

1 .
Cushman, Fordney D.
Interviewer

Tape: 011

First, we'd like your full name.

My name is Fordney D. Cushman. I live at 3360 Clark Road, Bath, Michigan.

And you were born right here?

I was born in this house in a room just off the living room.

And what year was that?

May the 8th, 1912, 8:00 o'clock in the morning.

And your father's full name was what?

Doty Cushman (1867-1944). He had no middle name.

And your mother's?

Lida E.

Her maiden name?

Greene.

Was she from this area also?

She was from the Bath area.

Do you know the birth dates of your parents?

Mother's was Aug. the 15th, 1868.

And the date of her death was?

Friday the 13th of Feb. 1953.

And your father's birthdate?

March the 1st, 1867.

And his death?

It was in 1944 but I can't remember right now. We'd have to get that off statistics.

I believe you told me they were both buried over here in the Gunnisonville Cemetery?

Yes, and so are my grandparents on the same lot.

The first member of your family to arrive in America in Michigan was?

The general opinion is that Ira Cushman may have come here, looked over the land, maybe even registered their names at Ionia, and then went back. There is some evidence that he went back and told them what he had done for them. Probably this was done at their request. Then they all came together from the east.

From New York, was it?

Yes. It was Kent Twp, Clinton Co., NY. They were all born in Kent Twp., Clinton Co., NY.

This Ira Cushman would have been an uncle or great uncle to you?

He'd have been a great uncle of mine, my grandfather's brother, George Cushman's brother.

When did your father come to Michigan?

My father was born here on this farm.

And then your grandfather?

He came. He was 12 or 14 years old, one of the youngest of the group, I think. There was, perhaps, one younger but I'm not certain. Also a lot of them didn't seem to live very long in those days.

So your great grandfather was here too?

My great grandfather came with his sons.

He was the father of Ira, was he not?

He was the father of Ira, Russell, Morris, and George and they didn't all settle right in a row here. Some of them went someplace else. Possibly one of them might of gone to Lima [Lima Twp., Washtenaw Co, MI?] Michigan. Maybe more of them went there. I don't know.

Your great grandfather's name was?

Gilbert. [1784-1849]

Where is he buried?

He is buried in the cemetery that is no longer used as a cemetery just east of the Chandler Road and Clark Road corners, on the southeast corner.

We'll come back to that in just a minute, but then your grandfather, not your great-grandfather, is over here in Gunnisonville. Do you know how old he was when he died?

No. I think he was in his eighties.

Do you know when he died?

I could get that for you if you want me to.

It isn't that necessary but he is at Gunnisonville and his name is?

George. [1825-1910]

And then your father's name was?

Doty.

You mentioned the Cushman Cemetery. Why don't we try to pin point that just exactly where it was?

As you travel east from the Chandler Road and Clark Road intersection, east of where we're speaking of, it was on the south side of the road, east of Chandler probably 600', where the little knoll forms. Probably on the low ground to the west, they didn't feel as though they should extend the cemetery to the west and to the east would have gone towards the farm house and buildings. That cemetery was abandoned and some of the people took their people already buried there, according to my folks, and put them either in Gunnisonville or in the Bath Cemetery. My family said that they tried to find Gilbert Cushman's grave, my great grandfather, but they couldn't find it. So he is still there if he hasn't been removed by the road excavations.

They did find some skeleton remains?

Yes. The last time the road was widened and it was taken to Michigan State University. I wasn't notified and when I called them up they told me not to worry about it inasmuch as it was a woman's skeleton and probably that of an Indian.

Do you know why they stopped using that cemetery?

Probably because of the fact that low land on one side and the farm house and barn was on the other. I haven't examined the land, as I think of it, to see if they could have gone south but anyway they did decide to no longer use that; and the Rose Cemetery too in Bath.

That cemetery that was on land owned by?

Ira. Ira had 160 acres there.

Do you know how the cemetery got started?

No, unless maybe it started with the death of Ira because it was on his farm and he was only here a short time and died, maybe as early as the next spring.

As time went on other people in the community were buried there?

