

**Name of Interviewee: Thomas Giblin**

**Recording Identification: Rec003\_0027**

**Google Drive Folder: Oral Histories / Montclair150 / montclair150-01-giblin**

**Additional Materials: No Additional Materials Provided.**

**Date: 05/16/2018**

**Interviewer: Jane Eliasof**

**Location: Crane House and Historic YWCA**

**Introduction:**

Thomas Giblin, born in 1947, traces his ancestry back 100 years to Ireland. His father, John J. Giblin, was one of 10 children and left Ireland in 1927/1928 to join some older siblings and look for opportunities in the United States. Mr. Giblin has many cousins on his father's side, which accounts for the name "Giblin" being a familiar one in town.

Raised in Newark, Thomas Giblin attended Seton Hall Prep and Seton Hall University. At 19, he joined the New Jersey Air National Guard, serving for 6 years attaining the rank of Staff Sergeant. He later obtained a bachelor's degree from Seton Hall University.

He and his wife moved to Montclair in 1979 and they raised their 5 children here. He was attracted by the character and atmosphere of Montclair, the excellent education system, the numerous retail establishments, the attractive neighborhoods.

Mr. Giblin has been active in public service for most of his life. In 2005, he was elected Assemblyman for New Jersey's 34<sup>th</sup> Legislative District which represents the towns of East Orange, Montclair, Orange, and Clifton. He is also involved in the labor movement and is the business manager of Local 68 International Union of Operating Engineers. He has also been involved in many civic organizations and served on the board of multiple organizations.

He expresses concern about some of Montclair's families being priced out of town as property values increase, particularly in the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward. He cites the town's reputation as an artsy/cultural place, the schools, the good public safety, the train system, the attractive homes and tree-lined streets, the restaurants, and especially the diversity as attributes that attract people to Montclair.

**Timestamps:**

[0:00]: Thomas P. Giblin was born on Jan. 15, 1947. He has lived in Montclair since 1979 [39 years as of interview date)]. He was born in East Orange at East Orange General Hospital and raised in Newark. Prior to Montclair he had lived in West Caldwell with his wife for about eight years.

[1:30]: His father, John J. Giblin, was born in County Roscommon, Ireland. He had relatives in Montclair. The Giblin name goes back for over 100 years in Montclair. There was an Ed Giblin who was Montclair chief of police in the 1980s. There was a liquor store owned by John Giblin

at 345 Bloomfield Ave. The sign is still up today. There was an ice man, Andy Giblin, who goes back to the early 1900s. He has many relatives in town.

[2:45]: Thomas has many cousins on his father's side. They were all born in Tibohine, County Roscommon, Ireland. They settled between County Mayo and other areas in West Ireland. They all came over to the United States, some to East Orange, some to Montclair. His father came over around 1927 or 1928. He left Ireland for the economic opportunities available in the United States. He was the ninth of ten children; his father died when he was only nine years old; some of his older sisters had already emigrated to the U.S. He was a farm boy, and America was the place for economic and social opportunity.

[4:17]: HIS PARENTS: John Giblin started a job at the Durand Chevrolet Plant in Bloomfield, on Bloomfield Avenue. Then he got work as a station engineer thanks to William J. Brennan, Sr. who was also from County Roscommon, Ireland. William J. Brennan Sr.'s son, William J. Brennan, would become a Supreme Court Justice. At the height of the Great Depression in 1929, he got a job as an oiler at the Prudential building Newark taking care of mechanical equipment such as boilers.

[5:20]: His mother was from a section of Newark's Ironbound neighborhood which they referred to as "The Island" – Lister Avenue – it kind of juts out from there. She was born there but later moved to the Vailsburg section of Newark. She attended Our Lady of Blessed Sacrament School in East Orange.

[6:00]: GROWING UP: Thomas Giblin moved to Montclair in his late 20s. He was already married. He always liked the character and atmosphere of the town. The good educational system, the shopping districts, the tree lined streets attracted him to buy a home there. He has five children. His first home was on Norman Road, off Valley Road in Upper Montclair worked well for a family of seven.

[6:56]: He went to high school at Seton Hall Prep in South Orange which was initially located on the campus of Seton Hall University; in 1984 the high school was moved to a former West Orange high school building on Northfield Avenue. He later went to Seton Hall University and earned a Bachelor of Arts degree.

