

Amy (Birmingham) Smith  
Interviewed by Jeanne Temple on 17 June 1983  
For the Clinton County Historical Society - Tape #030  
Transcribed by Myrna Van Epps - January 2002

[I am talking to Amy] Birmingham Smith on June 17, 1983. Now, Amy, we'll start with when you were born, when your birthday is.

I was born June 12, 1892, on Faragher Road about 1/2 mile east of what is now called the Richards School or the Avery School.

What were your parent's names?

My parents were Millard Fillmore Birmingham and Charlotte Emma (Scudder) Birmingham, married in 1878. My oldest brother was Ira Birmingham, born in 1879. My only sister was Lillie Birmingham, born in 1880. My second brother was Charles Birmingham, born in 1885.

Who did Lillie marry? What was her married name?

Lillie married George McLeod.

Those names now begin to ring a bell with me. I knew you were all related over there.

What did your father do for a living?

My father was always a farmer. We moved from the place where I was born when my grandfather Birmingham lost his second wife. His first wife was a Welsh lady, Parry (Peavy) Birmingham. They moved here in 1856 and Parry Peavy didn't like Michigan so she left my grandfather and went back to live with her people. She took the youngest child, Fred, with her. He was adopted by some people in Friendship, NY, and had the name of Fred Stearns. My father's sisters were Eva and Lillie.

So that grandfather Birmingham married a second time then after his wife left him.

I don't know when grandfather Birmingham was married again exactly, I probably have a record somewhere. She died when I was 6 years old, and I have pictures of them.

I know where Ira lived for many, many, many years--well, until he died. Where did your grandparents live?

Where Ira Birmingham lived was my grandfather's, Dennis Birmingham's, farm.

That was the old Birmingham farm.

His brother, David Birmingham, lived on the same road. It used to run at an angle from the Colony [Rochester Colony] clear through to Laingsburg. The Birmingham Road was part of it and it ran across what was then the Simmons farm at an angle from the Colony across the Simmons farm. When I was little you could see the track across there yet.

Let's talk about when you were a little girl and lived on a farm with your two brothers and sisters. What are some of the things you remember that were pleasant, that were fun things to remember?

When I went to school we played games, you know, like "pom pom pollaway," "anti-i-over," and sliding down hill. In the winter we went down to the--I guess it would be the Harmon Bridge now, and skated on the river, tried to. We slid down hill on the Richards farm on a plank. The whole school would get on that one plank and slide down hill. We slid down hill in the school yard on small sleds. I had two sleds, one that I took to school and one that I kept at home. An

uncle, George Washington Lewis Napoleon Soper. He was a great uncle or married my great aunt. He made things like that and small painted pictures on glass, odds and ends. He was the sexton of the cemetery at West Webster, NY. It's now part of Rochester. In his spare time in the summer, he gardened, and in the winter he made these little things from cigar boxes and pieces of wood he had. How old were you when you started school? Do you remember?

I was almost seven. I started in the spring before my brother, Charlie, finished the eighth grade. Then the next year I was put into the second grade, so I finished country school in seven years.

You probably could read when you went to school.

Oh, yes. I learned a good deal about reading and arithmetic too. Arithmetic has always been my best subject.

I noticed on your graduation diploma that was your highest mark, was arithmetic.

Principal Eddy (?) told me that I had the highest mark in the county in mathematics. I could have had 100 if I had cheated a little because somebody told me the weight of wheat a bushel. I didn't cheat.

Who was your first teacher? Do you remember that person?

No. He was Guy somebody and lived on the north end of Hall Road on the west side. Of course, I only went the spring term. I cannot think of his last name.

I know that they would have school--spring term, maybe a summer term, then a fall term. Did you go that way or did you finally go all year like September to May?

I went to school three terms in the country school.

Usually a different teacher each term?

No. We had first this Guy \_\_\_\_\_. Mrs. Levy could tell you who it was because her mother lives on that farm. The teacher, next one, was Millicent Temple; the next one was Minnie Simmons who married Kimmus(?) in Laingsburg; and the last one was Mrs. Frances Parmalee.

