Tydings, who's dead. They were all there. And they were in the same regiment overseas. You should have seen them.. they used to tell stories about-- well, I wouldn't put it in there (gesturing at the recorder). (Clears throat)

EIG: (continues)

So he conceived the idea to have two parking lots. Oh, the fights and the trouble that went on.. it was awful! He had the legislature pass the thing finally and we established the parking lot thing in there. I could talk hours on that deal, and all the things that happened. And years later, I wanted to build a hotel, on Colesville Road, by the big garage. I owned the land; I owned the corner. I went up to a convention in Montreal. When I came back, a couple of newspaper men met me at the airport. They wanted a statement from me. I said, "Yeah, we had a tough time. We circled around in the air for half an hour, couldn't land at the New York Airport. Is that what you're talking about?" No, they told me. "What are you talking about?"

I had had an application for zoning and they turned me down and that's why the newspapers had come down for a statement. They asked me, "What are you going to do with it?" I said, "I guess I'll put a big sign there.. 'Monument to Stupidity'." That was the stupidity of the day.

JRF: The County Council would not let you build or would not rezone?

EIG: They wouldn't rezone. They wouldn't rezone so I said, "Well I guess I'll have to build a monument to stupidity." But I couldn't build without a liquor license; you couldn't have a liquor license in Montgomery County at that point yet. So I wouldn't build. So then they wanted to buy this from me for a parking lot. And they came to my office, and they hounded me. .. the Board of Trade, Dave Scull, Brooke Lee and everybody. Finally I sell it. Charlie Jamison, and the county manager, They all came.. a number of people active at that time in politics. They really wanted it. So, they finally get it. The County government bought it from me, and at the hearing the official hearing, the press was there in Rockville, and I made a statement which I wanted to have go on the records. I said, "Sam and Esther Eig are giving the County a gift of half a million dollars." This was so because the land was worth so much more.

JRF: What year was that?

EIG: Approximately 12 years ago. Dave McDonald, a Republican was running for the County Council. He wanted to make something of the sale. He wrote for the press that I had made \$145,000 profit. So the papers came to me for a statement. I said, "Look fellows, I don't know what you're talking about but come to my office tomorrow morning at ten o'clock and we'll discuss it and find out what the hell he said." So, as I got it, the fellow was trying to be sensational, he was ignorant about the whole thing. I asked my accountant to prepare a statement and I showed that I lost \$13,000 on the deal. He forgot one thing. When you carry expensive land like this ten years, you pay taxes, interest on the mortgage and so forth. He forgot that. Do you follow me?

When the election came, they really put it to him. He really lost. I issued a statement to the press. Billy Wheeler was President of the Board of Trade and he issued a statement. So they built this public garage there, which is a godsend for Silver Spring. And, of course, these parking lots don't cost the County.. the businessmen, the landowners, the building owners, pay for it. I was the largest real estate owner in Silver Spring at that time, so I've paid the most for it anyway. So that's what happened but it was good for business and everybody knows it.

JRF: Do you think that over the years, the parking lots themselves could have been developed for commercial purposes and even more money brought into Silver Spring? Is there any way of measuring that?

EIG: No question about it. You have to have parking or you haven't got anything today. You can see when they build one shoe store today, one drug store, one grocery store.. look at all the parking they've got around it... one motel. You don't have parking-- you have nothing. .. you're a bum on a bench in the park.

JRF: I guess what I'm thinking about now is that I know in some places, Iowa City where I was the last 6 years, there's a fight about this. Bring a parking ramp or have a lot of parking lots in town. Some others say to put the parking lots on the outside of town, and have minibuses bring people in and that would --

EIG: That's ignorance, ignorance, stupidity. People won't do that, they just won't do that. Why do you have a minibus; why in the heck? The businessmen would move out to the parking lots. The parking lots are more important than the business. The business will go where the parking is! No transfer either. This is no good. It wouldn't work. They've tried it now, hundreds of cities, and it's a failure. But local people in this little community have their own little ideas, y'see, but they're wrong. It doesn't work that way. The American people would not put up with it. They want convenience. And this is a way out of it, the modern way out of it, the safest way out of it; this is right.

Why should a person, mama, papa and two children, park here and take a minibus and go work there? Why can't it work this way? The business moves.. it builds a building here where people live. It's being done all over the country today. Think how many corporations have moved out of the big cities into the suburbs. We see it right here, Bethesda. Bethesda was nothing, a whistle stop. Look at how many buildings have moved in from Washington. They can't get help in the big cities. Secretaries are afraid to walk the streets during the daytime and at night it is impossible altogether. But in their own community, they feel at home. Don't you follow me? It's good for the elimination of crime. It will cost billions and billions of dollars to eliminate crime. This ~~is~~ ^{is} itself is a good way to help that situation.

JRF: But.. well let me put this possibility to you. Let's say that crime will follow the population too; people go out to the suburbs and maybe the crime will too. It happens...

EIG: Not as much.. no, no, no.

JRF: You don't think so?

EIG: No, five percent, no, I'm sorry. Washington, you must remember, is an exceptional situation; it's government. You cannot move a government. Understand, they are stuck. So they suffer. You see, rapes, murders down there.. Secretaries get raped and all that. They have to stick. Because, it's the Nation's Capitol. Even at that.. look at all the agencies that have moved to the suburbs. Social Security.. in Baltimore.. in the suburbs. Look over here, NIH, all these things..they're moving to the suburbs. Look how many are going to Reston, and all over Virginia. They're getting out of Washington. They've got permanent institutions there, but they are not building any more in town. They're getting out. They can't get any help. It's transportation and it's safety, everything. Any kid in high school can figure that one out.. you don't need nine years of college. I've been watching this thing forty years now. Today it's common knowledge. Well, it's up to seven thirty.

JRF: You want to call it a day?

EIG: You learn anything?

JRF: Yes. I'm very happy with this. This is going very well.