[7:26]: PROFESSIONAL: He is an Assemblyman for New Jersey's 34th Legislative District. This district represents the towns of East Orange, Montclair, Orange, and Clifton. He was elected in 2005. He is also involved in the labor movement and is the business manager of Local 68 International Union of Operating Engineers representing workers who are station engineers; these are the people who maintain boiler rooms, air conditioning, refrigeration and other mechanical equipment — representing the same trades in which his father worked. A family tradition.

[8:50]: While at school, he worked at the trade. He joined the union office in 1970. Following

his father's death in 1975, he was elevated to leadership of the union.

[9:17]: ROLE AS ASSEMBLYMAN: Being an Assemblyman in the 34th Legislative District is important to him because it is about representing the people. District 34 is very diverse and includes many types of people of all ethnicities and economic standings. For example, in 2017 alone, he attended over fifteen + flag raisings at Clifton City Hall, signifying the diversity of the community, which he considers one of the most diverse communities in New Jersey.

[10:26]: FAMILY OF SEVEN: He has five children, three boys and two girls. He felt the community was always safe.

They had good opportunities. All his children were in the Scouts; the three sons were Eagle Scouts and the girls were in Girl Scouts; he felt that was a positive influence. They all did well at t. Cassian's Elementary School and experienced a diverse community. His children all live fairly close to Montclair. Two of his sons are councilmen: Patrick in Cranford and Edward in Verona. His daughter Norine went to Montclair High. She is Chief Council for the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. His youngest, Ann, got a doctorate in physical therapy and received a full ride to Northwestern University outside of Chicago on a basketball scholarship.

[12:40]: He agreed with the interviewer that he likely influenced his children to become involved in public service and local politics. They saw him interact with many different kinds of people and types of events.

[13:30]: CHANGES IN TOWN: Thomas mentions changes in Montclair, including property values. He talks about the large number of New Yorkers moving in. He shared concern about possible impact, especially on the Fourth Ward, where he's seen a decrease in the number of African American families. Young people who grew up in town can no longer afford to stay in Montclair.

He also comments on the huge number of restaurants that opened —calling Montclair the “restaurant capital of New Jersey —and created a lot of foot traffic on Bloomfield Avenue. People of all race, creed, color seem to all respect each other and welcome diversity.

[15:29]: POSITIVES IN MONTCLAIR An older place in town, which he visited recently, is Tierney's Tavern. It has been around since 1933 and is still owned by the same family. He mentions that the food is pretty decent. Many people go into the town for the various activities available, like the movies, cultural activities, or the restaurants. We're got a reputation as an artsy / cultural town.

[16:30]: People like the diversity of town.

He mentions the success of the Fourth of July parade, and the African American Heritage Parade, the acceptance of the LGBT community as all factors in building its reputation as a melting pot in Montclair that has room for everybody.

[17:47]: PERSONAL MEMORIES: He feels that his family has always been fortunate. Many people in municipal government do not receive much compensation, but Montclair's people are sincere and committed to the town. He enjoyed the Fourth of July parade because you can look back and see all the different organizations involved in the town and it gives you a sense of what Montclair is all about. Thomas feels that it is one of the most successful July 4 parades in North Jersey, as far as participation; it's a highlight.

[19:30]: Also, there are many people in the town who are very successful in their professions.

There was a restaurant called Cardone's on Watchung Avenue; he can't recall the current name. But he remembers seeing Montclair resident [actor] Louis Zorich, husband of actress Olympia Dukakis, there regularly. Many well-known people lived in Montclair, and they didn't put on any airs when you came into contact with them. They simply enjoyed living in the community.

[20:22]: MILITARY SERVICE: He joined the Air Force in the New Jersey Air National Guard at age 19. He was in the ROTC program at Seton Hall when he was approached about joining the National Guard. He distinctly remembers signing his papers at a restaurant called Burn's Country Inn -- now Alexis Steak House -- just over the line [in Clifton on Valley Road]. He did his basic training at the Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio. After six years, he became a Staff Sergeant. In the service, he worked as a refrigeration and air conditioning specialist. He looks at it overall as a positive experience. He got the opportunity to travel to Alaska and other places.

