

The Rev. LaVerne Ashur Bretz

This is Thursday, Nov. 17, 1977. I am Elizabeth Spoelma. This is a recording of the Rev. Mr. Bretz. He has lived most of his life in Clinton Co. and is well-known throughout the county. He is familiar with the development and the many changes that have taken place. He's closely associated with DeWitt and Bath Twps. and has a great deal of information and many interesting experiences to relate.

Would you like to start with telling us where and when you were born?

I was born in South Bend, Indiana, in 1906, July 23rd. When I was three years old, we moved to Coldwater, Michigan. From Coldwater, we moved right into Lansing and we lived on W. St Joe. It was a highly-restricted neighborhood. While there, my own sister contracted pneumonia and measles and I did too. She died. They held the funeral for two days but I didn't die. Then we moved out of there. We moved up onto Grand River Ave. in Lansing at the head of Pennsylvania Ave. From there, in 1912 we went to Natchez, Mississippi, for three years. Then we came back in 1915 and lived on North Seymour. Then my father bought a lot. We built a house on West Mt. Hope. When I was through high school, I went to school in Adelpian Academy. Then I went to the seminary there and left there and was married in 1927 [to Marguerite Goodenow Wormer]. We lived in Lansing for a while. In 1934, July 23rd, my birthday, we accepted a call to the Bath Baptist Church which had been closed and out of business. It was reopened and we spent seven years in Bath.

In 1936 I took on the Valley Farms Baptist Church. I was there nine years, built the first buildings that they had, the building itself being a donation from the Michigan Ave. or Olivet Baptist Church in Lansing, dedicated first in 1928. It was torn down when we built the new building and the old addition still remains as the fellowship hall.

Was it always located right where it is now?

Always. In fact, the neighborhood split over the location of the church. The ones over on the west side of the pavement began to break away because it was placed on the east side of the pavement. At that time State Rd. went to the top of the hill and no further. It was two lanes, two tracks, and it was grass all the way from there to Wood Rd.

Later in the year, we received a bus from R. E. Olds and we had to get a permit from the state to operate it. They gave us a permit over that section of the road that didn't exist. The State Highway Department contacted Clinton County. They had been paying--I think it was so much a year, \$53, I believe it was a year--for many years. They notified them that they'd have to open the road. Then they graded the road, opened the road, and it became passable. From that time on, it was a main thoroughfare across to the (?). While we were there the first time, the traffic light that now exists on US-27 and State Rd.--It was Bridge Rd. at that time, RFD 4 in Lansing--was put in after we had several accidents and the death of a little boy name of Lester Challender. Murray D. VanWagoner was Secretary of State [actually Michigan State Highway commissioner and later governor]. I have in my possession the letters relating to that traffic light and how it happened to be put there. It has went through many a time when the trucking industry fought it. Various people fought it. It was hooded for a period of a few weeks and we threatened to go in a body. It was unhooded and began to operate again. US-27, when I remember it first, stopped at the marsh.

Which marsh?

That would be the marsh between here and Bath Rd. That was a swamp and in a few years they dug that out. It was 60' of muck that they took out of there and filled in with sand and made a hard- surface road. The main road between Lansing and Dewitt at that time was DeWitt Rd. That was before Turner Rd. was even put in. After a period of time, 27 was again opened. It was a narrow road. It was sand when we went through it.

While I was in Bath, the church was remodeled and opened again. It used to be a Free Will Baptist Church. It was constructed about 75 years before I got there. After I'd been there for a period of time, the denomination wanted to know if I'd take Valley Farms. When I came to Valley Farms, they took up an offering to pay for the services and it would amount to about a \$1.50 a week. There's an old clerk's book that was in our possession last week and there was a motion in there made to raise my salary to \$2 a week. This was read at the homecoming for the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Michigan First Baptist Church of the Valley Farms Baptist Church by the first Baptist Church. These minutes are still in there.

At that time there was a drain. That man who had been contracted to build the drain was not put under bond by the county. He got up into the quicksand in north and east of here and he went bankrupt and the drain was never completed. That was the reason we were having so much trouble when we first came here. They called it the Big Horn Drain. The Big Horn Drain went across US-27 at Weiland Rd. and began in through there and went right on a northeasterly course.

The area where we're sitting on Mayfield used to be, in the wintertime, a skating rink. They used to skate over what was then Bridge Rd. At what is now Brook Rd., the water used to come up. The neighbors to the east of what is now Brook Rd used to bring their horses and it'd go clear up past the horse's stomach. Then they'd let the horse go and he'd go back home. They'd ride him to get across and lead the cars across. This was a regular lake region at that time. The tile, which was 15", were still here. Due to damage by hoodlums and being taking up by the county and moving to other areas, the tile was soon destroyed and the evidence was gone and the drain never was completed. At the time I first came here, there was a certain amount of money that was--I don't remember whether it's \$2,000 or \$3,000--in the old Big Horn Drain fund. This money, I suppose by now, has been gone because every few years they would survey it and use the money to pay the surveyors but nothing was ever done.