EIG: You're going to learn some more.

JRF: I'm once again with Mr. Sam Eig at the Washingtonian Motel--

EIG: And Country Club.

JRF: And Country Club. The 6th day of September 1972, and this is our second session.

First I'd like to go back to the time when you were building the community along East-West Highway. First of all, what are the bounds of that community? Was it like, let's see Rock Creek Forest goes from what, Rock Creek to Sundale Road?

EIG: That's right.

JRF: Or does it go all the way to 16th Street?

EIG: No, not quite to 16th Street. On the south side, approximately a little over Sundale, on the south side of East-West Highway, and over to Rock Creek the other way, and south all the way to the District line, and north all the way to Rock Creek again, turns around there. That place used to be called Monkey Hollow at one time. (Smiling).

JRF: Monkey Hollow? Is that what's known now as Meadow Brook?

EIG: No, Meadow Brook, Meadow Brook Riding Academy was my property. I gave that to them. That's on the edge of Rock Creek. That's south of East-West Highway. Before East-West Highway was opened I had to go (mechanical interruption, rest of statement lost).

JRF: Well, the community you built here, its housing, three churches, the Jewish community center--

EIG: I built houses; apartments; a shopping center; a Montgomery County Jewish Community Center and Synagogue; St. Paul's Methodist Church; Christ the King Church; the Red Cross Building. And, I allocated a site for the YMCA. And it so happened, in later years, the Red Cross Building needed more space. So they wanted to buy the land from YMCA. The YMCA had an opportunity to buy the old Indian Springs Country Club from Mr. Kay or his estate at that time, I think. Well I happened to be on the Board of the Red Cross and I was also on the Board of YMCA. So the YMCA put me on the negotiating committee, and the Red Cross put me on its negotiating committee. And I was in the revolving door--

JRF: Negotiating with yourself.

EIG: It reminded me of a picture years ago, many years ago in which Will Rogers played, called "The County Chairman". In it he was campaigning in an election and had Stepin Fetchit with him. It was a fight between sheepraisers and cattlemen. They hated each other. So Will Rogers first made a speech on the platform to the sheepraisers, telling them they ought to run the cattle people out of the county. They were a detriment, terrible. Then they went over to the other end of the county, so he made a speech to the cattle people that those sheep people ^{ought} to be run out of the county. About that time, they hear a little lamb, ehhehhehh ehhehhehh, because while they were in sheep country Stepin Fetchit stole a little lamb, and had it hidden in his bosom and the damn thing started hollering and so he got run out of the county. (Laughing heavily).
I remember that picture, many years ago.

EIG: (continues)
 Anyway, so the YMCA didn't have a nickle to put down to purchase the 8 acres there at the old Country Club at Indian Spring. So I worked out a deal, that the Red Cross will pay them \$20,000 for the site, (of course, it would be \$80,000 to \$100,000 today, or better,) and I came to the meeting of the YMCA and everybody was sitting there with long faces; they were worried. I said, "Where is the dead body? What do you all look so terrible about?"

Here's what happened. I had learned from some very wealthy people, through reading magazines -- and I used what I learned and put a clause in the deed when I gave away all these properties, in the millions, I guess, in the county, to various institutions. The clause says that they must build for their own use. They cannot sell it. In case they don't use it the property reverts back to Sam and Esther Eig. I had this clause with the YMCA. So I made a deal with the YMCA to give me back the property that they were not going to use, I sold it to the Red Cross for \$20,000 and gave the whole thing to the YMCA for the down payment. That is a true story, so help me.

JRF: That's funny.

EIG: Then we wanted to build a Boys' Club in Silver Spring. They organized twice and it folded, then they came to me. I got busy, I was a hard worker in my younger days and I was involved in trying to build a good community, a good Silver Spring, a good country. I looked around. I found a site at the edge of Sligo Creek over there, and this property really belonged to the Park and Planning Commission. I bought it and paid for it out of my own pocket to the Park and Planning Commission and we built a Boys' Club and there it is today with a little concrete post in front.. my name is on it too.

JRF: That's the one that's just off the Beltway?

EIG: Yes. And then we had a problem later on.. years later. I don't like to talk about that, about Holy Cross Hospital because that's a sad story. A Methodist group nearly came in and filed suit.

JRF: They sued you?

EIG: They wanted to stop Holy Cross Hospital, saying that one piece of the property was bought for the County years ago, a \$40,000 piece of ground. They claimed it was illegal. Anyway that's the way they felt about it. So, I thought, what the hell and I went to testify for the Hospital. They lost. We built the hospital. Ah, it goes on, it goes on, it goes on.

It was never a dull moment, but it was pretty hard beginning. Many people told me.. "way out in the country, East-West Highway, in the woods.". I sat on a job six months before I sold the first house. It was a horrible thing. I sold a house down there for \$8,200 and now they sell them for \$35,000 or \$40,000...the same house.

JRF: Well, when you first built this community, that was back in the forties, or late thirties.

EIG: The late thirties, yeah.

JRF: (continues)

community with houses, shopping center, churches --

EIG: That was a conception of mine; no doubt it was done in other parts of the country too. But that was all mine, just as I came here and bought up all this land, and developed it with the country club and motel, the apartment houses, golf courses. I looked to the future and I almost went under, it was so bad. I lost millions of dollars here before I got going. Now, of course, everything came out right in the end. I brought all the industry in; I had a lot to do as I told you last time with getting IBM to locate here, the Bechtel Corporation. Then it was natural for Atomic Energy and Bureau of Standards to follow, and Fairchild Hiller. They all came here, and today we are sitting on the most fertile, finest spot in the county, in the country. And with it we have fine people doing fine jobs. Montgomery County is the richest county in America, in average family income. I think 14 years ago we beat Westchester County in New York. The other counties will try to catch up, but they haven't done it yet. Let them try.