[22:20]: This was at the height of Vietnam. He had to take a year off from school for basic Training -- where he often thought "I can't wait to get back to school" as basic training was not always easy! He majored in Political Science while at Seton Hall.

[23:06]: INVOLVEMENT IN SCHOOLS AND ORGANIZATIONS He continues to be very involved in the schools in Montclair. He is on the board of Immaculate Conception High School. They were on the brink of shutting down a few years ago. He was strongly against the school closing because of the many students from low income/minority families that would have been negatively impacted. He was given a lot of credit for helping to save the school.

He went to the Archbishop to request more time. He got many parents and alumni involved and they had some good leadership. A female alumna, Celia Triggs Honohan, helped a lot with the leadership. Student enrollment and cash flow have improved significantly, with generous support of people who believed in Immaculate.

Thomas was also on the board of Lacordaire Academy run by the Dominican Order for 4-5 years. He was involved with United Way of North Essex, which later merged into United Way North Jersey. It provides aid to social service agencies that support Montclair's needs. He was president of the Montclair Division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, an Irish Catholic fraternal organization which met at the Knights of Columbus at 42 Park Street. They organized social activities to support local charitable causes and granted scholarships.

[26:00]: RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS Giblin has been on the board for Immaculate Conception [Church] for 35 years. In fact he was being honored by the parish for his involvement there the following evening at a dinner at Mayfair Farms; the owner of Nicolo's Bakery was also being honored that evening. When asked about the recent consolidation of the Immaculate Conception and Our Lady of Mt. Carmel Churches, he replied that he feels that [Our Lady of] Mount Carmel [Church] should continue to operate with its distinct character. He notes it was primarily for Italians, and he believes that there is room for both parishes and the architecture is notable, while also acknowledging the financial issues and notes that he's trying to help both survive. He mentions that they should start to develop the Hispanic community at the parish, noting that St. Peter Claver, another Catholic church in town with a diverse attendance, seems to be thriving.

[27:55]: WHAT MAKES MONTCLAIR SPECIAL He feels that the Oral History Project will let the next generation of people know what made Montclair special and successful. The town gained strength by embracing its diversity, so is the quality of the homes and neighborhoods. Another very important draw for families in Montclair is its excellent school system.

[28:55]: His daughter graduated from Montclair High, his three sons went to St. Peter's Prep in Jersey City (via train), like many boys in town. His youngest daughter went to Mount St. Dominic in Caldwell; she became an All State Basketball Scholar. His children were not directly involved in the magnet school system. He cites the quality of the Police Department that has had many great administrators and people working to get to know the neighborhoods and to keep the area safe. Bloomfield Avenue "speaks for itself" as another positive, and the character of the town.

[30:37]: He considers us fortunate to have the train system, another key part of the growth in Montclair, historically and with the more recent Midtown Direct. The different neighborhoods of town all have their own distinct personality and many types of stores are available – Bloomfield Avenue, Watchung Plaza, South End, Upper Montclair, etc. provide a good array of restaurants and shops. "You can find it all in Montclair."

[31:40]: Asked about Montclairians who influenced him, he names Michael Dellahunty, who, under Montclair's former form of government, was a Commissioner. (Our current form of government became effective in approximately 1984, he recalls.) Mr. Dellahunty who lived on St. Luke's Place, was Commissioner of Public Safety and later became an Essex County Freeholder. He always gave Thomas professional advice; he was a very positive influence. His wife Mary Ellen was a nurse at the former St. Vincent's Hospital that used to be on Elm Street. There was another important person, a woman, Mae Mar (sp?), who lived on 11 Portland Place. He described her as "a character" involved in Democratic politics in Montclair. He describes her as a remnant of the past, like a Ward Leader type; she always wanted to help the little person, help people find jobs or in a tough situation with the town or state. People looked up to her for leadership. Her cousin was the Montclair Chief of Police, Jim Riordan; her son was an FBI

agent. [The interviewer notes that Thomas is the second person who has brought up Mae Mar's name with fondness.] He recalls that she had been a star basketball player at Immaculate Conception and that she had run the Motor Vehicle Agency on Bloomfield Avenue as well.

Asked to recap, he notes the churches, the schools, the business areas, public safety, the inclusiveness – it's all here in Montclair and although no community is perfect, in the big picture Montclair is a beautiful mosaic of the way things should be.