During the depression in this particular community, we had at one time when I came here, five ex-convicts within a mile of the church. We had welfare recipients that you couldn't take care of them. We had a condition whereby people were calling. We used to call Valley Farms the buffer state or the Czechoslovakia between Ingham and Clinton. At that time we had two men that were supposedly taking care of the welfare and these men would be contacted but they wouldn't come. So I took it up with our United States congressman and they had a hearing in Chicago and they both lost their jobs. Later one of the men ran for a public office and asked if I would oppose him. I said, as long as he did his duty, I wouldn't. We've been through a lot.

Southern part of Clinton County had one piece of blacktop for many, many years. It was the only one, the one that went in to DeWitt. We called it Howe Rd. When Webb Rd. was blacktopped, it was a phenomena. In the northern portion of Clinton County, there was a lot of blacktop. This was a neglected area for many years. Then suddenly we found ourselves faced with a growing population. We found

that there was more concern because the tail began to wag the dog. They began to be more concerned and begin to come into the area.

I remember at the time we had the trouble over the welfare recipients that I received letters from the Worker's Alliance, from the congressman, inviting me to Chicago, inviting me to Washington to tell the story of this part of Clinton County and the way the welfare had been neglected. Beginning even ahead of this, I think we had more widows in Bath and Valley Farms area than any place I've ever been. Many of them were on welfare during the depression. I remember, when we used to set at night and have a gathering in the church and to get missionary money, we'd put 10¢ apiece in after we'd had our little luncheon. We called it "Polly."

This is much of what happened in the area and I remember many things about it. I remember how that we fought with St. Johns over the roads; how we fought with them over the areas of schools; when the Valley Farms School property was purchased, the old school site many, many times back in those days. The old school, which is the portable--we called it the portable building--that is now Burke's warehouse. The school began here and then when the new school was built, as I remembered, it was a two-room type of thing at first. The old school would have water. They couldn't hold classes in it. They would hold them in the church. All the graduation exercises, anything special that they did would be held in the church because this was the only other [?] we had in this area. When the new school was built, they didn't buy enough land. After a period of time, why they bought 8-7/10 acres from me off of the back of a 12-acre piece that I had. Now there's a park on the part that I had. I don't know about much of it other than the fact that during the time the pioneer spirit of the people seemed to persist.

The Reed's Filling Station was a grocery store and the grocery store was in the basement of a house.

Who owned it at that time?

A man by the name of Baxter. Then there was, kitty-corner from that, the old Brown Store building which later caught fire. I remember it burned once before and a man by name of Palmer was there, but it was built too close to the street so that it was on too small of a piece of property so that it was never rebuilt.

How does Burke's Old School House [a furniture sales business] and Valley Farms School relate? Was the Burke's Old School House for this area the first?

Yes. The brick building was the second [Valley Farms School] building. The portable building down below, which is the warehouse, is the first building.

Now that was moved from where though? You said it was moved.

Not that one. The church was moved off of Michigan Ave., not the school house. The town hall at that time was the building that is next to 27, the cement block building, some kind of a church. I believe now they have a little sign on it. That was the town hall.

Where is that located?

That's the first building off of 27 on the north side of State Rd. That was that town hall.

And who's that property owned by now, do you know?

I think it's owned by that siding company but they rent it from the church.

The county or the township doesn't own it?

No. It's been sold. It was sold on open bid. At the time it was sold, Carl Smith bought it and was going to put a business in there and then decided against it and went down on West State Rd. and put up the Valley Farms Plumbing Supply.

The reason for closing the one that they call Burke's Old School House there, was that because there wasn't room enough in the building?

The building was way too small and they needed a new building and it was close to 27. We were having trouble with the children crossing the street.

That was after 27 was widened?

Then they bought the ground where the school now sits up southeast of the intersection.

Did they have a fire barn and those sort of things?

There was no fire barn. When we used to have a fire, they'd called the parsonage. If it was at night, while I was getting up, Mrs. Bretz would call some of the neighbors. We'd all get together with our pails and go to the area to put the fire out, call DeWitt village. At that time it wasn't a city and we often had it out before the fire department could find it. We'd drive in the area. I had a spotlight on my car and we'd set it up in the air and the fire department would come to the spotlight.

When did DeWitt get its volunteer fire department they have now?

I can't remember, but it just seems to me it was while I was living in DeWitt which was after I came back. I was back 19 years. I've been retired 3 ½. During the 14 years that I had the DeWitt church, I had DeWitt and Valley Farms together part of the time. I had DeWitt and Bath together part of the time and I had Valley Farms and Bath together part of the time. The three churches I've had about 48 years.