JRF: I was going to say, did you ever develop a community like Rock Creek Forest in any of the other counties, or in any other part of the country?

EIG: I had invitations to; places to go, but I made up my mind, this is my home. My children, grandchildren were born here. And we're all going to stick to Montgomery County. (Slapping the table for emphasis) And that's where we are now. And that's why I'm going to press all my grandchildren to go to local schools, local colleges, have local professions, and so on and so forth. I want them to stay here and make it a lot better place to live yet, better yet.

JRF: Just to finish my questioning about Rock Creek Forest. When you built it, in addition to owning the land did you also form a construction company?

EIG: Oh yes, I did everything myself. Oh yes. I build my own stuff.

JRF: Is that the most economical way, in your opinion? Rather than contract out?

EIG: It all depends. If you know your business that's the way to do it. If you don't, get a contractor. Simple as all that. I happened to come up the hard way. I built places before I did Rock Creek Forest. This was my first project where I did everything myself. I built those bridges down there.. did everything myself.

That was a very interesting situation. When I first came, as I told you before, Montgomery County had 28,000 people. Now we have more than 600,000 and we're fast going to a million. I wanted to build an office building on Coleville Road. And I tried a half a dozen insurance companies and they turned me down. (Incredulous) I wanted to build an eight story building. And these people who own hundreds of billions of dollars think they have brains. And I'm convinced now they haven't got a brain. They were just damn lucky. They said, they wouldn't lend money out for a two story building. So finally I talked a company into a four story building. That's known as the Big Building, the first large building that was built in Silver Spring. Now they're building them 15 stories. But I was ahead of everything, the banks, the insurance companies and everybody else.

JRF: Back in those days, when at the beginning of modern Silver Spring,

JRF: (continues)

it was just you and I guess Col. Lee and a few other people. In addition to that time when you all got together to provide the parking lots, did you ever work closely together. Was there any kind of concerted planning for the future growth of Silver Spring in a specific way?

EIG: Well, Col. Lee was head of the Park and Planning Commission. The Park and Planning Commission wasn't in business a long time. He was pretty good. Outside of him and me there weren't many permanent people. They would come in, grab a buck and hurry out. But we stayed. And the Col. and I have shared advice and we respect each other.

For instance, when we were working to get parking, some people who had the property said, "Nothin' but a bunch of Socialists", that's what they called us. Now just imagine how small minded people can be. How blind they were to the future of the United States. People have to come to shop, but parking space where they have to park a car, they call Socialism.

JRF: (Laughs)

EIG: That's a true story. And I'll tell you, one of them was the Secretary of the Treasury, what's his name. I don't remember now but it's on the money.

JRF: Why would they call it Socialism. I mean I don't see how they could get that angle.

EIG: Neither could I. Neither could the Col. But we had to go to the legislature and we had to fight all the way through. They paid, for instance, on the parking lot, across the street from the Hecht Company. I think it was 50¢ a square foot. They hollered murder, saying it was overpaying. Today it's worth over \$20 a square foot, \$30, who the hell knows how much it's worth. But that's the way it goes. It happened, I'm sure, all over the United States. These things really haven't got a patent. There's no patent on stupidity. It existed everywhere. But I can only speak about our own community where I faced it.

JRF: Well, about that time also -- to shift a little bit -- was also the time of the Charter Movement;

EIG: The Charter Movement came later on, yes.

JRF: Oh, it came later on? And Col. Lee for a number of years, until the late '40's was a prominent opponent of the Charter.

EIG: That's right.

JRF: Were you yourself active either for or against the Charter Movement?

EIG: No sir, I wasn't against it. I was neutral. And I'm glad you brought this thing up. I'll never forget, there was an election day, and the Col. was in the Park and Planning Commission Building which was across the street at that time--

JRF: Which year, do you remember? Because the Charter went through several elections; it failed one and then came back.

EIG: It came in the second one. sometime in the forties

EIG: (continued)

One time at a luncheon, I asked a question. I said, "Suppose you stopped 20 people on Georgia Avenue and Colesville Road and asked them who were... then you name some of the politicians other than the Col. Two girls in the audience who worked for the county government said they wouldn't know. You could ask businessmen, who were so and so in politics, and they couldn't tell you either. But I can tell you, if you ask forty or fifty years from now, Who Was Sam Eig?, they can tell you. It's because I built institutions, that will be here forever and ever. There are some twenty houses of worship alone. That's what people remember, not who was on the County Council twenty years ago.

JRF: Of course, a lot of these people are new--

EIG: I know but there are some local people.. we had 28,000 people I told you when I got here; ask them. They couldn't tell you. I'll guarantee that. You go anyplace in the county and ask them. They remember the people who do the good hard work that everyone benefits from.

JRF: Well..

EIG: No that's just it. What I tell you, Jack. Remember. It's not just here that it prevails. It is all over the United States in every community. Politicians come and go. The hard working business and professional men, the hard working farmer, they stay and their children carry on and their grandchildren carry on. These are the people who build the country.

JRF: It sounds then that you don't feel that the people on the County Council, which was created by Charter, ~~don't~~ make much difference. Is that what you're saying. That they don't make much difference on the growth of the county, or the development?

EIG: They often hold it back. I know that. We have to fight like the devil sometimes, and we shouldn't have to do that.

JRF: How come they oppose? How come you meet such opposition?

EIG: Well, circumstances..

JRF: It's not just from the County Council, too. I know there's a lot of citizens groups.

EIG: Circumstances, even the citizens' groups. (Some guy is head of the group, then they throw him out.)

I'll give you an illustration. Many years ago, (the Chamber of Commerce, now of Silver Spring, was called the Board of Trade. I was very active. I was the longest, oldest director on the Board. We had a newcomer-- as you said, fast-growing community-- people came in, joined the Board of Trade, came to meetings, and man, first thing you know they get very loud. They're going to change everything. They're smooth talking, probably went to Law School for two years. Well, I remember a couple of cases. One in particular.. this fellow was a brilliant speaker, and very smart. But I got suspicious.. he wasn't real, somehow or another. So I went to work and drew up a credit report on him, complete. I followed him around five different communities he'd lived in. I found out the fellow was nothing but a crook. He was an ex-convict. Smart fella! and boy. I showed him this record. You know the fellow left town?