Was she from around here?

She lived one mile west of Shepardsville on the west side of the road, north of the railroad tracks.

Do you remember with Millicent Ellinger and Minnie Simmons, did they board in the neighborhood, or did they drive every day with a buggy?

I think they drove. Millicent Temple lived on the main corner in Duplain.

Her father was Bliss Temple and lived on the east side road--the southeast corner.

Where Walter Kaufman lived for a long time.

Minnie Simmons lived across the Maple River, just east of the Harmon Road, on the south side of the road. I don't know who lives there now.

Then, when you wrote the eighth-grade exam and you passed, you went into high school.

Yes. We wrote the exam at the Shepardsville School and Blanche Hazel conducted the examination for the county.

Did you have any boys or girls in your grade that were your kind of good friends, or were you alone in the eighth grade?

A girl named Leta Baker, whose father had bought the David Birmingham farm lived just north of us. In the winter our folks would hitch up the sleighs and take us to school. We seldom walked. The rest of the time we would walk. I can remember in the spring we usually were given a day off to go flowering. The

whole school would go east down by that Birmingham bridge and went flowering in the woods there. Of course, there were spring beauties, Dutchman's breeches, those tall flowers that look like larkspurs (wild ones). The ferns there were gorgeous.

What did mother pack for you to take in your lunch?

Eggs, sometimes some fruit, apples or bananas, or whatever we could get. We didn't have bananas very often.

I bet she made her own bread.

Sure. I made bread in the bread mixer for years before I was married and afterwards.

When you started in to Ovid to high school, how did you get to Ovid?

At first I boarded with Gleasons, who were relatives of Sam Gleasons and ----- . They lived where Louella Canfield lives. I roomed and boarded there. I took food to add to the food they had, but when winter came it was so cold in the bedroom upstairs that I moved to Dr. Hill's, kitty-corner from the Baptist Church. Of course, I furnished food. They had several, sometimes as many as five, girls upstairs who were rooming and boarding there.

What do you remember about your high school classes?

At first, when I started school, the old brick school had burned, so we started school upstairs over the Oddfellow buildings. The big room was the assembly hall; what was Oddfellow's dining room was a classroom; and what was their kitchen was offices. There was a long, long hall to get up there. The seventh and eighth grades were over the Register Union and they had a back stairway to go up and down.

My class were about thirty-three started and fifteen graduated. One of the fifteen really should have graduated the year before. Our class roll when we graduated was Beardsley, Birmingham, Boyd. That was the start of the class roll, and the three first ones were the three who stayed in this area. All the rest scattered out.

Beardsley, Birmingham, Boyd all stayed here. What year did you graduate?

In 1910.

I want to go back to when you were children on the farm. What did you do at home for fun? You know, today kids sit in front of the TV.

One thing I did--they had built an additional room to the house and I would go out under that room and play with books and dolls. I had a doll that my sister brought me from Rochester, NY, when I was ten years old. It was a very nice, jointed doll with hair and eyes and arms and everything else. I still have it but it's not connected up any more. I had other dolls. I had a doll cradle that this Uncle George Soper had made for me, that Janice Casteel now has. I had a china-head doll and smaller china-head dolls. I have a picture of myself under a tree covered with wild grape vine and I have that little cradle and a small folding chair, one about a foot long and six or eight inches high, that I still have. I'm playing there under that grape vine arbor. That's my playhouse.

I used to be able to drive horses on the slings when they were hauling up the hay in the barn. As I got older I had a flock of sheep, not very many, but enough so

my mother had a sheep wool batt made and it was covered with the wool crazy quilt that my Grandmother Scudder had made. Grandmother Scudder had sixteen grandchildren and she made a crazy quilts for all of them.

