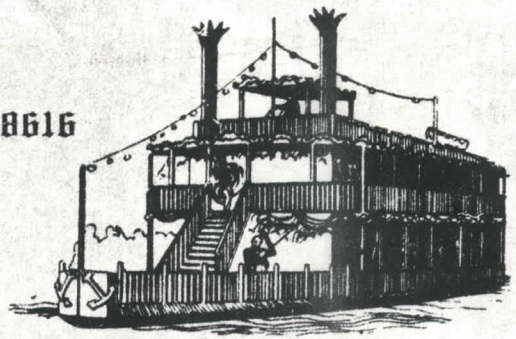


Chesaning Public Library

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Guy Chilton

Witness:

Helen Frink

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Guy Chilton

Showboat Park;
Ball Teams

July 3, 1979

Q. Would you give us your name, please?

A. My name is Guy Chilton.

Q. Mr. Chilton, on some of the tapes we decided that there must be an interesting history to Showboat Park. And I wonder if you could tell us some things about Showboat Park?

A. I'll do my best. From what I've learned from old records, Showboat Park, which is located on land granted by the United States government to Oliver Chapman on July 14, 1842, was bought by Albert Cantwell in approximately 1901. He developed it into what he called a Driving Park as he made one of the best half-mile racetracks, complete with grandstand, in this part of the state. Besides being used for horse races, bicycle races were also held there. My friend, Charlie Goetzen, used to race on that track. Later a part of the land was made into a deer park and also had a bear and other animals in it. About the same time, he had built a beautiful home in which Don Rehmann and his wife now live. This place he named Gate Lodge as it is near the entrance to the park.

Some baseball was played there in the early 1900's, but it was not used too much for that until about 1920 when a good diamond with a grandstand was built. About 1933, a nine hole golf course was constructed. Bill Brigham, maintenance man for Peet Packing Company, got a lot of used pipe from a place in Flint and also connected it up for us and water was piped to the greens. Jack and Joe Kettler did most of the other labor and maintenance on the course. The course was short, I think with a par 29 or 30; I believe there were three four-par holes and six three-par holes. Anyway, with the depression on it provided a lot of fun for local golfers. If I remember right, Harold Schulz and Carl Goetzen tied for the lowest score ever made on the course. And Jim Cowman made a hole-in-one on number three hole. Then later in the thirties Showboat began and of course that is a terrific story in itself.

Q. Well, thank you, Mr. Chilton. I appreciate that. Guy, when you were talking about Showboat Park, you mentioned a ball team. Was baseball played in Showboat Park?

- A. Well, there was very little baseball played in Showboat Park until about 1918 or 1920. The park where the best teams played and the high school played was on N. Line Street, right behind Miller Produce Company.
- Q. How long was that park there?
- A. That park was there, probably, since 1905 or so.
- Q. Well, you mean the high school did not have any place to play that belonged to the school?
- A. That's right.
- Q. Well, when did you start playing?
- A. When did I start playing? I played on an organized team probably from 1910 when I lived in the country and went to Fergus School. I played with what they called the "kid team" in Chesaning.
- Q. Was that people from all around went into that?
- A. Just from the Chesaning District.
- Q. Well, I have a picture in my hand here of a high school team, I guess. It's got all sorts of uniforms, though, and I just can't quite understand it. There's Banner uniforms, and Clothier uniforms and Global uniforms and seems like there's one other here. How would that be?
- A. Well, suits were inherited from what we called the Town Team or the "big team" we called it and the other team I spoke of the the "kid team" and, oh, those suits were furnished by different companies and the other suit that you didn't recognize was furnished by the Greenbaum Clothier and was the A. G. Clothier it says on the suits.
- Q. You mean that there were this many teams around here? And then when the teams got done with the suits they let the high school have them?
- A. It was practically the same teams but in different years the suits were furnished by different companies. And I consider the Banner Team the best team that ever represented Chesaning.
- Q. Who's this little fellow right here, Guy, he hasn't any suit at all!
- A. Well, I guess he was so small that you couldn't find anything--put one of those suits on him and--that little runt was myself! I was twelve years old at the time!
- Q. And were you in school?
- A. In ninth grade.
- Q. Well, tell us about some of the players that you remember or some of the teams you remember.
- A. I better correct one thing I said. I believe at this time I was thirteen, because I was twelve years old when I finished the eighth grade and I believe I was thirteen. I don't want to tell you a big fib!
- Q. No, your birthday's in July, isn't it?
- A. Right!
- Q. Uh-huh. Well, tell us about some of the players or the teams that you have known.
- A. Well, the high school team--I told you about the kid team and then this was the high school team which I played on

for four years, and then I got to play on what they called the "big team" which was the Town Team, but it was after the Banner Team which I have called the best team that ever represented Chesaning. That more or less disbanded, you know, but there were some of those players that played with us younger kids, too!