EIG: (continues)
I have a friend, one of my best friends, who lives in Florida. He's a native Floridian. I met him forty years ago; we became very good friends. In fact, he visited me today. He was in the insurance business. He had six southern states. He was Chairman of the Personnel Board of Miami Beach. He had the same kind of situation down there and handled it the same way I did.

There are some people in public office today who don't belong there. You know Montgomery County is a 20 billion dollar corporation, and you hand it over to people who get elected, who never had experience whatsoever in anything, and they criticize and tear down everything and everybody. They pass legislation. Do you realize that this County Council in two years has passed more legislation than Congress did. And every time you pass a thing you create something. First, you start with ten employees. Next thing, you have sixteen employees. Then it costs a half a million dollars to run. And first thing you know if you own a little house and I own a little house, they raise our taxes. Where's the money going to come from? And we get taxed up, every year, up, up, up every year because of these spendthrifts. Of course, I'm not involved in it, but people tell me. They are trying to bring in public housing into fine communities. It will change whole communities.

JRF: That's not inevitable, though, is it?

EIG: That's a job for the Federal Government, (not for the local Council to do. So, of course, we threw out Democrats and the Republicans have come in.. eight, twelve years ago. We threw them out and we got semi-Republicans and semi-Democrats, then we threw them out and we got all Democrats. I think in two years there'll be a change again.

I have nothing against anybody. God has been good to me. I worked hard and earned my own living. But this is a sideline. I see what is going on. That's the American way of life.

JRF: Do I take it then you were never really active in party politics?

EIG: I was a very active Democrat all my life. I was a delegate to the National Convention in 1952. I was one of the big fundraisers in the state-- that's why I was called into that breakfast with Governor Mandel. Was it Thursday a week ago, I think it was. (It was the morning after our first session.) And there were 25 of us down there. Mr. O'Brien was there. The Governor insisted I sit at the head table. In fact, the Governor was sitting in the middle and I was sitting on his right and Mr. O'Brien was sitting on his left. And it was a fine breakfast, very well served and it lasted two hours. One black woman was there; she was a Democrat from the Fourth District in Baltimore, State Senator--

JRF: Would that be ^{Verda} Verna Welcome?

EIG: Yes. And she asked a question of Mr. O'Brien. "Mr. O'Brien," she said, "Mr. McGovern wants to give everybody a thousand dollars, and he's going to give a family \$6500 for not working. Will you please tell us where the money is going to come from?" Mr. O'Brien talked for a whole hour to take himself out of that one.

It is my opinion, my humble opinion, that of 25 people who were present there were maybe eight who would vote for Mr. McGovern and the rest would vote for Mr. Nixon. I've been pretty accurate in the last half century.

JRF: I'm just curious. Last week it was announced somebody named Harry Rodgers, is that his name?.. had been active in Maryland, was he--?

EIG: Yeah.

JRF: Did Mr. O'Brien try to enlist him for Mr. McGovern?

EIG: Yeah. Mr. Connolly got him. Mr. Connolly, Democrats for Nixon. It looks like a lot on Democrats are for Nixon. I think Mr. Nixon's going to carry the state...tremendous majority.

JRF: Did you ever think of running for office yourself, did you consider it?

EIG: They've tried, they've tried and tried and tried, and I've always said, "No, I'm just a hard working businessman, and I'm working for charity. I was appointed by Governor McKeldin to the State Welfare Board, for six years, and I was reappointed by Governor Tawes for another six years. I have travelled all over the state, reform schools, the jails, and all the other institutions. The Welfare Board spends the most money next to the State Roads Commission, I think. And there's no salary attached; but you get travelling expenses. Well, I refused to accept a single cent of traveling expenses. I've had, I guess, I don't know, maybe \$50,000 worth of travelling expenses.. staying at hotels, motels; I used to drive with my wife to various places and I never accepted money. I said I thought I owed that to the state. I was told I was the only one who did that.

JRF: My curiosity is tickled a bit when you say that you were asked to run for different offices; would you like to drop names, like Congress, Senator, Governor?

EIG: Oh, not Governor, Senator; I haven't got the ability to do that. Local County offices.

JRF: About one of the larger economic movements of the last ten or twenty years to make Montgomery County economically independent of the District and completely self-sufficient. How can that happen?

EIG: What do you mean by that? I don't understand.

JRF: OK. For many years, people worked in D. C. and just came home at night. And bringing industry into the County for one thing creates jobs within the County so that more people can work as well as go to bed here. I've read some clips from some things about the planning struggles of the early '60's, and for instance, Col. Lee was quoted once as saying he wants Montgomery County to be completely independent of the District of Columbia and to have no economic dependence on the District, you know. That's his ideal or his goal.

EIG: Well that's just one man's opinion. You didn't see the show 1776, did you?

JRF: No I didn't.

EIG: You missed it. Boy, you would look ^{like it,} good. It played in this theatre (Shady Grove Music Fair) here five or six weeks ago. The original 13 colonies tried to organize this Congress and pull away from the English. And the delegate from South Carolina,.. he was willing to do anything but he wanted South Carolina to be independent. He wanted to pull away from

EIG: (continues)

England, but he didn't want North Carolina or Virginia or Maryland to come and tell them how to run their state. Oh, what a show that is, 1776, a very topnotch job; very good show.