Aunt Minnie Scudder had a dressmaking shop over Uncle Dar Scudder's store in Shepardsville. That had been an apartment but she used the front room and one other room for sewing and a dressing room. I used to go there to play and learned a little about sewing there. Mary Olson learned the trade there of my Aunt Minnie and later worked all around the country to make dresses. The picture that you have is a dress that Mary Olson made.

That white graduation dress?

Graduation dress. She also made my high school graduation dresses.

You have a picture of that.

Yes.

Nellie Green was showing me--of course, that was much younger--her high school graduation pictures, and the girls all chose a pattern and had the dresses all made alike. There weren't too many in that class. That was a little different.

We were ten. They were all different.

Were they all white though?

Yes. There were reception dresses. My reception dress was pink wool, silk faced, trimmed with silver lace. White lace was "silver lace."

When you say "reception," what does that mean, like an open house would be?

The juniors always gave the reception for the seniors. My senior reception was at Mrs. Dr. Campbell's house.

Did they have refreshments?

Yes. You were allowed to invite two guests. My brother Charlie went with me. I should have invited my father and mother, really, but she wasn't well. For some reason they couldn't go. Usually they had ice cream, cake, and punch, coffee. The year before Harriet Gates had invited me to go to their reception, and that was at Lowe's up in the Northwest corner of this town. The Lowe girl was--I think you would call her--a dwarf. Anyway, her room was all furnished with short, cut-off furniture. When you were a junior, your class had to put on the reception for the seniors. So you'd help one year and then been honored the next year.

What did you do after graduation?

I stayed home. My mother had an operation after I graduated. I stayed home and tried to keep house. I wasn't very good at it.

Where did your mother go to have an operation?

The operation was done right in the home. The parlor of the house was stripped and scrubbed. The operation was done right there by Dr. James McGillicuddy. (Dr. Campbell and Dr. McGillicuddy and another doctor who was down here. I can't think of his name right now). Edna Hudson was the nurse. She got so faint at one time that my brother Charlie took over as the nurse. He was studying to be a veterinarian.

Where did he study, by the way?

He studied in Chicago and went on to Kansas City, I believe, for his final

graduation. I don't think there was a veterinary school at Michigan State then. There is now. He spent three years in Chicago and later went to, I believe, Kansas City where he graduated.

Did this Edna Hudson stay then and take care of your mother?

Yes. She stayed.

She made a good recovery?

Her arm--she'd had, not cancer of the breast, but close to it--and there were long tentacles taken out under her arm. So she always carried her arm cross her stomach about at her waistline.

When were you married?

[We were] married the first day of January 1914, at the home of my husband's parents in Shepardsville, on the farm. They were celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, so when they had their 50<sup>th</sup>, we had our 25<sup>th</sup>.

Was that farm just north of Shepardsville on the east side?

Right. It was the George Frank Smith. His name was George Franklin, and he was always called Frank Smith or "G.F." My husband's name was Paul R.--Paul Revere--, but he was always called "P.R." at Elsie. I liked that.

Was Oliver Smith his brother who married Josephine Alderman?

Yes. They were married later, before Charlotte was born, in 1915 sometime in October, I believe.

Where did you and Paul start housekeeping then?

When we were married, he was working in Toledo for the Merchants & Mechanics Railroad. He was the billing clerk. He went to work sometime between 2 and 4 in the afternoon and worked until that job was done. His boss was Clarence Eichorst(?). Clarence had a store out at Point Place in Toledo and his in-laws lived right across the line where they could have a saloon. He would come to work in the afternoon and bring in a suitcase full of beer for the guys and he'd say, "Now, don't you touch that." So, they didn't.

Are you saying that they could have beer in Ohio?

No. They could have it in Michigan but couldn't have it in Ohio.

They got around that by kind of bootlegging a little bit.

He would tell the other guys not to touch that, so they didn't. They all had whatever they wanted after the other fellows went home from work.

You were living in or near Toledo?

In Toledo.

In an apartment?