When I went to DeWitt, the village, to the DeWitt Community Church, this church was a member of the old Free Will Baptist Church. They didn't even have a baptistery. They didn't believe in this. They believed that they should go to the river summer or winter and baptize. The building was 108 years old when we remodeled it. It was on what used to be the town square. The town square now is the property from the north side of what is now the Veterans' Building, the old church, and clear down to the corner. That whole block was the town square. I don't know how they ever got it any other way but it was the town square on the original deed. When we remodeled that building, we moved it three times, put a basement under it. It probably is now pretty close to 140 some years old, probably one of the oldest buildings in the area, the old DeWitt Community Church which used to be the First Baptist Church of DeWitt. When the building was moved, the timbers, the building was condemned. When we moved it and put it on a foundation, we reclaimed the building to the tune of about \$36,000. We

moved it three times in order to put the basement under it and made a very good building. Later it was sold after the new church was built on Webb Rd.

How about the population in DeWitt at that time?

The population in DeWitt when I went there was 700. The population in DeWitt, Valley Farms, and Bath--I mean the membership of the three churches--was about half of the number of people that I have buried over the years I've been in the ministry. The area--Bath, Valley Farms, and DeWitt--in the general vicinity of these built in these areas, probably wasn't 1,500 people in the whole shebang at the time we began.

Did the increase in the population, in the development of the area, did that change the people in the area? Did that change them very much? Did it change their attitudes and their culture?

Yes, to a certain extent it did. It brought in people. Many of them were tired of living cluttered lives in the city and they wanted more area. They brought a fine group of people to the area who, in turn, helped raise the attitude of the area. Many of them that were already here came because of this but we were in the Great Depression and there was so much that they couldn't do because jobs were scarce. I believe that the southern end of Clinton Co. probably was one of the poorest areas in the state.

Would that have included Watertown Township also?

I don't know too much about Watertown Township. I knew many of the people in Watertown but I didn't know too much about the township.

The school house on the corner of State Rd. and Wood Rd. was the Gladden School. It was still in operation when I came to the area but the road from Wood Rd. to US-27 was impassible. It was nothing but a little trail, like a country trail into a set of woods or something along this line. Later they cut that road down and filled it in and raised it. Many, many times, even the portion of road from about, well, maybe 200' east of what is now Eskes Rd., from there to US-27, the water covered the road so completely, as I said, it would come up to the horse's belly when he was going through. It was an impassable road.

Was the Gladden school discontinued when we consolidated with the Lansing schools?

Oh, it was discontinued before that. I don't remember just what year it was discontinued. The building was torn down and the property was sold to the [?] real estate company, and as far as I know he still has it. We had some young people in the area was going to buy it, build a home on it, and they heard that there was a church that wanted it. Some way in the fracas, why they bought it from these people. They now they live over in Clinton Village #3 or Boichot Acres.

I understand the Lansing School District had owned the property on the north side of State Rd. there. The big farm house and the barn...

That was Henry [?] property and Henry and his wife still live on Wood Rd. They sold the 150 acres to the Lansing Board of Education but this is a recent transaction.

The old Hurd School is another example. The area built a new school down on DeWitt Rd. about maybe half-three quarters a mile from the old Hurd School that's in the center of the Hurd Cemetery. When this school down there was built, I don't remember how many rooms they had. The building is still there. The Hurd School then was left and the children went to the other so when the Lansing Board of Education consolidated with Hurd, Gunnisonville, and Valley Farms, it left the new Hurd School empty. It also left the area well-equipped with buses picking them up so there would seem to be no need for the Hurd School any more. Gunnisonville School had a new one built. The Valley Farms School, of course, had already begun to build a new one so that was in operation at the time.

How did the people out here feel about this consolidation with the Lansing school district?

At the time they were excited because they thought it was going to raise their taxes. A lot of people came here with the understanding their taxes wouldn't be too high and they weren't. When I first came to live, bought property here, my taxes were very, very little. The taxes on the same amount of property today would be somewhere around \$700 so that the property value has really gone up.

Were most of the people in favor of consolidating with Lansing?

Well, they voted for it so they must have been pretty well in favor of it. I think that there was one clique that wanted to build a high school. They wanted to unite with DeWitt proper and build a high school someplace between here and DeWitt. Somebody got the jump on them and the DeWitt School was moved out of the village of DeWitt and put closer to the DeWitt area. Our people cooled off so that we consolidated and left DeWitt with the building. I think the original plan was that, if they could get that school started, that's where it would be.

Of course, property taxes did go up as you were assessed for drains, new drainage, and sewer systems. What about like when 27 was put through? Was there an actual assessment on that or--?