We should be by ourselves, independent; I always believed in freedom. It's a free country. The principle, the Constitution is on freedom. Anybody wants to live in Washington, let 'em live there. Anybody wants to live here, let them. What does one have to do with the other? Be like a separate state. Virginia is by itself; we're by ourselves; we happened to be the two states adjacent to the city of Washington. If people want to live there and work there or people want to live there and work here, that's the American way of life. I know a lot of people working at the Social Security Building in Baltimore who commute from Alexandria everyday. A lot of people in Baltimore who work in the Pentagon. That's the United States of America: You can't tell the people where or you become a dictatorship! It's crazy. People should see, investigate where they want to live and then let them decide.

I sold IBM into coming here. IBM is the second largest employer next to the Federal Government. (Telephone Company used to be but IBM passed them). Montgomery County wouldn't be number ONE if it wasn't for IBM. These people who make \$25,000, \$45,000, \$60,000 a year want to live in a fine community. Most of them settle here. What have they got to do with Washington. If someone in Washington has a good job, a nice home or apartment, what does he have to do with Montgomery County. Let's keep the county clean and independent. Let's let people live where they want to live and work where they want to work. I don't think ANYBODY has a right to tell ANYBODY where to live or where to work. I think that's horrible. You do away with independence and freedom there. We've had some members of the Council -- I believe some feel that way still -- who like to dictate these things. It's wrong. They will never get away with it.

JRF: I don't understand. What is it they want to dictate?

EIG: They want to tell builders what kind of housing they can put in their developments.

JRF: That's a matter of attraction, building say cheap housing out here--

EIG: NO.

JRF: To attract people to come out, but that's not a matter of forcing anyone.

EIG: It's stupidity. Now wait just a minute now. Hasn't this Council got a bill up, or they passed it -- Let's say a builder's got a piece of ground he paid a lot of money for. He applies for a zoning for X. And the Council says, "OK, what is it, 15% or 25% of this has to be the fair housing thing. Now who in the -- let's say you're a rich man. You hit the jackpot with your PH.D. You worked hard for it and then you get up in the world and you want to buy an \$80,000 home. You're not going to buy when in the next two years there's going to be a \$15,000 house there. You wouldn't do it. It's just common nature, common sense, isn't it? They want to do this and that, in the same subdivision, or you can't get zoning or sewer or anything.

JRF: Well, I think --

EIG: This country just wasn't built that way; it wasn't built on that basis.

JRF: Well, let me ask you a related question. I've been studying up on the Falkland project that Mr. Linowes and the PMI people are going to build. And one of the objections coming from D. C. from both citizens there on sixteenth street and members of the D. C. government was that if more projects like Falkland, like Crystal City, like Rosslyn are built up around the perimeter of the District, this will not only attract people from out of state to these places, but also attract business from the city. This article said the demand for office space after the riots in '68 zoomed in Silver Spring; it was way up. Six months before that they were willing to buy up leases.

EIG: Let them tell it to their grandmother. It's not true. There are empty offices in Silver Spring today, while I'm talking to you right now. That's lawyer talk. If all lawyers agreed on the same things, we wouldn't have trials.. would have to let everybody out of jail. (Laughs)

JRF: OK, well by that route anyway, I was trying to get to this point. That, well, let's say is it really, ultimately in the interests of the wealthy counties around D. C. to do nothing to prevent, say, the economy of the District of Columbia to deteriorate to the point where it is all poor, crime is zooming -- what would confine that "urban rot", they call it, from spreading out?

EIG: Well then build in Washington! They've got land. Tear down the slums and build shopping centers and housing. Why infringe on Maryland. It would be a wonderful thing to tear down some of the junk down there.. they can build on Georgia Avenue too. I don't know, but I think putting congested building on the fringe of Washington would kill Silver Spring. Montgomery County can take care adequately of its population today and for years to come.

JRF: To move out a little further in the county, to 70-s; again back in the early '60's there was a big controversy over what they called Wedges and Corridors concept. Which was to sort of build up the urban, the business, the commercial part of the county along corridors like Connecticut Avenue, Georgia Avenue and I would guess also 70-s; I don't know for sure. But I wondered if this Wedges and Corridors concept was helpful to development along 70-s.

EIG: Well that's almost a natural thing. That's all over the United States. At least it is not what I say or what you say. It's taking place all over the United States; the American public wants to live, spread out with breathing spaces. This idea.. like Baltimore with the little steps and other little steps housing... those days are gone. That was 200 years ago and the city is now taking them all over. People today want to have a yard or want to live in a modern elevator building. They don't want ghettos any more. They want to have recreation, a country club next to them. They want to enjoy life. They don't want to live in ghettos. It's happened all over the country, so why shouldn't we enjoy the same privileges. Especially now that it has been established that we are the richest county in America per family income.

EIG: (continues)

We haven't got multimillionaires here but we have the average families who make more money because they have jobs, they work for big companies. They have studied, they didn't inherit that. They came up step by step up the ladder to success. Now, why take a man who has a nice family, a wife and 3,4 or 5 children and drag him down. They live in a nice community, join a church; go to school.

It's generally known that in the ghetto there's a lot of crime. Let's concentrate on that and get rid of the crime there. I'm one hundred per cent for helping these poor people. The law must take hold of it. A guy gets in trouble; the judge in Washington let's him out of bond. First thing you know he gets a gun and kills someone. (Slaps leg). Kills more until he gets caught. What kind of sense does that make? How are you going to build a society of this kind?

JRF: Many people will say, though that the only way to get at the roots of that -- OK, you have to take care of the people like that, who are currently, who have killed raped -- but to get at the roots of the problem you have to somehow eliminate the poverty which makes somebody go out and rob a liquor store, something like that, and everything else that follows. Somehow you have to build up that poor community -- and well there are many angles of attack. One idea, one of Johnson's ideas was to build these mixed income communities, high, middle, low, the idea or the hope that eventually--

EIG: Was that Johnson's idea? Johnson, Johnson wasn't the smartest President we ever had.

JRF: No, no. I'm just saying that even Johnson had this idea--

EIG: No. No.