Yes. My father told me when he was young boy, which would probably be in the early 1870's, that they might look up there and see some wagons, horses, and buggies. They didn't know for sure how many people did use it. It was hard to tell how many are still there. There's probably some there. Up to the time that I was still in high school no one still farmed the area that was the cemetery and I have seen markers that were removed from there, at least one is placed in the barn nearby. There was

one man in Bath, I believe, that said he could remember when there was standing markers there. I think they started plowing it maybe twenty years ago.

Now it has a crop on it?

It does now.

Was there not, on the corner of Chandler and Clark-- this would be on the northeast corner-- the school there, wasn't it?

Cushman School was on the northeast corner.

And that was on Cushman land also?

No. I think someone else gave a lease probably on that land. For a long time the property adjacent to it was owned by Mr. [Charles] Stadle. I think this land probably reverted back to the farm when that was removed. I know my mother's parents gave a long-term lease of some kind for a school at Bath, a country school and that reverted back to the farm when the school was consolidated.

Did I ask you where your mother's home was, where she was born?

Bath. She came from Bath.

I'd like to talk about the house when your grandparents first built. It was on the opposite side of Clark Road, was it not?

I don't know. I'm inclined to think that it might not of been because the property across the road belonged to my grandmother, not my great grandfather. In fact, there's deeds right here showing that the property was taken from the government by her. When she and my grandfather were married was a long time after my great grandfather was dead or quite a while. So I'm inclined to think that the original building probably was a cabin on this side of the road. Sadly, I was too young to take proper interest.

There was another house before this one?

Yes. That was across the road on my grandmother's property.

That would be on the north side of Clark Road?

On the north side of Clark. I think a map dated somewheres in the mid '50's on Clinton County shows that house over there and also lists the entire properties belonging to George Cushman. However it didn't. That 40 acres belonged to my grandmother.

I think you told me that house was moved?

That house was moved and was taken down board by board. It was moved east of the Baptist Church on that road-- I can't remember the name of the road right now. Anyway, it's down there maybe half mile and is on the north side of the road and was rebuilt and it is in use today.

And it was built just about the same as it was torn down?

Yes. It was put together, reassembled is what it was. Incidentally, there's 4 by 4's in it. I know a fella that lived in it for a while.

This is just outside of Bath were talking about?

Yes. It would be east to the Bath church. You come to a "T"-ending road that goes north. You go past that and I think it's the first house on the left-hand side of the road on top of a hill.

And then this house that we're in right here was built when?

In 1877.

And your grandfather had it made?

My grandfather had it built and a Mr. Willard built it. Mr. Willard, I think, was an uncle of Alta Gunnison. She mentions it in her history of Gunnisonville. She mentions this house. I happen to know that my grandfather paid him a \$100 for building it, labor.

I think I remember you telling me about his workmanship, the siding on the house.

My father watched him and my father was ten years old. He said every board of the siding was a pressed fit. He sawed them by hand. The board would stay up there while he was nailing one end and not dropping at the other end. It was that good of a fit.

You also told me about the interior of the house, how many rooms there were.

Originally it had fourteen rooms. However, we've taken out partitions to enlarge the rooms. The hired man's rooms upstairs and this room had partition in the middle. It was big enough for a person to sleep in and that would be about all. By taking the partitions out, it made a pretty good-size kitchen and also a good-size bedroom upstairs.

That was a pantry and an entryway?

That was a pantry at this end. This end was a bedroom.

That's on the east side of the house. This room we're in--

This was the combination kitchen and dining room. You'll find in most of the houses of this vintage seem to be very much as you recognize them as coming from trend of the same builder. The stairs would enter from the same way the Wilke's(?) next door does.

I think you told me that this one was somewhat unusual because of the two wings.

Very often they would build a house with a wing then extend a wing to the south. In this case they didn't. Instead they extended it to the west which made a very long house, a fairly narrow house but a very long house. It was a little unusual. One of our neighbors went by in a horse and buggy while it was being built and called to my grandfather and he went by the nickname, Joel. He said, "What are you going to do Joel, put a hayloft?" It must of have been quite a sight with just the studding all the way up.

I believe you told me that you could remember a little bit about what they had in the parlor and the way that it looked in there.

