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### Oral History Interview on Bloomfield, CT

Edward Stockton

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## **Stockton, Edward**

Oral history interview by for the Cities, Suburbs, and Schools Project, July 29, 2005. Available from the Trinity College Digital Repository, Hartford Connecticut ([http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp\\_ohistory/](http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/cssp_ohistory/)).

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Transcribed by: Aleesha Young

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Abstract: Edward Stockton reflects on his time as a resident of Bloomfield, including his employment by United Technologies, and rise in the local Democratic party and election as mayor in 1969, 1971, and 1973. As a white man, he was interested in living in a town that had diversity in both the religious and racial aspect. Stockton recalls his children's experiences attending Bloomfield public schools and believes that diversity within the schools they attended prepared them for the diversity they would experience out in the "real world." Stockton recalls the voluntary busing situation and felt it would solve racial imbalance of schools, but was unsuccessful because it could not get enough people to make a difference. Submitted as part of the OnTheLine web-book by Jack Dougherty and colleagues (<http://ontheline.trincoll.edu>).

Speaker key:

AY: Aleesha Young

ES: Edward Stockton

[all comments by transcriber in brackets]

AY: I am interviewing you because you because you were active in Bloomfield during the 60's and 70's, but before we focus on your role, where in Bloomfield did you live during that time?

ES: I lived at 40 Hill Farm Road in Bloomfield of course, and that was Laurel Park which was where a lot of interesting people lived and most everybody was from out of the state. So we moved there in 1961.

AY: And during the 60's and 70's...well when did you move to the address that you live now?

ES: Well we moved here, 3 High Meadow Road in 1984. We lived at 40 Hill Farm Road for almost 24 years.

AY: During the 60's and 70's, why did you decide to reside in Bloomfield?

ES: We'll it was an interesting town I guess because our background was a white Christian background, all over Unitarians, but we thought it would be interesting to live in a community that had diversity and both religious and racial. That was our real reason; plus it turned out to be

very good because it was very convenient to the airport and not a bad right to United Technologies where I worked in their headquarters for 13 years when I first moved here.

AY: You said you worked at United Technologies, but what kind of work did your family members do?

ES: I was a corporate economist for United Technologies, and that's; I was living in Columbus, Ohio working for North American Aviation and I was visiting my sister on Cape Cod on vacation. Somebody called United Technologies and said we want to talk to you about a job. I said I am not interested, I am very happy. So then they called back the next day, and me being a cheap skate, they said oh, we will pay all your expenses, your wife's expenses, and your children's expenses to come over and talk about a job. And I said, we can have ourselves a nice little family vacation. Never dreamed I would come here, but they were just beginning to do what we had already done for 5 years, so great opportunity.

AY: Do you have any children?

ES: Yes I do.

AY: What are their names?

ES: David and he works for Alan Greenspan and has a PhD in Economics from Yale, and our daughter is Catherine, and she got her PhD at Brown in English Literature and she is a professor at the University of Utah. They had a great experience at Bloomfield High School. Our son got his bachelors and masters in 4 years and our daughter got her bachelors in 3 years because they had essentially a year's worth done.

AY: When and where were they born?

ES: David was born Kennett, Missouri cause I was in the air force and our daughter was born in Columbus, Ohio.

AY: What year were they born?

ES: David was born in 1954, Catherine was born in 1958.

AY: Where did they attend school? You said they went to Bloomfield High School, but what about elementary schools?

ES: They started out at Metacomet, and then they built Laurel, and that was right in our backyard, literally.

AY: So what grade did they end up switching?

ES: David, I think about 5<sup>th</sup> grade when he went to Laurel and our daughter was in the first grade.

AY: What were your experiences with these schools as parent?

ES: Fabulous. The schools were excellent and they had a great experience. And the fact that they has a years of college done when they went to the University of Connecticut, it was a big help. I think it prepared them well and they got a sniff of diversity.

AY: What about your children's experience in Bloomfield Schools?

ES: They loved it; they were very enthusiastic.

AY: How has the quality of Bloomfield Schools changed since the 1960's?

ES: Well you know, you never know because if you don't have kids, but people whose kids don't do well in school have a lot of excuses. It's always the school systems fault. I think the Bloomfield Schools may be not the best in the state, but I would say they are in the middle somewhere. I think I have friends whose kids have graduated and they go off to Yale and other places, so I can't believe that they're not; you I if you want to learn, I think that you can.

AY: Now I have read that you were active as Town Mayor in the 1960's and 70's, but when exactly did you become involved and why?

ES: Well, I was, I am trying to think, 1966, I think it was, I made Outstanding Man of the Year, but the JC's. I was not a member of the JC'S.

AY: Now what does that stand for?

ES: The Junior Chamber of Commerce. So I got a call from the Democratic town chairman when there were very few democrats in Bloomfield, and he said do you want to be on the Town Committee here. I didn't even know what he was talking about, so I said sure. Then in 1969, in those days we had a hard time trying to find anybody to run for office. So, I am at a meeting one night and the Democratic Town Committee was meeting, and he said, this is exactly what he said, We have a Jew, we have a Black, and was have an Italian Catholic, we need a Wasp; Stockton, your it. I never thought of myself as being a Wasp, but. So I said ok, and I just happened to end up with the most votes. And the tradition was the person with the most votes of the party who controls the council becomes the Mayor. So it was all by accident.

AY: How long were you involved?

ES: I was Mayor for 5 and half years, 3 terms. I was elected in 69, 71, and 73.

AY: Why did you become less involved?

