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# Interview

**of:** Aloysius Johnson

**by:** Ericka Gauge  
Nathaniel Holland

**date:** 1986 July 13

**Q** How long have you or did you live or work in the Penn & North Community?

**A** I have lived here for 35 years but never worked in the community.

**Q** What are some of your earliest memories about the community?

**A** Starting off at Penn & North where there were a Reads drug store, theater, Leon's Delicatessen, Beauty Salon, Jewish Cemetery. Opposite side of the Street was Wilson's Diner where the train station is located. At this time we did not have a library. The Youth Center was a Funeral Home.

**Q** What changes have you seen on North Ave. by the positive and or negative?

**A** Positive side — When they added the library to the community.

**Q** Describe living on North Ave. and Penn.

**A** It was beautiful living in this community in 1955. We had a mixed community of black and white. The people keep their yard and front of their houses clean. Trees were lined on both sides of the streets starting from the east of North Ave. until the end. At the present time they are trying to do the same. Everyone was pleasant to talk to and friendly. Now, of course, most of the people have retired and moved into senior citizen buildings.

**Q** What Business have you seen come and go?

**A** The Bank, Beauty Salon except one, Grocery Store which the owner was killed, Drug Store, Barber Shop.

**Q** Was there as many Filipinos and Koreans back then?

**A** Within the last seven years is when they started taking over the entire area, which they have the right to do so.

<b>Q</b>	Do you think it is unfair the way the government treats them compared to us, they give them a certain amount of years to get themselves settled, giving them money to open up a business?
<b>A</b>	Many people misunderstand this, there is a counselor down town in the Federal Building and 36 Charles St. where I work and this man is responsible for everyone entering into Business. The government does not give them any money. The money comes from their own countries. If we had went to the Governor 10 years ago I am quite sure he would have put up a loan then. We didn't have as many black business men.
<b>Q</b>	How has transportation changed over the years and how has it affect the community?
<b>A</b>	We had the overhead electrical trolleys. I don't have any trouble with transportation. They do have schedules, transportation has improved and we do have good transportation.
<b>Q</b>	What has the political climate been in the Penn North Community present and past?
<b>A</b>	There has been so many changes in the last 4 or 5 years. We do not have enough police force in the area. At one time we were to have a police on foot.
<b>Q</b>	If this area had better police protection, you think crime would cut down?
<b>A</b>	For Sure.
<b>Q</b>	What are your memories for entertainment in the community such as the Met Theater, Wilson?
<b>A</b>	The most entertainment we had was the theater. You could go in and order in Wilson's but you could not sit down until racial desegregation. By that time they had torn down the right side of the street going up North Ave. We had to go down to the Royal Theater. At that time it was located where Shake-n-Bake is.
<b>Q</b>	What year did desegregation start at Wilson's?
<b>A</b>	In 1957/58. We had Jews and Polacks. We had one Chinese place in the 1708 or 09 where the African place is. The name was Mrs. Lee Young's.
<b>Q</b>	Did you attend school in this area?
<b>A</b>	Yes, I attend a Catholic school on Harlem and Fremont, Dunbar, Douglas.

<b>Q</b>	How much did you pay for lunch?
<b>A</b>	50ç included breakfast, lunch, cookies and milk.
<b>Q</b>	What can you say for the quality of education?
<b>A</b>	If we had better instructors the quality of education would be better than ten years ago. Instructors are teaching with out their PhD's, which are being sent back to college to receive their PhD.
<b>Q</b>	Do you attend church in this community?
<b>A</b>	St. Peters
<b>Q</b>	How long have you attend?
<b>A</b>	Over 15 years.
<b>Q</b>	What was the ratio of blacks, whites when you first moved here?
<b>A</b>	It was more blacks.
<b>Q</b>	What was some of your favorite places that you hoped wouldn't leave the community?
<b>A</b>	Wilson's, Met theater because it was a pleasant place and quiet.
<b>Q</b>	How much did you have to pay to get in the movie?
<b>A</b>	I think it was 75ç.
<b>Q</b>	Do you prefer Penn & North area of yesteryears or now and compare yesteryears with today.
<b>A</b>	The time I came up around here and the time now they have done a lot of renovation. As for rebuilding the more they build the more buildings are been torn down. Because of the different transactions Penn & North is not a sociable area. As far as I am concern I do not like this area like I use to.
<b>Q</b>	Was there as much crime and violence?
<b>A</b>	No, there was not any crime or violence.

<b>Q</b>	What changes would you like to see occur?
<b>A</b>	Change in violence, we do not need a bar on every corner. I would like to see another theater but they believe that it might be crime. Skating rink in the community.
<b>Q</b>	How did desegregation affect the community?
<b>A</b>	Desegregation did not affect the community. Everybody seem to be beautiful to everyone. As the people left more blacks came and left that's when it seem to be more radical hatred towards one another as it is today. If you have something they don't want you to have they will take it from you. We could walk down the street and no one would bother us.