Mr. Willard did all the work with the exception of the heavy cornice that is quite deep. You can see from here if you want to describe it. The center was plaster where the chandelier hung. There was flowered rug on the floor, velvet finished furniture. They never used the room for anything except company or special people, ministers, and so on. It even had its own separate entrance from the outside and they were quite proud of that room. It was what they call a parlor.

I would assume in this circle in the ceiling is where you had sort of like a big oil-burning chandelier?

Yes. it came out or there a year later and we let that escape us.

When did you do the remodeling that you have done here like closing in the porch? I believe you have eliminated one porch completely, haven't you?

Yes, I think we did that around 1953, '54, somewheres around there.

And at that time you took that door that had been the entry door and put it on which is now your kitchen.

Yes. It has a couple of glasses in it. We thought it would be a good place to put it in and not just store it.

It's a beautiful door. When you were a youngster, you did not have electricity here then?

No. We didn't have electricity until—oh, I think it must of been after Franklin Roosevelt was elected president. I would say 1934, '35. I think maybe I had just gone to work at Motor Wheel; about '35; not later than '36.

But you did have the telephone already?

Yes. They had one of the first telephones; probably went in prior to 1900. I think, when we gave up the Bath phone, that it was a very low number phone, #54, #55, something like that. It had been there all that time.

One of the kind that was on the wall?

With a crank. It was quite useful. Besides business and keeping in touch with neighbors, if there was a local fire, the operator at Bath would put an intermittent ringing signal on. Whenever that happened we knew there was trouble some place. And I also remember the night that they put a signal over to let us know that Dempsey had won his important fight. Also the day that the LaNobles had a train accident in Lansing. They were running the store at Bath and were well known at that time and two of them were killed, Adys [Faith Adys LaNoble (1905-1921)] and I think, Victor [Victor Ross LaNoble (1898-1921)]--they put a general alarm on so it served a purpose instead of just business and conversation.

I believe you told me that sometimes it was used for advertising.

On rare occasions the merchants did have that general call put on and would advertise that they had special buy on sugar or meat or something like that but that was rare. It was probably a kind of a premonition of what was to come, wasn't it? Wonder what would've happened by now if we hadn't gotten radio or television.

I guess the telephone was a good medium for that.

Well, it saved the day. It did change life though a great deal because in the early days, the way they got information about their families-- like there was one group of them over in East Lansing--they would come by horse and buggy or wagon and stay all night. With the phone coming, this more or less stopped the close association between families. If they wanted to know how someone was, they phoned, you see. I saw just the last of it. I can remember members of the family coming and staying all night and talking over old times and what had happened and going back home again the next day. This, I think, in a way loosened the families because in five minutes you could get all the information you want by simply ringing up on the phone.

You told me about the barn, the age of that barn.

The barn was built in 1868. My father was one year old. It's a pretty old barn now. It even has the original doors on the front, the original siding, and it didn't get painted until it was ninety years old and it's still in use.

You painted it when it was ninety years old?

Ninety years old.

Tell me an interesting little bit about the foundation too.

I think my grandfather, when he built it, decided that he didn't expect it to last any longer than he needed it. Instead of putting a good wall under it, he simply rolled big stones up and the timbers set on these big stones. Quite a few of them have rolled out of the way but it still stands there in good shape. We wouldn't lose it for anything. We keep it insured.

I noticed you had the date on the door.

The date on the door is the date that the family took the farm over. That's the date of the land patent on the farm and that was 1839 so I put at up there. I think I should've put the date of the barn. That would've been just about as interesting to anybody. The date of the barn would be 1868.

I wonder if you remember as a young boy what kind of crops did your father raise for the market for his income?

Wheat and beans were really his income crops. The corn usually was fed and that was just about it. We didn't--

Where did you have to go to the market that?

Bath would usually be our place to market. His brother owned the elevator. That's Ed (?) Cushman and Son. He took most of selling his cash crops to his brother. I can't remember him ever

selling anything other—Well, I said only those three crops, but he did every once in a while sell clover seed and he might of sold clover seed someplace else. Other than that, it was always at Bath.