Small. When we first to Toledo, he had one room at 1019 16<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> St. She didn't have an apartment to rent at that time, so we moved around the corner on another street. I can't think of the name or number now. I used to walk downtown to Toledo just for the exercise. I remember some of the markets there. There was ----- Market. There was a long entrance with four shops on each side. Inside there were different markets--fish market. We always got fresh halibut from the fish market.

After you were in Toledo, you came back to the farm, north of Shepardsville.

The first farm house north of the railroad track on the east side belonged to George Franklin Smith, commonly called "Bird Smith," and when he bought it, it

was only partly cleared. The field back of the houses on Shepardsville road was not cleared and he and the boys cleared it all. Later it was drained, tile drained. Paul's parents were living there. You lived together for awhile.

Just three months.

They moved to Ovid?

Not as much as three months. We went there about the first of April, and they moved about the middle of May to Ovid.

And you said Charlotte started school in Shepardsville then.

She started in the first grade, I believe, and Mary [Mattie] Smith, who was county commissioner, came to school and she said she should be promoted to the second grade; so she went into the second grade.

I know you told me that Paul worked for his brother, Oliver.

Learned the trade.

Oliver had a Ford agency in Ovid.

This was after he had quit the railroad.

You said Oliver was in officers training at Michigan State College when WWI ended.

Yes.

So he didn't go overseas. Now tell me again about Paul, what he did to his eye.

When Paul was a sophomore in high school, some of the boys skipped school and went hunting and he got black powder back into his right eye. He didn't tell his parents about the accident and got infection in his eye. It was very badly damaged and for years he had trouble with that eye. At one time he went to a lady specialist in Lansing and she said the glasses he had on were entirely wrong and they shouldn't be magnifying. They should be decreasing. Anyway, he went on for years; often painful when we would use hot salt packs to help the eye. Finally, in 1968 or '9, Dr. Phillips operated on the eye because a cow had switched her tail when he was milking and cut the cataract loose at one corner so it rolled up. Dr. Phillips was about an hour doing the operation, because it was hard to get out.

Your husband Paul came to Ovid to work for this brother Oliver in the Ford garage. Tell me again where you lived first.

After we left the farm, we had an auction and sold implements and whatever we had and moved to a small house, second house north of the tracks on the west side.

How long did you live here in Ovid?

We moved to Ovid in the fall of 1924 and lived up on the hill in the large house with the tower in front; and then moved on to a house on First Street just south of the railroad track where we lived until April; then we moved to Elsie. Charlotte stayed with her uncle Oliver and Aunt Josephine until she finished the year.

And then moved to Elsie, right?

We lived in Elsie until 1930 when we came back to Ovid. The Ford Company had discontinued making Model T's, and so we had nothing to sell for over a year and lost out.

Where in Elsie was your garage or your sales?

The garage in Elsie was where the post office now is and it was set on fire and burnt.

Oh yes, I remember that. Then you came back to Ovid, or did you go back to the farm?

We came back to Ovid for that winter and then went to the farm in the spring?  
When you left the farm in 1923, did you rent it to someone to work?

Father Smith owned it. I believe they moved back there themselves.  
I know the farm stayed in the family quite a long time, didn't it?

Oh yes, until after Paul's death.  
Now we want to get back. You were going to tell me about the beginnings of that school.  
We call it the Richards School, but you said it also was known as the Avery School.

I don't know what it was called at first. It was out of the corner of the Hudson Farm. At the time I went to school, it was known as the Richards School. Later on it was called the Avery School.

You know, when I was growing up though, we still -- and you see my father's farm backs up to the corner of the Hudson farm, -- and it was Richard School to us then. It's strange how school names get ---. Well, how was that school started then? Did the Birminghams get it going?

No, but I do know that when my brother, Ira, started school Frank Smith was the school teacher there.

Who was Frank Smith?

My father-in-law. His father was N. L. Smith and had moved to Shepardsville in 1883 and father Smith was 20 years old at that time. He went out teaching school, and when Ira started school he was teaching at the Avery/Richards School. Lillie went to school to him the next year. Later on father Smith taught at the Shepardsville School [Dist. #3, 1894] which was across the road from Clare Alderman's store at that time.