To a point, but not much. There was a little but most of it was done by the state and they put a big drain through there that was big enough you could almost walk through it. It goes right down 27 on the east side. In some places they've gone across to pick up a drain that followed the other side so that the drainage along 27 now is ample for most anything like this, but it's surface water drains. The sewer drain was something other. In the area there was a lot of muck at the corner of State Rd. and Brook Rd., I would say 20' down. There was corduroy logs that was probably, some of them, 15-20' long. These logs were well preserved. Many of them were hauled away and dumped in different areas. The sewer at the corner of State Rd. and 27, down through there, went down pretty near 25'.

The southwest corner of State Rd. and Brook Rd. and the northeast corner, where the old Big Horn Drain was to go through has had thousands of loads of fill, this on the southwest corner. It was down probably 20'. And the fine ash from one of the factories from the city was dumped in there for better than a year and across the other way, when 27 was put in, that was filled in several hundreds of loads. I don't remember how many hundreds. I mean it's still a little bit low but the reason was so that it wouldn't back up onto the neighbors.

When you first knew State Rd. as far as it was open, was there any logs like corduroy or planks on that road?

Not Visible, not visible. It was called Bridge Rd., RFD-4 in Lansing, and it went through from way down to almost where it would hit US-16 east of the city. It went right straight there east of town and it went, supposedly, from Wood Rd. clear across and then it starts again on the other side of Bath by Park Lake.

It didn't go all the way down to Chandler at that time. When was it opened up from Chandler all the way through?

I think it was opened up--. Brown Rd. is just across I-96 and we used to be able to get there, but you couldn't get in through Chandler's Marsh until the big freeway was put in. This road was then paved to make a bypass so...going to East Lansing or into Bath from that area--. That road is comparatively new. At the time when I went into Bath, Chandler Road went probably 200-300' south of Drumheller Rd. and from there on it was a blue snakes and swamp. You couldn't get through there. Only once in a great, great while you could walk through. I've heard the old gentlemen that lived around the area tell about, when they started to clear it off, that the brush piles, if you would go through there, they literally become alive with blue racer snakes as long as six' long there.

I've heard old Mr. Schworer tell about how his father told about working in that area. Now the Schworer farm is a part of the old farm that was known as--What's the name of that lake right there?

Jones Lake

The Jones family was old Mrs. Schworer's side of the house and her grandmother was the first white child born in Ingham Co. When the Michigan state capitol was built, in the cornerstone is the history of the Schworer family from the Jones side. She lived to be 96 years old and it was her grandmother that was the first white child born in Ingham Co. She was the mother of Homer Schworer (and Homer Schworer never was married.) and Elmer Schworer and Ernest Schworer, three boys. Homer and Elmer are both gone in death. Ernest still lives in St. Johns. His son, Fred, has inherited the old family estate and he's making a Cater House out of it which was the original name of that old family way back. The house at one time contained the old leathern abstract or deed that came from the President of the United States. It was homesteaded back in those days. The house also had a clock, a mantel clock that had wood works in it, and all the old furniture. Some of it is still there on display for a fee. That is on 27 at the end of Coleman Rd., across the street. The old house is still there and Fred Schworer calls it the Cater House, which is the family name back beyond old Mrs. Schworer, the Joneses. The Jones Lake was part of the original estate.

The tenant house on the same farm is where Harry Leadley, the local mortician, lived when he first came to Lansing and worked on that farm. His oldest daughter was born in that house. Later, Harry Leadley worked for the interurban line that ran between Lansing and St. Johns. He was the conductor and they used to get as far as State Rd. sometimes and be blocked in the snow. A lady by the name of Leland would take them in, the whole bunch, and keep them all night. Mrs. Leland later moved to New York. I understand she passed away there. She used to come back and sit by the hour and tell us about the early days when that interurban couldn't make it to St. Johns. She lived on what is now known as Hazel St. and the interurban went right by there.

The interurban was in operation when you first came out here?

Well, it wasn't in operation when I moved out here, but I remember the interurban.

What did you have to pay?

I don't remember. The Interurban went from Jackson to St. Johns up through that way. They had a third rail which was very dangerous to animals that hit it or children and there was a lot of death along the line where it would go. This Harry Leadley is the same Harry Leadley that was in the Estes-Leadley funeral business until the time of his death.

What was DeWitt like then? Were there any businesses were there stores and things like that?

Oh, yes. They used to have a saloon in DeWitt back before prohibition that was known all over this section of the country. It finally was not on the town square but kitty-corner from it and it was on the main four corners at that time. It was a hotel and a saloon. About halfway between St. Johns and DeWitt was a Halfway House where the interurban used to stop. These were well-known in this part of country and that building burned down years ago before my time.

Which one, the Halfway House or the tavern?

The one in DeWitt was burned down. At that time, we thought the whole city was going to be gone but it remained in inactive status for a number of years. Then the Woodruff brothers founded the bank and started -- DeWitt. When I came to DeWitt, Mrs. Clara Woodruff, the wife of one of the founders, was still there and later she passed away and I buried her. Her son, Lawrence, passed away. Ralph is still retired and lives in the area. They were members of the old Baptist Church before it became a community church. It didn't become a community church until under the leadership of the Rev. Thomas Toy when the Methodist Church burned. The Methodist Church later was rebuilt. The Community Church continued and many of them never went back to the Methodist Church. They stayed in the Community Church.