ES: Well because Aligrosso [sp?] asked me to become Commissioner of Commerce, which became Commission of Economic Development and I had worked at UTC for 13 years.

AY: Whats UDC?

ES: That's, United Technologies Corporation. I had worked there for 13 years and I thought my oh, God, if I work here for 2 more years I will start thinking about my pension and I did not like that idea. And it was a unique opportunity because Alligrosso is the smartest person I've ever known.

AY: Now how long were you on the Commission of Commerce?

ES: I was commissioner for 6 and half years. I started in 1975, in March of 1975. I left in October 15<sup>th</sup> of '81.

AY: And why did you become less involved in that?

ES: Well Alligrosso died and Bill O'Neil became governor and he was a wonderful guy, and very easy to work for but not the same, and I thought, I was 51. I thought if I am gonna do my own thing, I better do it now. So I left and it was the best thing I ever did.

AY: Were you active in any other governmental or non-governmental organizations in Bloomfield?

ES: Well, I sort of got my start. I was appointed to the Ethics Commission and that was...going back to 1963, I was put on the Swimming Pool Building Committee and we built the pool and that, of course I was the scout, scout of the Troop Committee for the boy scouts. I was in Civitan, which is a civic organization, Civitan. I am trying to think.

AY: What year were on the Troop Committee, do you remember what year that was?

ES: The Troop Committee, I can tell you because my son was born in '74, I am gonna say it started in 63?

AY: What about Civitan?

ES: Civitan, I think '62. I am trying to think what percent of the democrat town committee from '66 on [inaudible]. I was on the PTA council which was...they had 2 representatives from each PTA, and that became the PTA council and I was on that with the chairman.

AY: For how long were you on that?

ES: I am gonna say 4 years.

AY: And that was, what years?

ES: '63 to '67?

AY: And you mentioned the Ethics Commission.

ES: '68 I think, and now, are you talking about before I became the mayor?

AY: Well, between the 60's and the 70's.

ES: The I was on the Economic Development Commission, but that might have been in the 80's, probably was because it was after I was the Commission of Economic Development, probably 85, something like that. I am also on the Wintonbury Historical Society with...of course Fannie Gabriel used to be chairman of the republican town committee.

AY: Yes, She is a nice lady.

ES: She is such a nice lady. The work this lady puts in, unbelievable.

AY: During the 60's and 70's there were debates about several issues. Can you tell me if you were involved and how you were involved in each of these? The first one is racial imbalance in schools.

ES: Yea, very involved because we thought maybe we could do that voluntarily. We were gonna...our kids were gonna go to blue hills school and they were gonna bus some kids from blue hills school to laurel school, but we could not get enough people to make any difference. We had a lot of hearings about building a middle school that would essentially integrate the schools and that was very controversial. All we did was go to all these meetings. People would scream and holler and carry on, but we prevailed and they built the middle school.

AY: The redistricting from the Blue Hills School...sorry you just talked about that. Did you have anything else to add?

ES: Yea, both of our kids volunteered.

AY: What about the redistricting of public school boundaries?

ES: Yea, of course that, I don't remember too much about that, because I don't know, that probably took place. I think Carmen Arace opened in 1970. I think so because I was elected mayor in 69. So I think once they committed to the middle school, the redistricting sort of followed if I can recall.

AY: What about block-busting and racial steering by real estate agents and the town's lawsuit against them?

ES: Well I was involved in that. I am trying to think, what was his name? The guy, he was but he was a do-gooder, and he got very angry with racial steering, and of course when I was the mayor, we outlawed real estate signs and ultimately told them that it was illegal. Cause you know it was...let me go back to 1961 when we moved here we were in a real estate office in West Hartford.

AY: Do you remember the name of it?

ES: No, but there was a Bruglers [sp?] Bagels, and the Middleton [sp?] was upstairs. He was going through these houses, and I said gee, that house in Bloomfield looks good, and he said I don't think you want Bloomfield, he said, and these were his exact words, There are too many Jews and too many blacks and so steering was...the federal laws cracked down on that a little, so they has other ways, but that was 1961, so racial steering has been going on for a long time.

AY: Were there any other issues about race, schools, and housing that I have not asked about that you would like to share or would be important?

ES: It is interesting because Bloomfield unique in lots of ways and the resistance to integration was quite moderate here. I am not saying it didn't exist, but quite moderate compared to a lot of other towns and it was never...other than the schools, and of course that was a big thing because Bloomfield schools are beginning to get 60 to 70 percent African American. Some of the other schools were very minimal. And it is interesting that integration in Bloomfield was not totally in one area. In other words, there was racial integration pretty much everywhere and I remember in Laurel Park and the Westside. I don't know if you ever talked to any of the Woods or not.

AY: Beatrice Woods. I talked to Irene Llewellyn.

ES: Oh yea, that's her daughter. Bea Woods was an incredible person. There was Don Harris who was one the school Board who lived on Tunxis Avenue. So I wouldn't say there wasn't any resistance, but I would say, less resistance in Bloomfield and practically anywhere that I can think of.

AY: What has changed in Bloomfield since you've been here? And what has stayed the same?

ES: What has changed? Well I would say the racial composition has changed obviously, but, I don't think it has changed anything significantly. There are some people who don't like the idea of their kids going to the school or they're not in the majority, which is sort of interesting...but and trying to think, changed now? I think that many cases the African Americans are replacing older white families. They are probably higher income and better educated than the people they are replacing cause in the east side you know a lot of the older people, a lot of them only have high school educations, whereas the younger African American families basically were better educated and higher income because there are probably two people working. In the old days women didn't work.