And you were not into cattle except--

Yes. We had cattle, sold milk and sold beef. We had sheep and hogs when I was young.

Where was the market for these?

That again would be Bath and we had chickens and eggs.

Did you go to the store with your chickens and eggs?

Most of the time a fellow by the name of Harry [W.] Sweazey--a lot of people remember him--ran a grocery wagon through this area and she would sell a lot of eggs there. After 1926 when we had a car, we might sell them in Lansing or Bath. But Mr. Sweazey would come and he came originally with a team of horses, later on a Model T Ford. He built his little store on the Model T Ford.

Where did he have his store?

The store was actually the truck. The sides would open up and there was neat shelves and everything on it just like a store.

He was simply a huckster and he used his truck.

And his father did before him. And he stored his stock at home in a barn and I think possibly he might of sold to the neighbors but principally his business was driving through the country and selling all of this stuff.

Now with your cattle, you took them to Bath to sell. Were they then shipped to a stockyard somewhere?

Originally they were. However, from the time when I was a boy, a lot of them were trucked to Detroit and a lot of them were sold to local slaughter houses.

Where were the slaughter houses near here?

One of them still exists, the one that used to sell over there on Okemos Road, VanAlstines is still in existence. In those days people operating the slaughtering houses would come through and buy the cattle and then they would come and get them.

When did you get your first automobile?

August of 1926, Model T Ford, 2-door sedan, \$585 with bumpers and a speedometer.

Did you learn to drive that?

Yes. I was fourteen years old. My father probably bought it because I was fourteen. He never learned to drive. He was not mechanical and if I hadn't been able to drive and fix it, he wouldn't of bought the car.

So you never went without a car from that time on?

No.

Where did you go shopping for most of your things, to Bath or to Lansing?

In the early days it was almost exclusively Bath but about once every two months my mother would gather me up and my father would take us by horse and buggy to Bath and we'd and take the train and go to Lansing. They would usually need everything from overalls to shirts. Mother would shop all day with my sister and in the afternoon we would go to the Bijou which is where the Hotel Olds is now. (It burned down when I was young,) [1926]) or later on to the Strand, which is called Michigan, and the Capitol, and the Gladmer. We'd always take in a show.

Do you remember any of the movies you saw?

Oh, yes. In the early days I saw a lot of Harold Lloyd's and Charlie Chaplin's. I was trying to think of one of Charlie Chaplin's. To remember the exact names of them I would have to take a little more time to think of them.

Did you see any westerns like Tom Mix or--

We must of because, whether the show was good or bad, we saw them if they were in town. Most of the ones that I remember at the Bijou in Lansing, the vaudeville was as good as the movie. The movie was really rather short. People came to see the comedy. They came to see the vaudeville which was very good. We always had to go to the-- I loved the music. The music has always been a part of my life so that was wonderful for me.

Where did you go to school when you were young?

I went to the Cushman School on the corners until it was consolidated. Then I started at the fifth grade at the Bath Consolidated School. After the Bath [School] disaster [18 May 1927], I went for one semester at Central High School in Lansing then came back here and graduated at Bath High School.

When was Bath consolidated?

I think we spent the first year in 1922 in the Bath Consolidated School.

That took all these schools in this area. Bath now is consolidated with Lansing?

No. It's still its own consolidated group.

I wonder how the people felt about that.

About the disaster?

No about the consolidation.

Most of them wanted it or it wouldn't of been voted in but some of them were upset because of the higher taxes. That hurt. I think they were proud of it. It was the first consolidated school around here and not a wealthy community and it was a good school.

When was the Cushman School torn down?

I think about the next year it was torn down. That was about 1922, '23.

When your youngsters were older and they went to school, they were all being bused?

When I was young everything was bused, mostly by Model T Ford. The truck was overloaded, the body, with all the kids on it. Later on they got better buses, better trucks. In fact, one of them I rode was drove by horses because it went over Chandler marshes. They were so rough on it they couldn't and didn't want to use trucks for a long time. My own daughter graduated from Bath High School. Then she went to L.C.C. [Lansing Community College]; then later on to Michigan State.

You decided to go to work in Lansing rather than staying home on the farm. When did you go to work over in Lansing?