Oh, it wasn't right where it is now?

No. It was across the road from the store, and there was a sidewalk from that corner down to the village where it is now. I can remember that sidewalk very well.

I'm wondering about the Richards School. I should go past it and get the date because those brick schools, a lot of them were built about 1880. The Dennison School, I know, was built in 1881. I wonder if that was the first school that they had there or if there had been a plank or log school before. Did you ever here them mention whether that brick building was the first one or if there had been a little -?

Far as I know, that was the first school, and it was said to have been the first school in the township because there was one in Ovid but it was a fractional district. So our school was district No. 1.

My mother went to school at the Wilson School when they moved from Farmington to South Ovid. My grandfather Scudder bought us either 20 or 40 [acres] just west of the South Ovid Cemetery. It's part of the Wyrick farm now. Since I can remember the log house that they lived in was there. It's gone now. Grandmother Scudder brought huckleberries from Farmington and scattered them out in the swamp between the house and the cemetery. I don't whether they grew or not.

How many years after the automobile business quit you, I guess I should say, were you on the farm then? Were you there until Paul died? Were you living on the farm at the time he died?

We were on the farm when he died, but between that time he had worked for other people. In 1930 we came back here to Ovid and lived through the winter but in the spring moved to Shepardsville to the little house again. Then about 1935 Paul went to work for Dar Scudder selling implements. At Thanksgiving time in '36 we moved back to Elsie where he worked for Boyd Williams. I worked part-time in the Byerly Store. We stayed there until 1939 when we came back to Shepardsville. I kept on working part-time until '41. In Elsie, at that time we lived, first (can't remember the name of the street) but moved up to Main Street where Sid Keys now lives. When that was sold, [we] moved out to the north part of the big house that belongs to Merle Green on South Main Street. We had rooms in part of that.

Was that the house that Merle Temple lived in later or don't you remember? That house was divided in two parts. It had been a Baker house.

Yes, and she was living. She was married to Merle Temple.

Jennie Baker?

We lived in the north part of that. I cleaned it up because it had been used as sort of a granary-chicken coop. I did a great deal of cleaning to get it cleaned up. We stayed there until -. Anyway, we moved back to Shepardsville because Paul's parents were both sick. His father had had a light stroke and his mother--I think she had had two. We moved back to the little house but we stayed with them except weekends through the winter. Charlotte and Lloyd were married August 26, 1939. They stayed with us or apartments in Lansing until he and went into the service in 1942. Charlotte, as soon as he was established, she followed him around in service.

You were back on the farm now and farming or was Paul working for Dar Scudder?

He worked for Dar Scudder, and then Williams, and then Gower. We moved back down to the farm in 1940, I believe. He sold implements and drove truck for Gower. He would drive the truck to Jackson and generally picked me up to go with him.

By the way, I've heard of Dar Scudder for years. I don't remember him too well, I guess.

What was his whole name? What was Dar a nickname for?

Darwin, D.H. Scudder. He had the middle store in Shepardsville for many years. Finally, he rented it to Eddie Lattimer and later sold it to Eddie Lattimer. Uncle Dar had the first heavy wagon to drag around the country and sold groceries from that wagon.

Like Clare [Alderman] does.

Well, yes. It was just a common horse and wagon. Then he rented and started the store and bought it.

When you talk about the middle store, I remember, vaguely, Mr. Lattimer. Wasn't he kind of hunched?

He was a short man, hunchback.

The one on the south was Alderman's.

The farthest back as I remember, it was Frank Cleveland's. He had the post office in that south store, later sold to Aldermans and moved to the north store.

He had the post office in the north store, and the Ira Frisbie-Frisbie was the one I was trying to remember. Was it Ira Frisbie?



I don't know, but I remember it was Frisbie's, wasn't it?  
And all three had dry goods, and groceries or whatever?