Was there any other shops that you can remember, you know, stores or manufacturing of any kind or anything right around the DeWitt area?

The DeWitt area was known for many of the names that are common in Lansing. Will Joy, Brinkerhoff. These were funeral directors. Korff Manufacturing Company. They lived in DeWitt but they did their business, most of it, in Lansing,

DeWitt was mostly a farm community then.

Yes. Max Glass, not Max, but his father, Harold, used to run the drugstore and they later moved into Lansing and it was the Glass Pharmacy.

Now where was that located in DeWitt?

It was on the main street there, north and south. I think they call it Bridge St.

When you first came out here, you went back to Lansing for most of your shopping and business and that sort of thing, right? When you came out here then you just went there for that?

We lived in Lansing when we were married, we lived there and we lived there for quite a time.

When you first went to Bath, what was the city of Bath like? Was it--

Deserted! There was an old hotel that was out of business, and a man by the name of Ewing running a general store, and the post office.

Where was this old hotel located?

The old hotel is still there and it was on the east side of Main St. There was a blacksmith shop in there. The blacksmith shop was south of the tracks. The road that went through--I think they called it Webster Rd.--went across the railroad track. They had so many accidents that later they closed it and it doesn't go across there. Sleight Rd. goes around to the north and where Sleight Rd. and this road came together, it went on, but it doesn't. It's Clise Rd. That road doesn't go across any more, hasn't for years. When we first went there, it went across.

There was a railroad through there. Is there a depot or was there?

There was a depot but it hasn't been used for a long time. When the 20th Century Limited was a new train that was making its debut in Michigan, it came through Bath. They went through for weeks ahead of time and tightened up the track. It did come through Bath. It didn't stop. It whistled!

It wasn't even a whistle stop, was it?

No, but there was a big elevator there, a grain elevator. The farmers would take their produce to the elevators and it was loaded on trains and moved out of there.

Did you ever have any experience with farming at all in this area?

Not in this area. We used to have a farm for a couple of years in Okemos, Michigan. That was back years ago, I would say probably about 40. Our middle son was born while we were there and he is 47-48 years old this year, so it'd be 48 years ago. Sometime in December I'm supposed to go back to the church in Okemos and speak to our retirees' club about what happened years ago.

Are you familiar with any of the methods or the machinery and the things those farmers were using or hear them talk about how they managed, like with the wetlands, the swamp lands, because this offered sort of a particular type of farming?

When I went to Bath years ago, I used to follow the threshing machine around to get to talk to the men and we'd have dinner together. I wouldn't accept any money but I did accept my dinner. I'd go in and they'd razz me for a while but we always had the blessing. When it was over, why the lady of the house many times would say, "Well now, the reverend is here. We want you fellows to try and watch your language a little bit. He's been working with you this morning and we want you to kind of have a little respect for him." We'd have a gracious dinner and go back to work and it was all done, practically, with horses.

There were tractors. I remember the John Deere. It didn't have rubber tires. They had lugs, spade lugs, on the John Deere. They had a Ford tractor that had steel wheels. It would hardly pull an empty wagon on a hard road but the John Deere would do very well at it. The Ford tractor would run a silo filler, put it

up 60'. The John Deere couldn't put it up 60'. Usually, the farmers would go together and when they'd trade work, they'd trade tractors for whatever the situation would be, but there was a lot of horses. Around Bath there were mostly horses. They'd put three horses on a corn binder. After they'd run the corn binder around the field, they'd pick it [the corn] up and shock it. During the winter, why they'd tear the shocks down, take the men and husk the corn and feed the cattle and take the corn and either have it ground up for feed or whatever they would do with it. I can remember when we used to be able to buy corn at 15¢ a bushel. That's by the ear.

Unbelievable!

At one time during the depression, we had a cow and the cow would give more milk than we could use and we give it away to the neighbors.

At harvest time when you were threshing, not everybody owned a thresher, did they? Did they go around with groups of people from one farm to another?

In Bath they used to have a big, steam-fired threshing machine and they used to take it around and the neighbors would get the help. They carried their own help to operate their own machine, which was the threshing machine and the steam engine that ran it. I remember these machines sitting in, I believe Jake Dolton's[?] yard, when we first went to DeWitt or Bath years ago. When the grain-threshing season would come, they would take it around and stand in line and the neighbors all seemed to help each other. They would what we called "change work" with different ones. One of them would stack it and another one would pitch them in and the others would haul them in from the field and thresh them out. When that was finished, why they'd hook onto this big threshing machine with a steam engine.

Now this was a steam engine and in what years was this?

This was back in the early thirties.

And they was still using steam engines in this area?