I went to work, I think, about the 8th of November 1935 at the Motor Wheel Corp. in Lansing.

You worked for them how long?

25 ½ years.

Up until you retired?

No. My division was moved to Indiana. I was safety engineer for them. I didn't want to move to Indiana so I left Motor Wheel and was safety engineer for Michigan State Accident Fund for 15 ½ years until I retired.

When you were working for Michigan State, I believe you mentioned about traveling around the area going to all these small towns.

Yes. I traveled both upper and lower peninsula, probably there would be very few towns that I haven't visited.

You told me some interesting things about that, about some of the people in the towns and how they didn't always accept an outsider coming—

No. My job was accident cost control or reduction and we would go in and give them suggestions as to hiring and training and watching out for preexisting conditions that could cause false claims. Inside the plant I would go with the owner and I'd make recommendations for safety; such as, guarding on machinery, chemical and electrical hazards, and anything that we could do to help them,

protective equipment, safety glasses, gloves, and so on. Some people would accept us. Some of them were not for it or against it and would do nothing but we were gaining all of the time and it was a pretty good job. I don't think that during the 15 ½ years that I had more than five or six people really giving me a hard time.

Was the union as strong then as it is now?

Yes. The unions were pretty well established by the end of World War II and prior to that they were pretty well established. We wouldn't have much trouble with them because they too were struggling to get protective equipment and were pretty much for safety.

Were strikes called as frequently then as they are now?

No. Most of the strikes were in the thirties; that is, the big strikes and they were organizational strikes really. Later on they were long strikes for better pay but they weren't of a vicious nature. The original ones, they had to fight pretty hard just to establish themselves alone, but later on there wouldn't be any head cracking or baseball bats or anything like that.

That takes you pretty much into the years of the depression.

That would be the years of the depression.

What effect was that having on these smaller businesses especially that you could see?

The people of today have not seen a depression. This was something. I got out of high school in 1930. I could of had a job around 1933 but my dad needed help on the farm, so I stayed with him. I didn't get a job until 1935. If you can imagine going five years when you're out of high school and not getting a job, or even three years. My first job at Motor Wheel paid--I just got over the line when they were paying 70¢ an hour. Prior to that it had been 50¢. If any of us worked at anything other than production and I often did, such as on clean-up work, cleaning the greasers, repairing [?] seals and anything for maintenance people, 35¢ an hour. In those days we did have a place to wash but the towels were just rags and you'd have to watch if they'd been washed by someone. They'd have shavings in them and so you had to watch things like that. Fifteen minutes for lunch in an 8-hour day and you could hardly get time to eat. There were cockroaches in the rest rooms and everything and these were the things that really made the union. I think many of the companies could have prevented the unions if they had only taken care of these minor matters. At least they could of held them off for three to five years. Instead of that, they would do nothing. Some of the men would come in--they had what they called a bullpen. Now you had to come in every day. This is really the clock room and the lunch room. You'd stand out there all day. If they had work for you, they would give you a job. Maybe it would be for an hour, then you'd go back and sit in the bullpen. You got paid for the one hour. If you didn't come in, you got disgusted with that and you skipped a day, you could come in and stay as long as you wanted and they wouldn't give you a job. So these are the things, like I say, they could have prevented a lot of trouble if there had been a little more consideration. These are the things you don't hear about. That really caused so much trouble. Human beings are pretty patient but there is a limit to everything.

That just wouldn't be tolerated.

And that was 35¢ an hour. If anyone ever worked in Motor Wheel, they'll know what I mean.

You were talking about your music. Why don't you tell me a little bit about that?