JRF. Keeping people isolated from each other, poor from richer, helps to exacerbate the problems.

EIG: We're not talking white and black. We have some very fine black members of our Country Club. They live in Washington and they believe in law and order. But the government in Washington.. the City Council should get strict, should put their foot down. They should clean up the city, get the drug pushers; clean up the slums. The answer is not to shuffle people about. The answer, when you have cancer is to cut it out. Simple. We're not running the Nation's Capital city right, I'll tell you that. And lately it's been terrible. God, what's going on down there. It's something awful.

JRF: Well to turn to maybe a more congenial subject. You were telling me last time, at dinner, about the family, what you called the family, at the Washingtonian. And you were telling about relations, how people work together, how they live. I would like, just for the record, if you would describe just a little bit again --

EIG: You mean about the employees?

JRF: Yeah.

EIG: We have between a hundred and fifty and two hundred employees, and in the summer it's about 300. Many times it ~~was down to~~ about 225, and some of them have been here ever since the establishment went up,

EIG: (continues)
going on 17 years. They all have homes, have a couple of cars, they raise children and they're law abiding citizens. I think the world of them and we operate like a big family, congenial family. And, of course, I put in, as I told you before, 7 days a week, 16 hours a day. I don't allow any profanity on the place. No one uses profanity here.. that is no employees. And everybody just likes everybody and gets along splendidly. And occasionally, when they have to buy a home or a new car; or send a kid to college or are short of funds, I usually lend them money without interest. And that makes it very happy.. it sounds a little bit like -- even the Socialists, the Communists charge a half rate of interest -- but I don't do that because this is a Capitalistic form that I invented.
(Laughs)

JRF: Capitalistic form of Socialism. (Both Laughing).

JRF: I was curious. I drove around your grounds the other day and I noticed this little Shady Grove Village down here--

EIG: Yeah?

JRF: Which seems way tucked out in the woods, but it looked like a very nice, pleasant place..

EIG: That was built, what, about 3 years ago? It sold for 27 and 28 thousand per unit. They've already been resold for 39 and 42.5.

JRF: Did you build that?

EIG: No.

JRF: I wondered because it was called Shady Grove.

EIG: Well, they used the name. The name is very well known today. It is associated with Shady Grove Music Fair and so forth.

JRF: I have a few miscellaneous questions, but before I get to them. In the elections over the past 20 years, the Jewish vote in Montgomery County has been said to be very important. And I wondered what your opinion would be, what advantages Jewish people found in Montgomery County to attract such a large number of them rather than to Prince Georges County or to Arlington; or any other place. Was there anything special about Montgomery County?

EIG: Well, being Jewish myself, I want to tell you, Jack, there isn't such a thing as a Jewish vote. The Jewish people are the most independent people, and they believe in democracy because they have suffered a thousand years, as you know. We've got some Jewish Republicans, some Jewish Democrats, there are Jewish Socialists and I must admit we have a handful of Communists too. I don't know why in the hell they're communists but I think we've got 'em. When I moved to this county I was Jewish person number six I think. I estimate today we've got 90 thousand. We can swing an election any time here. The Jews and the Catholics. Used to be nothing but Protestant country here; no Catholics, no Jews then. But things change.. they're changing all over the country..

JRF: That's interesting, you said they can swing the vot any time they wanted to, but you said there was no Jewish vote.

EIG: Just a minute now, everyone together, everyone the same way. But they're not. I said-- you misunderstood me --

JRF: I see. OK, well I wanted--

EIG: Predominantly, they are Democrats, like myself. But this year I think they'll be a split in there. A lot of them I think will go Republican this time. They seem not to like the agitation Mr. McGovern caused, mostly through his followers. And it is generally known that the majority of Jewish families are pretty law-abiding citizens. We've got some people in jail, and we've got some on dope, but a majority of them, in comparison to other minorities are law-abiding. After watching the conventions, seeing these Hippies and Zippies who were trying to run the convention, they lost their taste for that, I think. After they watched the kids at the Republican Convention; they were a different breed of cats; and I think it swung them over a little bit. Especially when Mr. McGovern says he's going to give everything to the whole country. He's going to give everything to everybody, well everyone knows you can't do that. But the average family watches that and listens; they're going to start thinking, you know. I see in the paper, for instance, yesterday, day before, they're going to have to know door to door, Dollars for Democrats. They got 40 volunteers. I remember when they had several hundred volunteers. What happened to the others? Where ~~are~~ they? What happened. The population got bigger; there are more Democrats; what happened?

JRF: Well, politics aside, what about Montgomery County attracted so many Jewish people to come out here to live?

EIG: I'm perhaps responsible to some extent. I built the first synagogue, Montgomery County Jewish Community.

JRF: That was the first one?

EIG: The first one. Then I helped build Har Tzeon in Wheaton, then Temple Israel on University Blvd; I helped start Beth-El in Bethesda; then Agudath Achim Temple over there. That's, let's see, one, two, three, four. We've got about... oh yes, I helped to finance the one in Rockville and we've got one in Potomac. I guess we've got ten of them today. But I started the thing.

JRF: Interesting.

EIG: I'll tell you something else. Let me tell you something else, fella. This is a true story. I had a call from my Christian friends when I opened East-West Highway and I owned some of the valuable land, along side of Rack Creek. They called me up and this fellow says, "Look, Sam. You know us. We're not anti-semitic. Keep it restricted. You'll make a fortune. You can make a million." You know--

JRF: Keep Jews out -- keep it restricted?

