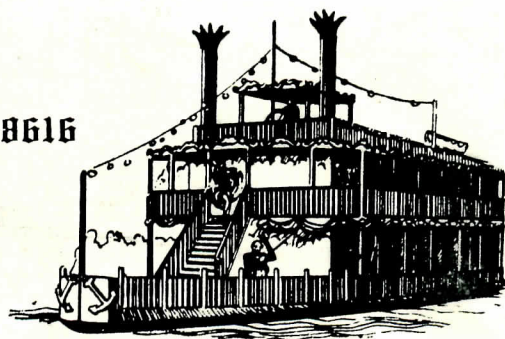


Chesaning Public Library

227 East Broad Street Chesaning, Michigan 48616

Phone 845-3211



I have been asked to participate in the Chesaning Public Library Oral History Project. I have agreed to a tape recording between a library representative and myself. I take this opportunity to assure you that these recordings are the property of the library and its historical collection, for use as the library sees fit, and I agree that no monetary consideration need be paid me.

Ethel A. Potter
6-8-76

Witness:

Heber G. Trunk

Will you give me your full name?

Ethel Arlene Potter. I was born in 1895 on December 16th.

What was your name then?

Blakeslee, Ethel Blakeslee. I was born to Jerome and Minnie Smithgall Blakeslee on Cornuna Road, where Lucille and Ivan Augustine live now.

There was a different house there, but we lived there until 1903, when my folks, my father and mother and three children moved to the next house to the north, where my father had built a new home for us.

Mrs. Potter, when were you born?

December 16, 1895.

Then after you moved to this new house, what happened?

Well before that, I had started to school in 1902 so I started school in Chesaning, just before I became 7 years old. When did you

Did you walk?

I walked. My mother would walk with me about half way for quite some time until I got acquainted with children that were going.

How far was it?

Well it must be two miles, at least. It was downtown where the middle school is right now.

Well tell us some more now.

This new house was quite a large house. It had 5 bedrooms in it and a parlor, living room, dining room and kitchen, but there was no basement. No lights of course, but we got a telephone before 1910. About 1910 my father made up his mind, thought he'd like to go to California to live. So he sold the farm, but then he changed his mind and instead of going to California we moved downtown. We lived downtown for a year. In the meantime he bought the farm, the place that R.P. Mason had owned when he first lived in Chesaning, the house that R.P. Mason built on Front Street. I thought of it as an old house at that time, but it really wasn't so so old either, because the date on the cornerstone is 1849 and we moved there in 1911. It was from there that I went to High School and graduated in 1914. In the meantime we went to Church. Well I started going to Church from down on Cornuna, but we went to the Evangelical Church on the other side of the River. When we moved down to this other farm my father said he would go to Church if we'd all go to the Methodist Church. So we changed and from then on we went to the Methodist Church. The house down here, the R.P. Mason house was named Tarry-A-While. It was a beautiful home, I thought. It had a parlor, living room with open staircase in the hall, 2 bedrooms downstairs, 3 bedrooms upstairs, a back stairway, front stairway, and the dining room was 16 by 22 when we first went there. Then the kitchen was behind that and then a woodshed. It was a big house, but it

burned in 1925. We didn't live there then. Our son, Glen, was one year old and we lived down north of town at that time. It burned the same day that the Agnew Buildings burned.

Did you say you graduated from High School here?

Yes, I graduated in 1914. I always went to school down here^{You see} I never started any other place, although I could have gone to the Westfall School or the Frink School because the farm out there was in those three districts. My father had gone to school in town and he was quite educational minded and he thought it would be better for us to go to school in town. It was, I'm sure.

What did you do after you got out of school?

Well I stayed to home some of the time, but I worked at the Burke Store, for A.H. Burke.

What kind of a store was that?

It was a general store. He had groceries and dry goods. It was where Cowman's Store is now, on the corner, where the grocery store is. The grocery was back of the dry goods store when I worked there. I worked there for a while until 1920 I would say, 1922, very near 1922. I had learned to sew in the meantime, because my mother could sew but she couldn't sew fast enough to suit me and I liked clothes real well. You couldn't buy clothes like you can now, already made, So I learned to sew. And also one of the things^{that} I did was go to the library, as long ago as that.