In some of the areas, yes. They had the old, famous Ford tractor that had the steel lug, was quite popular. It would plow about two to three inches deep, two 12" plows, and the John Deere would haul two 16" plows with spade lugs. These--I don't remember what they call them--the International had a 1020 that seemed to come along about with them and there was some of these around, but the smaller farms, there wasn't too many of them that had the better equipment. I can remember when we started 48 years ago, we had a silo filler. That was a 13K, and we had it in partnership with the Grettenbergers of Okemos. We used run the thing back and forth. We would fill the neighbor's things/silos. One time we would use the old Ford tractor and one time would use the John Deere. Well, the neighbors got onto it and when we'd go to fill a silo, we could fill it so much cheaper with a Ford that everybody demanded a Ford. We had problems. All of the wagons coming out of the field were horse-drawn. We didn't have any equipment at that time that I was familiar with that was drawn by anything other than horses. That was back 48 years ago.

I'd like to go back to this Chandler Rd. down here in--

Chandler?

Yes. You were talking about roads sometime back and I'd like to go back to that. I've heard stories about when the road was closed for over a long period of time. It had been opened quite early, wasn't paved of course, but then it had burned out. The marsh had burned out underneath and between the water and the fire and everything, it was all broken up and had sunken down or something or other and it was closed for quite a few years.

That's right. Not only was that true of that road but along what is now 27. It would be down five, six, eight feet for the fire and burn. I can remember when the fires burned along 27 in the muck. Then later they dug it out and made the road wide and dumped in hundreds and hundreds of loads of sand to bring the road up to what it is today. This wasn't only true here but this was true way back on South Cedar in Lansing. In the 2500 block the road used to veer to the west where the buildings are now, it would have gone behind them. There was a greenhouse right there. It went through in front of the greenhouse and back straight south again. There was a pothole of muck right in the center of Cedar St. in the 2500 block. I remember this.

Do you remember when Chandler was closed because of--

Chandler Rd. wasn't open for years after I moved into the neighborhood.

Where did you go to go through, you know, like you wanted to go--

You couldn't go through Chandler Rd. because it was unpassable. You used to come around on 27 or Park Lake Rd. around through that way. There was no other road that you could get through to what is now High St. other than 27 or Park Lake Rd. which runs around Park Lake and back. I think when it goes into Bath, it's called Clise Rd. or something.

Did you ever experience or know anything about it or are the stories true about this swamp land out here being sort of a rendezvous or a hideout for criminals?

When I first came out here, a Ross [?] was chairman. I mean, not when I first came to the county, but when I first came to Valley Farms. Ross Pesco[?] was chairman of the parole board and he was a friend of mine. At that time we had over five ex-convicts within a mile of what is now the church. We had a lot of this in here. We had a member of the Diamond Gang out of Detroit. This man was apprehended while I was here. He later committed suicide and I was called to identify him, 31 years old. He spent all of his natural life, practically, in prisons and reformatories. He lived here and his family, part of them, still live close to the area.

Was it actually sort of a rendezvous or a meeting place for gangs?

It could have been. I wasn't too familiar with it in this light because Sergeant Hopkins, when I hit Valley Farms, was a very active director of the Michigan State Police Uniform Division and I knew him real well. Back in those days, if he had a message, he'd call and say, "Have you done your missionary work today?" And I'd say, "No, I guess not." and he'd say, "Well, would you go up on a certain street and tell so and so thus and thus?" Whatever it happened to be, I'd go do it. Then if something happened and I needed something, I called Sergeant Hopkins and asked him if he would do thus and so for me. The thing was different than it is today. I remember one time we had a suicide on Burton St. and a young officer was in there. The gun the man used was a double-barrel, 20-gauge gun and they wanted to sell it right on

the spot. The officer didn't have the money and every [?]day. So I said, I'll loan it to you." I loaned him the money and later he moved away before he ever paid me. I went down to the post and was inquiring about the man and finally Sgt. Hopkins, realized something was wrong. He said, "Come on now, tell me what's going." I finally told him what's going and he says, "You go home Saturday and be sure you're not home until about midnight. I want that young man to wait in front of your house for about five hours." That was the way they reprimanded him. Then they gave him two weeks' or a week's vacation without pay because he couldn't be depended on. They had transferred him into Detroit but they called him back and made him make the amends for this. I think it was \$20, something like that. I know at the time he said, "If you ever get a chance to loan them money, loan it to them and then let me know if they don't pay it back." All of this is in the past. They don't do this type of thing anymore but he was quite a individual. He was unusual. As far as the gangs in the area, there used to be a lot of conflict between the areas of Bath and Valley Farms where the teenagers would gang up and get into gang fights between the areas. The hoodlums, they were here, some of them. Some of them that we knew about that were here. Some of them we didn't know about until after we had come in contact with them. They were being wanted.