EIG: That's right. That's right. And so, first thing I did.. I built a synagogue. Right there. Montgomery Jewish Community.. right there in Rock Creek Park. Little playground for the kids. And then I went to work and I gave property to St. Paul Methodist Church and to Christ the King Catholic Church. I wanted to illustrate.. I was one of the pioneers in the United States who want to see that kids of all kinds could grow up together happily. So I built this thing. I had heard children saying.. "Jews are moving into this neighborhood... Catholics into that." And I knew where they got that. They got it from their homes. So I built a neighborhood where they could all live together and see they were all the same. And it worked. And, for that I was written up in Fortune Magazine, and many other publications. I developed my philosophy myself and went about fulfilling it, looking ahead all the time. Of course, now it's going on in many communities but the idea for Rock Creek Forest came out of my own head. And I was decorated, as you know, by Pope Pius and Pope Paul. Pius in '50 or '52 and Paul in '67. Also, by the Methodist Union and the Baptist Church. They're all downstairs on the walls. It's quite an inheritance for my grandchildren.

JRF: To shift a little bit. You've been associated with the Suburban Trust Company for a long time --

EIG: Yes.

JRF: As a director, member of the board --

EIG: I've been on it about 25 years now.

JRF: What are the duties and responsibilities of a Director?

EIG: Like any other director on any other corporation. (JRF goes blank) You're going for a Ph.D. and you don't know what a director of a corporation is? (Laughing)

JRF: Ph.D. in English.

EIG: (Laughs heartily)

JRF: You see, this is what I'm doing, I'm learning about all these things now. (Laughing too)

EIG: You're getting an education here; you're getting a billion dollar education for free. (Both laugh)

EIG: In any corporation, a director is, it's his responsibility to supervise, to run the corporation. He sees the stockholders are protected and making a profit. And the Government collects its taxes, and the employees get new jobs, and they get all the facilities and health coverage they need. That's the job of a director. I am Vice-President and director of our Savings and Loan now, called Montgomery Federal Savings in Kensington. Years ago it was a new organization. They couldn't get insurance. They had \$750,000 in deposits and still couldn't get insurance. I went up to the Home Loan Bank and argued with a couple of fellows with regard to the Federal Insurance. It must have carried some weight because we got it. Today, we have \$20 million on deposit and a million dollars capital. We've already saved up a million dollars. Now we've a license to open an other office in Bethesda in the Air Rights

EIG: (continues)

As far as the Suburban Trust Company is concerned I've already told you I one of the oldest depositors in it. I've been doing business with them 54 years. It's quite a little history. Perhaps I told you before how the bank got its start and became amalgamated.

JRF: I got a little book. The Bank's been so prominent, so important, in the development of the county. In fact I got, back in '65, on their 50th anniversary.. they wrote up a little book on the history of the place for their employees.

EIG: Let me tell you something that's not in that little book. When President Roosevelt was elected, there were no banking laws. They stole, banks that closed out banks, they robbed, they did everything. So the President rushed a bill to Congress.. a new bank law, and they closed the banks for one day. Those that were a little shady, the Treasury Dept. put up a conservator, I believe they call it, to save the bank. For instance, there was a bank in Silver Spring which is Suburban Trust today but with another name then. They had a bank in Takoma Park and I was doing business in Takoma Park. I had a little grocery store 54 years ago in Georgia Avenue, so I opened a little account there. The bank had a million and a half, two million dollars at that time. There was a Treasury Dept. man from North Carolina, I think a Mr. Turner, who was trying to save the bank. It was opened by the skin it its teeth. He was the "watch dog". The bank branch at Silver Spring they allowed to stay open. It didn't handle a lot of money, say two or two and a half million. Then Mr. Duckett, got an idea to put these two little banks together. After three or four years the Treasury Dept. approved the merger. And they had to sell stock.

In 1937, in April, I was going to a convention in Paris, France. They had the Ile de France, 860 of us from the whole United States. It was a liquor convention. We were the guests of the French government, wine and champagne and all those things. Also involved were the Scotch producers. I was sort of President of 57 stores called National Beverage Stores, so I was a big delegate from the Nation's Capital. I was leaving Sunday morning. On Saturday night, Mr. Turner came in to me liquor store. You remember he was the conservator of the bank. He said, "Mr. Eig, how about buying some stock in this new bank, the Suburban National Bank?" "Naa," I said, "I'm just a merchant, a builder." He says, "Mr. Eig, look, if I don't sell this stock Monday, the Governement will close the bank, and I have a little money in there." I told him, "I'm going away Sunday, tomorrow, to France, what the hell's going on here?" "It's a must. You've got to." I said, "I'll tell you what I'll do." I took a check out and signed it, blank, and gave it to my brother-in-law Harry Koenick -- he was the manager of the liquor store. I was running a construction business then. And I called over to Harry and said, "Mr. Turner will come in on Monday, and whatever stock is not sold between now and Monday, you buy and here's a check, signed." New tape.

EIG: (delay warming up)... I returned and I said, "What happened to that check I gave you for this fellow for the bank stock?" He says, "Oh yes I forgot to tell you. You know this fellow didn't sell any? He came around here and you didn't have the money in the bank. So I moved some money from another account and paid him. You're in the banking business." And that's how I got in the banking business!

JRF: That's funny. Almost by accident.

EIG: Not by accident. I was a good citizen and community man and I didn't want to see the bank close.

JRF: So it didn't close and you became one of the--

EIG: Owners, yeah. (Laughing, both laughing).

JRF: You were one of the first really big builders in Montgomery County, and since that time there've been a number of others like Carl Freeman, and Kettler Brothers out there with Montgomery Village.

EIG: Some younger people grew up and took over. I got too tired. I quit for a while

JRF: Did you ever give any of these guys a helping hand or any kind of advice, or..?

EIG: They never asked me for any. No, no, oh yes, I know them very well. They're nice people. They came up the hard way like I did. Carl Freeman came from California. I met him first time 28 years ago in Leo Bernstein's office down tow. That's where I met John McKeever too. Kettler Brothers did the same thing. .. started small, built a couple of houses, then they came in here and almost went under. Borrowed \$7 million to buy land and the way things turned out, they're now doing fine. They're nice people.

JRF: You mentioned John McKeever. How long have you been associated with Mr. McKeever?