Where was this Library, Mrs. Potter?

Well, it was down very near the bridge, very small. There were not very many books.

Was it a public Library?

Yes, it was a public Library, but very few books compared with what the one is now, and you had to pay so much a week or a month^{I guess}, or every three months, something like that.

Would it be a Township Library?

No, Chesaning Library.

Chesaning Library.

I don't think they had any help from outside.

You mean financial help.

Financial help, no.

And did they have a librarian?

They must have had, but I can't remember who it was or anything like that.

I know that we could go in there and get books when I wanted to^{em}, and I read every book there was in there I think. The School also had a pretty good library for that time.

How did you meet your husband?

He moved to Chesaning in 1918 and I was working at Burke's at that time. In about 1920 he came in the store with his mother and that's when I met him. That's where that part all started. We were married in 1922 on August the 24th. We were married by a Methodist minister, and ~~we had~~ our wedding trip took us to New York and Watkins Glen and Niagara Falls. We had a real nice trip. We had a Ford car, and then when we came back we lived down north of town.

And what did Mr. Potter do for a living?

He was farming at that time. His people had moved up here from Lansing. He had worked at the Noble Engine Company before that as a mechanical draftsman, but when he moved up here he farmed. I didn't tell you that I joined the Methodist Church in 1916. I was about 20 years old at the time, and I was Secretary of the Sunday School for nine years just before I was married. Then when Glenn, our oldest child, was one year old, or no when Doris was hardly one year old, in 1926 we bought this place and moved here and we've lived here ever since.

Tell us, how many children you have.

We have three children, two boys and a girl.

What are their names?

Glenn, the oldest lives in Algonac and he teaches Industrial Arts. He's married and has three children. His oldest one is in college now, and Nancy will graduate next year from High School and Jim will be starting High School next year. Then Doris. Doris was born in 1926 and she was married in 1945. She has five children. Only one of those is married, and we have three great-grandchildren, two girls and a boy, but Doris has four boys and a girl altogether. Her children go to school in Hemlock. They live on a farm, and that's about all I can tell you about them except that they're pretty good kids, all of them. They're something to be proud of, all of them.

Are then Dale?

And Dale lives in Chesaning. He works for Peet Packing Company, and he's married to Joyce Gerding. They have three. Jeanette is through High School and works at Hehr Manufacturing Company, and Bruce graduates next year from High School and Karen is in the sixth grade I think.

You have a very nice family, don't you?

Yes we do have, we have a wonderful family. They haven't created the disturbances that some children do nowadays. That may not sound very good. Well no that sounds all right. It's all right to be proud.

Then in 1945 I went back to work at Ed Rehmann's store and I worked there, oh let's see I was going to think about that some more. About 15 years

part time. I clerked sold dry goods, men's furnishings, and also helped do the tailor work. That's where my sewing came in handy; and after I got grandchildren I made clothes for them too, which I liked to do. I did it more for myself I think than for helping them out, because I never had been able to have as many clothes for Doris as I would liked to have had and by that time I got so I could afford to spend a little money on materials and so I had lots of fun making clothes for the grandchildren. In 1940 the W.S.C.S. Was formed at the Church and I was Secretary for one year, then I became President of the Women's Society and I was the President for four years from 1941-45. From then on I was some kind of officer, of one kind or another for 23 years. At that time I began to get older and my health was not so good so I haven't done so much lately.

What do you do now for a hobby?

I still sew some, but not so very much, and I knit. I don't crochet, but I've knit probably a dozen sweaters. Other than that I read.

Just like you used to.

Just about like I used to.

I notice you have a cactus that's blooming. Yes, just that one blossom. Here it is June, and it's a Christmas cactus. It don't know what day of the year it is, I don't believe. That's something again, that's probably sixty years old. Aunt Emma Fox brought that ~~back~~ from (should be Washington) when she came back from (should be Washington) in 1910. My grandmother had it, Aunt Lizzie Brigham had it, my mother had it, and now I've got it.