Apparently, I am the only member of my family who has some musical talent and I've always loved music. As I was telling you, when we used to go to the Bijou, I got so much pleasure out of it. When I was a little boy, I sung a lot so they bought a Victrola and I got so that I could sing with almost anyone on there. However, I didn't turn into a singer possibly because I might have damaged my voice. When I was twelve years old, a neighbor bought their boy a violin. I went down there with my folks one night to a card party and I found that I could play the violin and this surprised my parents. About a month later a violin came in the mail from Montgomery Ward, a violin case, bow, two good books of

music, ones that were supposed to self-teach you the violin, and the whole business cost about \$23. We had a record of *Humoresque* by Dvorsak. I practiced with the phonograph until I could play that. About a year later I took lessons from a piano teacher at Bath. We didn't have a violin teacher. They didn't want to teach me but I told them if they would teach me the notes I would take care of the violin part of it. About a year and a half after I got the violin, I played at the Bath Community Hall, a solo with this teacher. The teacher was Mrs. Huyck, the wife of the superintendent who was killed in the Bath School disaster. Then I also took a few lessons prior to that from Mrs. Nellie Wilkins. She was a great help to me.

Was she in Bath also?

Yes. She was the wife of our delivery postman. Their son, Hubert [P. Wilkins], he took a great interest in wanting me to play in an orchestra. They had started a small dance orchestra. When I was about 13 or 14 years old, I played my first dances at Bath and Laingsburg. In those days I wasn't supposed to be playing in a dance hall and so I stayed right up on the platform.

Tell me what were the names of these halls and where were they located?

One was the Odd Fellows Hall in Laingsburg. This is where I did a lot of my playing to start with. The first two or three years that I played, I played right there for a Mr. Curtis.

Now were those dances sponsored by the Odd Fellows Club?

Yes. The orchestra had Hubert Wilkins, Alonzo Webster, and Marshall June.

And now the other place was where?

Bath Community Hall. Later on I got to playing in Lansing and almost every place. I had an orchestra of my own for nine years. We used to play the Dance Box at Eight Mile Corners and Long Lake up near Ionia, Perry, and Morrice, Lansing. I liked to play for mixed dances. I played at Club Roma. One New Year's I had as many as nine musicians.

Were they all local?

Mostly the musicians would be from Lansing. In World War II I got to substituting for orchestras and I enjoyed that very much. Later on I played two or three years for the Moose in Lansing which included floor shows. I played twelve years every Saturday night at Bradley's Hall in Lansing. I played three or five years for the Eagles.

Did you ever have anything recorded?

Yes, but not for commercial records. Is that what you mean? No. We played on the air one time when I played with an orchestra. We played out at Coral Gables a couple of years.

Whose orchestra was it?

Fred E. North (1906-1994) He died just recently. He became a professional musician. Lee Talboys (1930-2009) and I played together at a Bradley's Hall. Lee lived at Boyne Falls. A football scout brought him down here and he was playing with us and singing and learning to play sax. Later on he became fairly famous. He was the entertainer for the Globetrotters on half-time.

He was very well known.

I played with [Leverette] Derwood Carn's [1915-1999] Concert Orchestra and, I'll be darned, we played at the River Front Park in the summer time. We used to play in Potter Park. And I played with him for ten or eleven years and still belong to that orchestra. It's been a paying hobby, very enjoyable hobby, and now I recently played with Leo Ballsa.(?) I hope to play with his orchestra in the future now.

I think that's just fabulous.

Later on I took up saxophone. That was more of a money maker because it was more popular than the violin for dances then. Now I play about half and half, saxophone and violin.

Were they still having a lot of square dances in this area when you were young?

Yes, quite a few. That's probably why I had the jobs with the violin. I made it a point to keep up with all of them.

Someone mentioned there used to be a bandstand at the corners, Gunnisonville.

Yes there was there was a Gunnisonville band and they had their own bandstand. There was a grocery and post office there.

What years are we talking about?

It would probably be around the turn of the century, about 1900, and that was our post office in those days. This was ten or twelve years before I was born. My Uncle Harry [Cushman] who lived here at the time, that was his job every Friday night to walk down and get the mail. There was no rural delivery. My brother-in-law, Philo Hall, was an experimental tester for the Reo Motor Car Co. and he took our first mail carrier around with an automobile for the first time, experimentally.

When the mail came into Gunnisonville before the automobiles were used, I would assume it had to either be brought in by horse and wagon or horse and stagecoach or whatever.