Q. Well, tell us about the Banner Team.

A. The Banner Team played from about--the team that I'm going to tell you about played from about maybe 1905 to about 1912 or 1913 and then, as I say, some of them played on the team with the younger people and by the time I joined them, most of them didn't play with them anymore.

Q. Did they play just here in Chesaning or did they travel?

A. Well, they traveled quite a lot--around--sure, other towns, like Ovid, and Montrose and Merrill and Hemlock and towns like that and--would you like to know the names of some of the players?

Q. Yes.

A. Well, what a lot of people thought was the best player that ever represented Chesaning was a man by the name of Fred Snow. I understand that the old timers say this.

Q. Yes.

A. And I believe it myself, although I kind of favored my brother, Elmer, too; Fred Snow was a long ball hitter and my brother, Elmer, was more of a percentage hitter and I'm sure he hit a hundred points better than Fred did but he didn't hit the long ball. But he was a real good infielder and later played on the leagues and he was what Ed Walser called the best catcher that Chesaning ever had. Ed Walser was a real good short stop that played on the Banner Team. And he's still living and he's about the only one that's living because Mr. Snow died a couple of years ago at the age of 95 years.

Q. And you didn't play on the team you're talking about now. You too young for it?

A. No, I sure wish I had. I think I played one game with them, to tell the truth, but I was still in short pants and I didn't do too good! But I did play one game with most of those players.

Q. Why did the team disband?

A. Well, people left town and--I would like to name these players over for you--

Q. Go ahead.

A. I have a picture right here, that I can tell you. Well, on the end was Ed Miller, who I believe was the best, you know, home town pitcher that ever lived around here. And the next man is Arthur, Art Thayer, he was a good pitcher and also a third baseman and the old high school gymnasium was named after Art Thayer in the old school down here because he made a great name for himself in athletics and also he was killed in the World War on the day after the Armistice was signed. World War I. And the next man was my brother Cyril, always called Cy,

he was an outfielder and a pretty fair player. And this one here is Elmer Smith, who we called Grandpa Smith, because he wore a mustache! And he was a third baseman.

This man is the great Fred Snow, right there. He only died a couple years ago. And this man is name of Brandyhof and he is really not a native but he was here for a few years and I believe he was a second baseman. And that's my brother Les on the end and he was a real good outfielder. And here is Eddie Walser, a terrific shortstop. And that's my brother, Elmer, that I've told you about and this man is another catcher, from Saginaw. He helped us out at times and I'll tell you his name some other time! And this here, I think, is Nick Scheidler, who is a relative of Doc Scheidler's and he pitched for the University of Michigan and he'd visit here and played with us at different times. And I really believe that is the greatest team we ever had but, I don't want to play down the teams that are playing now; I presume there are lots of them that could have made this team. And players that played with Chesaning after this team-- I'll name a few, Ralph Marshall, could of made this team, I believe Clayton Azelton could of made this team, and Miles Babcock and--and--good friend of mine, I can't think of his first name, even, I think he could of made this team. But there never was enough of them in one year that could compare with this team, in my estimation. So, that's it--you want anything more here--I can't. . .

Q. Well, I noticed these must of been quite well attended. I see these crowds here at--pictures with a lot of people watching.

A. Oh, why sure, they had good crowds because there wasn't so much entertainment in those days and baseball--seemed that everybody went to the games.

Q. Was there good competition?

A. There sure was, especially from St. Charles! (Chuckle) And now some of these players that I've told you about, other teams would hire them like Eddie Walser and, uh, Ed Miller to come and pitch for them for a big game. Ed Miller to pitch and Ed Walser to play shortstop and my two brothers, Elmer and Les, were always in demand and they played minor league ball. Both of them. And my brother Elmer, also played on the very best semi-pro teams in Detroit after he moved to Detroit. So I can't say too much for them, I don't want to say too much I guess. . .