Was there anything here to indicate the old Chandler farm, you know, on the corner of State Rd.-- State Rd. wasn't there-- but identifying it by the corner of State Rd. and Chandler, right in that area, just north of the railroad track. Senator Chandler early had his first farmhouse--

That was nothing there.

There was nothing there when you came here?

No, but, you know, I can tell you this, that when you go to the railroad track and follow back to the northeast, up in there quite a little ways, there was a log hut built. I don't remember what happened to it but it belonged to a man by the name of-- Oh, his name just alludes me. He was a real estate man and he's quite well-known among the historical circles of the city. I know it as well as my own. Anyway, this man owned this property and he gave a deed to the boy scout troop of Valley Farms for their continued use as long as they wanted to use it and it would revert at the time. As I imagine, I still have that deed in my safe to that piece of property and our boy scout troop.

There was a big barn back that way too that was probably torn down long before you ever came in here.

Yes. The last place on there was a woman by the name of Fannie [Allen?] coming off of Bath Rd. or Clark Rd. now and going to the south. They lived on the right-hand side as you worked south. Their house was the last house and she was an old-time school teacher in the Bath district back in the beginning. When I came here, she was an old lady and her and her husband still lived in that house and that was as far as you get. I remember she was taken sick and I went to call on her. I had to leave my car half a block from her home on Chandler Rd. and all you could see was just a trail and it disappeared into nothing as you looked down.

When you first had your first church out in Bath, that was in 1934, I think you told me. Did you move to Bath at that time too?

No. I moved to Bath about a year and a half or two years before we resigned from the church. We lived in a house. It was called the Scholes(?) house across from the old apple drier. It was an apple drier in Bath. That was '34 and the apple drier had gone out of business and people by the name of Pace lived there and later Maudie Pace died. I buried Maudie and her husband. Guy Pace died later and I had his funeral in the house. The building that was the apple drier has been converted into a house and it's still there, people living in it.

Those people that lived in Bath back at that time, right in within the village, were they farmers or where did they work?

Yes. Part of them were retirees and some of them worked in the city of Lansing. The school was a consolidated school because the old Kehoe farm was out on the pavement. Lansing's first traffic cop by the name [Otis?] VanOstran(?) bought the old Kehoe farm. For years it wasn't worked for fear it was planted with bombs of some kind. Old man VanOstran was the first traffic officer for the city of Lansing and he retired in Bath and he was the deputy sheriff there.

Any reason why they thought there it might have bombs on the property or mines in the ground?

They thought it was mined and nobody'd buy it. This old fellow was quite a tough old dude.

Did he actually have it dynamited?

No. It never was dynamited. They was afraid because he had committed so many acts of violence, blowing up the school; and blowing up his house and his buildings; and burning his house; his wife alive behind the barn, spilling gasoline over her and setting her on fire--just brought her home from the hospital. We have the book that's the history of that. These are priceless. They're hard to come by and we got one some time ago as a gift.

When VanOstran started in Lansing, it was horse and buggy days and they used to have a tower on the corner of Michigan and Washington. I remember the tower and the man would sit in there and change the directions and they'd go. I don't remember the horses primarily. I remember the tower. It was still there when I was a boy and VanOstran was the first traffic officer of the city of Lansing. When he passed away, the story was in the *Lansing State Journal*.

How were the signals then, like to go or stop?

It was on top of the building.

And you had to sit here and look up?

Not too far up and one day, one time--

Excuse me, but was the tower right in the center of the street?

Right in the center of the street, a building probably six' square, as I remember it, and then it had this pole down through it. He could turn the thing and blow the whistle. I remember one time them telling about how that some man come up there and got abusive with him. He got out and grabbed the horse

and stopped him, took the man out and slapped him up and put him back in the buggy and told him to get out of town. This man, when he passed away in Bath years ago, they had a big article about him in the paper. I buried the man. He was Lansing's first traffic officer and when I went to Bath in '34, he was a deputy sheriff for the township.

And then when you came here to DeWitt Township, that was in what year now again?

[19]36. Yes. I had them both together.

The township hall you told me was the little building there on State Rd.?

Yes.

What about the township officers and the way the government township government was set up? Was that pretty similar to what it is today?

It was pretty similar. It was quite political. I can remember some of the early politicians. They'd come to church a week or two before the elections and shake hands with people and this sort of thing. It was very noticeable. We had some very good politicians as I remember them.

What is known as the Pigeon Inn was a rabbitry. They raised rabbits there. It's the same building remodeled. The pavement wasn't there the way it is today. It was a little narrow road. I remember, during World War II, the siren that we had on the church was copied by people out of New York. Maybe they enlarged on it, did much better with it, but our siren that the church owned and operated could be heard into the city.

Where did you get this siren was it made around...

I made it.

You made it?

Yes. We played it off of a record. We took it to the Department of Defense and they okayed it. We played it off a record but I had it. It was made out of a electric motor and a bicycle siren.