EIG: It's a partnership, my son and him. He's not my partner. He's my son's partner. McKeever and Buddy Eig. These 26 years they've been together.

JRF: How did that come about?

EIG: I met him in Leo Bernstein's office and I was filling out some papers. I said, "I don't know, I'm so busy with five or six subdivisions, and doing this and doing that, my charity work and my liquor business; how about making a corporation? You come into the office, and I'll set you and Buddy up in business." Joh had just come from South America where he was a pilot. He's a local boy,; he was born here. His father was in the real estate business. Now John has his own plane and flies all over the place. He had a boat. Funny thing, he sold it and bought a plane. I tell him once in a while when he goes somewhere and can't fly out because of bad weather, "Why don't you turn it in for a mule or horse or something?" We've been through a lot of history, with corporations, big ones, little one.. and we have a mutual respect for each others opinions.

JRF: Just a few years ago you were promoting a graduate college for Montgomery County. What happened?

EIG: Not me, I know nothing about it.

JRF: I read a little clipping.

EIG: No, I give away scholarships; I've done it for 20 years.

JRF: Oh. Well this clipping I read, when you were toasted as Mr. Montgomery County, said your current interest was in building or seeing built in Montgomery County, not just a 4 year college but--

EIG: Well, this thing, I'm promoting it right now. I think we ought to have a medical school in Montgomery County. I wrote a letter, confidential letter to the County Council about nine months ago. I guess I never made it available to the press. And I watch television and read that there's a shortage of 80,000 doctors in the United States today. Prince George's County and Montgomery County have close to a million people. Why should our kids go to Baltimore or St. Louis or Boston to get into a medical school? When I arrived in this state we had a little over a million, now we have four million people and they still have the same number of medical schools. When I came to Washington 57 years ago, the population was about 300,000; it's 280,000 or 290,000 today. And we have three medical schools, George Washington, Georgetown, and Howard. Today we've got a combination, round number 4 million people. You get sick and try to get a doctor. Many people die; they can't get medical attention. Of course in a medical school you can only take 150, 175 in a class. That's all you graduate. It's not like you take a class of engineering and teach thousands. Now I've been after the County Government to buy land, they finally got 300 acres here on the corner of 28 and Shady Grove Road. They bought it from the State, only paid \$10,000 an acre about five years ago. And that'll be ideal. Of course, I realize the County Council can't build a medical school. That's for the Federal Government to do, and the State. It's always the same. Everything we do is too late. I'm agitating for a medical school here now.

There was a group that got together to build a Jewish hospital. The chairman came to see me several times to solicit my assistance. I said, "No, I'm against it." We need a medical school right here and have the hospital with it. Like Maryland University has a Medical School, Johns Hopkins has a medical school and have a hospital right with it. But it's getting late. To build a medical school today takes \$100 million dollars; that's for the Federal Government, not local. Again, I started agitating for it. I think, in my opinion it's right.

I've got a grandson in medical school at Georgetown. They took only 205 and had 8,000 applicants. I've got three grandchildren in Law School. There's just as many applicants for law schools nowadays. It's exceptional. There are four Eigs in Georgetown. Of course, I've always tried to do what I could for Georgetown, even when I didn't have any grandchildren.

JRF: I have only a couple more questions.

EIG: Yes, sir.

JRF: It should only take about five minutes. Have you ever revisited Russia since you left?

EIG: No, they wouldn't let me in.

JRF: They wouldn't let you in!

EIG: I've tried. I tried in '37. I tried to go there. They wouldn't let me in. I had the Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee trying, when I went to Paris. They said I could pick up my visa for Russia. Then when I got there they didn't know anything about it. I'm damn lucky they didn't let me in, because I cursed them, and they would probably have thrown me in jail. So, I'm lucky they didn't let me in. Now I guess they'd let me in but I'm not interested.

JRF: Do you still have family over there?

EIG: I've got one brother who's alive still over there. Has a sister there too. She finally raised so much hell, the Communists didn't know whether to throw her in jail or let her go to Israel. She's an old lady now, so they finally let her go. She's in Israel now. Just had a letter from her, couple of days ago.

JRF: What do you think is your most important contribution, or your most satisfying contribution to Montgomery County, in all endeavors?

EIG: Everything I did, I felt was important. I can't separate them. I'm proud of everything I did. I remember the picture of Cardinal O'Boyle and me sitting on a big bulldozer getting ready to dig the first shovel of dirt for Christ the King Church... found the picture the other day and sent a copy to the Cardinal. He got a kick out of it. And Bishop Flint and Bishop Pierson and Sam Eig putting the mortar on the cornerstone on St. Paul's Methodist Church. They're all important. I remember the day we dedicated Holy Cross Hospital. My wife had a cold. She stayed in Florida. I came here.. Mr. Barry and I. It was snowing again, had a hard time finding a parking space; we were late. There was snow on the ground. One of those Swiss Guards in the uniform says, "Where's your ticket?" I said, "I lost it in the snow". "You can't come in," he says. Soon the architect who designed the building came by with an official from the Knights of Columbus and they said, "Come on, the Archbishop's waiting for Mr. Eig. He's holding up the whole show." The Archbishop, My son, Dr. Eig, and one other person spoke.. just the three of them.

One day, down here at lunch I saw the Archbishop. He asked me how my wife was. He was very fond of her. I told him she was very sick. She had had a stroke and was in Holy Cross Hospital. Do you know he left his food and got into his car to go there and say prayers for her. I was in the hospital myself, six or seven weeks ago. I was there 12 days, in Holy Cross. A bleeding ulcer.. I didn't know what was wrong with me. I felt bad. I called my son. He just said, "Go to the Hospital." The Cardinal sent a Monsignor every day to my room to say a prayer and called to tell me that he was saying them for me also. You earn these things, Jack, they don't just happen. Of course there is much more.

JRF: Well, thank you very much.

END SESSION TWO