Q. Well, that's all right. It's interesting to know that somebody came from Chesaning and was able to compete with. . .

A. Oh, but, they're my brothers and I don't want to brag them up too much, but they were good ball players.

Q. Well, uh, I notice this one team picture here has a lot of "L's" on it. What did that. . .

A. That's a country team out here at Luce--you know where Luce is?

- Q. Well, not exactly.
- A. Well, Luce was only a store on four corners about a mile south of the Prairie Farm right near where the tower is.
- Q. The TV tower?
- A. The TV tower, right. And one of them is still living, he's in the Rest Home over here, name of George Tinkler. And these two Indian boys were real good ball players, and they were Art and Sam Henry. And Art Henry was a terrific player and he was also the Chief of all the Chippewa Indians in Michigan and his daughter was a Chippewa Princess. And this here is Roy Hill's brother, and there's--I know most of them. And anything else you can think of?
- Q. It certainly is interesting. You know, you don't realize these things have gone on when you just sort of move into a town maybe forty years ago, you know. At that time I didn't realize that Chesaning had had all these ball teams and that they had played as well as they had. They must of been pretty good players if the players would be hired out by other teams and if some of them could go down to Detroit and play in semi-pro. You know, that's better than average.
- A. My two brothers also played on the Michigan Agricultural Team which is now Michigan State University for one term. In those days eligibility rules didn't mean much. They simply went down there for the spring term only and played on the team which was coached by Macklin who was the football and baseball coach down there. And they played for that one term and that is all they went to Michigan State College--and they say at that time they went out and played during the summer in league teams. . .
- Q. In other words they just went to Michigan State to play ball.
- A. You could say that.
- Q. They learned a little besides, probably.
- A. And a, they played for a lot of years, well I can't think of too much that might interest people.
- Q. Well, this has been very interesting--if you think of anything more we'll add it on or put it on the other side of the tape. That all right with you?
- A. Yeh, I think I've bragged enough now!
- Q. All right.

(Added on)

- A. There's one story, it's my favorite story, which, uh, shows the dedication of ball players in the old days. And it was told to me by Ed Miller quite shortly before the time he died. And, uh, I don't know what year it was, but they were holding a two day tournament in Merrill, Michigan and in those days we traveled by horse and buggy and Doc Culbert Livery Stable down here had a three-seated surry or buggy and that would take the whole team except maybe three would go in a one horse buggy and rig. And

they started out for this tournament on a hot day for Merrill, Michigan. And they got as far as Brant and I guess those Town Team kids, they didn't know much about horses, so by the time they got to Brant, which was eleven miles the horses were tuchered out! And just couldn't go any further, so they left the team of horses there with a man to take care of them and they took off on foot down the road to Hemlock, which is about six miles from Brant, and by that time they were getting a little hungry. And they went in a store and they bought a sack of old-fashioned oatmeal, you know, I don't think they had this quick-cook then, and they bought several pounds of raw hamburger and they mixed those two up together and they ate it just like that!! Raw! And then they took off down the railroad track to Merrill which was another five miles and played a game of ball in the afternoon. And I don't think, in this day, if the kids had got as far as Brant with the car and it broke down and there wasn't any other--I think they'd call the game off, but in those days, it shows what great lengths they would go to to get in a game of baseball! And that's kind of my favorite story, right there!

Q. Well, that is a very interesting one. Did you think of that Mr. Lease's name?

A. Yes, I do. And I never had a better friend, it was Albert Lease. (Leis?)

Q. And I happened to see a picture; it said something about Zacharias on it. Where does he come in?

A. Oh, it was that catcher from Saginaw, I couldn't think of his name.

Q. Oh. Well, this has been really good. Now, have you thought of anything more now?

A. Oh, I could talk here all day, with you, but I won't.

Q. You won't?

A. That was about all, I guess.

Q. Well, we're always glad to have you say all you want to!

A. Yeh. Well, I could tell you how I became good friends with Albert Lease! (Chuckle) But that's a separate story. But the first time I met him we were practicing in the spring of the year on what they call the Old Grove which was higher ground than our diamond and was always dry. And this kid came to play and I'd never seen him. He was about twelve years old and I was about seventeen maybe, and I could see he really came to play ball. And so I chose up with another older guy and right away I chose this kid. And from that time on we were great buddies and he was a real good ball player and he was a good little pitcher and a good batter and I considered him one of my best friends and he died about three years ago. So, I don't know if anyone is interested in that but me, but that's the way it was!