You report it once in a while?

Once in a while, now it's in a bushel basket. It's got so big that we can't carry it outdoors. It's too heavy for us to handle, It's kind of a dirty plant because dust gets on it you see, and it's awfully hard to clean. All you can do is run the vacuum sweeper over it with a brush and it don't take it off. If I could take it outdoors and put it under the eaves it would wash it off.

There aren't very many house plants around that are that old are there? Well it's going to bloom for you anyway. You don't care if it is June. I was surprised. It was supposed to have quit long ago, but just Sunday we saw that there.

Did it bloom at Christmas time?

Yes it started in about Christmas time, but it didn't have as many blossoms as it should have had really. I guess it's getting to old to blossom, you know.

Probably getting kind of tired.

I think so, sort of like its owner.

Well this has been very interesting. Is there anything else, any special

things that happened in school, or anything, or taffy pulls, or sleigh rides that you would like to tell us about?

No, I can't think of anything like that really.

What did you do for amusement when you were growing up?

I never roller skated. We used to go to picture shows. I can remember one time when walking home from a picture show about Christmas time, way over on the other side of the river.

Where was this picture show held?

Well it must have been in the west building of the present Sales Company.

They had a picture show in there at one time, and I remember one thing about it. ^{It was cold weather} In those days we didn't have boots or at least I didn't have.

Probably if I had some I wouldn't wear them, I don't know. But I walked home and and my feet got pretty cold by the time I got home, I remember that.

That was a long walk.

I always took my lunch to school even when we lived up here on Front Street because I didn't like to come home at noon. You know, you just didn't have time enough to come home and eat and go back again.

Mrs. Potter, did you have brothers and sisters?

Yes, I had two brothers, no sisters.

Who were your brothers?

Floyd was my older brother. He was born in 1899 and he was married to Lyndall Conklin. He died a number of years ago. I don't remember just how many it was now. And Irwin, married Vivian Graves and they lived down north of town where my father owned property at one time. After he sold the Nason farm down here on Front Street, he bought 160 acres out on Gary Road where Lyndall lives, and also another 50 acres where Irwin and Vivian live now. And that's where we lived when Ed and I were married. Oh you mean where Vivian lives? Where Vivian and Irwin live.

Yes, well it's always ~~kind~~ of interesting to kind of know how the families go together, you know.

Yes, we have a big family. I have a big family, I mean my parents' and. My family was a big one and Ed's was too. So we both have big families. So you have lots of cousins.

Lots of cousins. I have 37 first cousins without any husbands or wives. That's a lot of them.

It's a lot of them, but we used to have some real good times. We had Christmas gatherings. We'd get together on Christmas day, And the Fox Family, Calvin and Emma Fox, that's mother's sister and her husband,

Aunt Lizzie Brigham and Uncle Sumner, Helen Brigham's father and mother. We all went to the Methodist Church, and we did just like we do now. We talked when we came out of Church, and sometimes mother would say, "Come on go home with us for dinner". Sometimes Aunt Lizzie would say that, or again Aunt Emma would say that, and so we saw each other quite frequently, and always, the families always got along real well together.

Well that's wonderful to have families that get along.

Yes, I know it is. Our daughter-in-law, Glenn's wife, made the remark one time, "I never thought I would marry into a family that got along so well with each other". I thought that was quite a compliment to the whole family. Yes, it is a compliment. It's a wonderful thing, because there's often so much jealousy and bickering in families.

Sometimes when somebody has ~~another job~~ ^{job} that's ^{job} better than another somebody's hurt or feels as if they weren't having it quite so easy, but I don't think there's any of that in our family at all. And then Ed has just as big a family, so with it all we just have lots of friends and lots of family. See he is related to that Miller family, Ann Miller died last week. Lawrence Miller, the husband's mother was a first cousin to Ed. So that was a big funeral, a big family there, you see too. Oh, we're putting things on there that isn't really necessary, I guess.

It's all interesting.

To you and I maybe.

Well, you can't tell.