The south store had dry goods and groceries and meats and milk; and Uncle Dar had groceries and candy, cigars, for awhile made ice cream and sold ice cream.

The north store--I don't remember too much about that.

Was it more of a hardware, do you suppose maybe?

Yes, when Mr. Frisbie owned it, it was a hardware and post office.

It seems strange to think that three families made a living off of three stores in Shepardsville, doesn't it?

Well, they didn't have the automobiles to go out around the country, you know. My grandfather Acre--1914-15-16---ran the Pearl store at the Colony. He rented it, and he went all over the country with a grocery wagon too in those days. Perhaps they didn't go as far as Shepardsville because of the stores were already there. You don't ever remember him going through?

No. I remember a man from Elsie coming around through there. I should be able to remember his name.

Then also in Shepardsville, there was a depot that was very active, wasn't there? Who ran the depot?

Oh, yes. When Paul and Oliver were youngsters, the station agent roomed at their place, and I think his name was Quinn, but I'm not sure. Oliver learned his trade there and was agent there. Paul learned of him. The next man who came there was Smith. I think his name has George Smith, George and Ethel Smith.

But no relation?

No. They came from Owosso. Her parents lived in Owosso on Corunna Avenue. I don't remember a great deal about it, except that in 1925 my grandfather went to New York State. He went to Shepardsville, bought his ticket and got on the train. I mean it was a very, very active station. There were stockyards in Shepardsville.

Who ran the stockyards?

I guess they probably belonged to the railroad. Different men brought in stock, Shepards, I think it was Bart Shepard --- and there were others.

There was probably an elevator there at one time too.

There were two different elevators there. Both burned. I don't think I lived there when the first one burned. It was in 1933, I think, that the second one burned. I know that everybody turned out to pump water and carry water and fight fires.

They put out fires on top of the church, and--

Do you remember when the station closed or not?

I can't tell you exactly when it closed. I remember when Dr. Osterheld was hit there--a very stormy winter day. [14 Feb 1923] Paul was standing on the front steps of the Alderman store and saw the accident. He was the first one on the job and George Smith was station agent.

I think I heard that George Youngs was driving.

George Youngs was driving, but the storm was so bad that you couldn't see or hear. But George Youngs didn't get out of the car. He stayed in and he came out alive but hurt. Dr. Osterheld opened the door and was trying to get out and was killed.

I've heard my mother talk about that because my sister was born in January 1923 and Dr. Osterheld was either on his way out or had been out to the house and was going back.

He had been to Ruth Hazel Olson's. She was pregnant and they had called him.

George Youngs brought him out there. On his way back from Olsons they had to go north. There was no road--

[US]21 hadn't been built yet.

They had to go from Shepardsville Road to Hollister Road. 'Twenty-one had not been built.

Do you remember when '21 was built?

Yes. We were in Elsie at the time. They had German prisoners south of Ovid in the encampment. They used German prison labor.

They did?

Yes, they were Germans, WW I. The prisoners were south of Ovid on the east side of the road where that motor court is now.

Well, Amy, I sure thank you for all the things you told me. We could keep on going on for another day. Is there anything you finally want to say?

My mother went to the Wilson School first, and they had just half logs cut for seats. Later, when the family moved to Shepardsville, first, their house was at the top of Bensinger hill on the south side of the road at the top of the hill right at the corner of that field. Then they moved it to Shepardsville. When they moved the house, Uncle Dar had had the operation on his leg. It was probably a cancer of the knee, but I don't know for sure--either cancer or tuberculosis. He was in bed when they moved it. My father and mother, when they were married, she had a white dress with pink flowers in it. I remember seeing pieces of that dress.

Was she quite young when she was married?

She was born in 1856 and they were married in 1878, so she was 22. I have daguerreotypes of my father and my mother each when they were children. She had worked for Dr. [L.O.] Ludlum when he lived over the north store in Shepardsville. And she had worked for Mrs. -?- when ..... (tape ends)