How could you get that much volume?

We had a 50-watt amplifier and we drove it with these big horns on the steeple of the church. We could use the amplifier to speak through. One time we had a youngster that was lost over on Turner Rd. in the swamp back of his house and we combed the area and directed the operation with the aid of the state police from the church tower. We found the boy but not till the next morning. He was asleep and he had his dog with him. We used it as an emergency tower if we had anything. If we'd had that back when we first began, we could have had it for fires and things, but we didn't have it back there and all we could use was the telephone.

Until just recently, we didn't have a siren here in the township to give us warnings of tornadoes or anything like that?

We had this before. We were hooked up with the circuit in Grand Rapids during World War II and we had the all-clear signal and we had the alert. We had the whole business.

When did you discontinue that, at the end of the war?

I imagine. I don't remember exactly but I would think, probably, at the end of the war we did away with it because we had no further use for it other than a tornado and we didn't have a problem with the tornadoes. In those days, they blowed-- I remember we had one tornado that went through this side of St. Johns, took up a lot of trees, went over through Bath and tore down a lot of houses and everything but we didn't blow sirens. We had one tornado on a Good Friday, I believe it was. It was Palm Sunday and it come up what is now Therese St. It killed a youngster there, tore down a couple of houses.

What year was this, 68 or 9?

Probably 65.

Is it the same Palm Sunday that Grand Rapids had the tornado that was so destructive?

It started down in Marshall. My brother's wife's sister and her family were practically wiped out at Marshall, Michigan. They lived in Mason at the time and they were on their way from Bucyrus, Ohio, back home. They come in through Marshall and the tornado hit them, killed the wife, the two boys. He was out in the field wandering around when they found him. A few years later, we were in Washington, D.C., and he was in the hospital, my brother in law, and they were still taking leaves out of his hip several years after the accident.

I have just one more question for you Rev. Bretz. When did you really decide to become a minister?

When I was 12 years old.

Was there any particular person or something that influenced this decision?

There was an old lady. Her name Goff. At that time we were living on W. Mt. Hope. It was an open area. My father had a one-cylinder REO car and we put it up in the winter. It run on five di(?) cells. We'd have to walk from then Beale Ave. Before winter was over, we'd have to walk from Washington Ave. about eight blocks because the road was mud all the way across there. The road was not improved at all. That was W. Mt. Hope. We used to play in the lot out in back, the kids from the area. There was only a few houses because, when we moved in there, it was a corn field. Kids would come down and across and it was old Elmhurst, they called it. High voltage wires went overhead but we would play there and when we got through I'd go over at night. I had a step-mother. By that time my father had married again about 1915. When they'd go home at night, I'd go over and sit on the porch, on the steps, and this old lady would sit her rocker and she was always talking to me. She said, "You know, I'm praying that you're going to be a minister." She'd keep this up until it began to weigh on me and when I was 12 years old, that's what I wanted to do. I'd go home. Now the old lady is long since gone. One of the neighbors, when I finally was at a church, came to me, a Mrs. [?]-she's long since gone--and she said, "If Mrs. Goff could only come and hear you!" That was her name, Goff. From then on I wanted to be a minister. When I got through the grade school, wanted to go into high school, wanted to go to religious school. I used to sell garden seeds and heckle the neighbors to get money to go. My father told me if I'd be a

lawyer, he'd help me but if I was going to be a minister, he wasn't going to help me waste his money. Before he died, he said he was glad I didn't listen to him.

How did you decide to become a Baptist then?

I was an Adventist. My stepmother was an Adventist and I was taught Adventism. When I was in school, about time to graduate, I decided I didn't believe that. I thought I was on the... I knew nothing about it. One day I was walking along the street and I thought, well, that was the end of it. I wouldn't be anything. I finally wound up in the South Baptist Church. The minister was very clever. I talked to him; the kids talked to me. Finally, I found somebody that I agreed with and so, without going before the deacons or anything, they made a motion I become a member of the church. I started from there, started leading the song services, being on the boards. At that time there was a Michigan Baptist Convention. A Yes. I had them both together.

A man by the name of [?] was in charge of country churches. He said, "I got a country church. We planned on having it opened and we got a man out there one Sunday and he won't go back. We wondered if you'd go up. I want to take a vacation. I'll be gone for six weeks. Would you take it until I can come back?" I said, "Yes." So I went out and I took it for six weeks. It took them seven years to get rid of me.

They must have liked you too though? You wouldn't have been there 7 years if they hadn't wanted you to. I think we've had a long enough session. You would be willing to talk to me again sometime, right?

Oh yeah, if I can help you.

You certainly can, and I really appreciate what you've told me today. It's been very interesting.

Kind of a hodgepodge type of thing, but you can get something out of it.

We can get a great deal out of it, you believe me, and I will talk to you again. I want to thank you for the time you spent with me.