As I recall, if a person went to Lansing, like anyone took some grain to Lansing, that they would pick up this mail and bring it back to Boyden [F.] Hubbard's (1851-1926) store. Incidentally, one of my friends, this Harold [C.] Hubbard (1907-1991) who is a grandson of his, he is still on as a retainer at the Motor Wheel Corp. He's a genius inventor. That man still exists. Harold Hubbard, he's a man around 71,72, I think at the present time. I bowled with him last year.

What was the first name of the man that owned the store?

Boyden. I think that you'll find on a plaque down there where he first got his license to be the postmaster.

Do you know when that store was closed?

No. The historical records on Gunnisonville will tell about that. I imagine in the very early 1900's.

Do you know which corner that was on?

I think it was on the northwest corner. That would be directly west of the church. As I understand it, there was a set of scales and a bandstand on the southwest corner.

What do you mean by a set of scales?

People could come there and weigh loads or weight cattle or things like that. They were apparently open scales. Maybe they were covered but my impression is that they were open scales. It might be that Mr. Hubbard had something to do with this, maybe for milk or cream. They were a heavy set of scales that would handle a good load.

Did your parents or grandparents go to church in Gunnisonville at all?

The Cushmans never seemed to be church people. I don't believe that a one of them was prominent in the church. They might find their names in it someday but I wouldn't be surprised at all if they didn't find that. Whether they contributed to building the first church or contributed labor, I've never heard them say. As a rule they were not people who were inclined to be leaders in that sort of a thing. They were also not inclined to be in politics.

You mentioned the Bath School and the Bath School disaster. Were you going to school at that time?

Yes. I was going to school. I didn't happen to have to take an algebra test until 10 o'clock and I was staying home cramming for the exam. If the schoolhouse had blown up as Mr. Kehoe had intended, I would of been one of the few who would of lived. I was laying on the couch here studying the algebra when the school house blew up. My wife, however, was in the building. Her brother dug her out of the rubble. I was pallbearer to four funerals in three days and I was only fifteen years old.

Did you know the man? What was his name?

Andrew Kehoe. I knew him personally. I can remember what he looked like very clearly. He had a shock of white hair, thin narrow face, and a lot of gold on his front teeth. He was not a person who would give away anything that would make you think that this was coming. He would do little acts of kindness even to the friends that he liked. He hid his activities in an amazing manner. I was to his place a year before at night, alone with him and his wife. He had a one-tube radio he had built himself and there was a basketball game on at the college. My folks were at my father's cousin's across the road for the evening and I went over there alone and stayed with them and listened to radio, that game, he and his wife. He treated me as nice as anyone could treat a boy of fourteen years old. It's hard to tell how he could of gotten away with it or gotten away with it alone. All the time there was hatred in his heart. Maybe he didn't intend to kill anyone as an individual, but people as a group.

It makes one wonder doesn't it?

Yes. It certainly does. I can't understand it. I never heard him say an unkind word although he had trouble, people (the superintendent of school) he argued with. He would do strange things like at my father's cousin's across the road. His dog kept going over there and he shot it. This is something that would put you on edge but lots of people see someone else's dog, if they chase their chickens or something like that, and they try to get it to stop it.

Do you remember your father or anyone talk about the flag stop down on Chandler Road just where State Road intersects Chandler, where the [Michigan Central] railroad crosses?

You're speaking of the siding there? Yes. I've set on that siding while going to Lansing while a freight train passed. This was used be on Chandler and that easily was in existence forty-five years ago. It's still is there. That road leading to the farm over there was an awful thing to travel certain times of the year. Yet, apparently, the [Zachariah] Chandler people did. He was dead before I was born. Up until I was 35 years old you still couldn't get across the marsh with a car.

I've heard stories about it burning out underneath the road even after it was paved and then the road caving in and it being closed for several years.

I think that might of been over on [US] 27 where they had problems like that. This road, there has never been a big fire since this one was been built. What happened, they deepened the ditch on Chandler Lane and piled the banks up high and they couldn't get the county to put a road through. So the farmers started using it themselves. They scraped it down. It was rolling and bumpy but the traffic, right away, it just amounted to a great deal so the county had to go ahead and make a road out of it. I'm glad to see it there. I would like to see one other road. I'll make a prediction and I want it so bad. I would like to see a road on the west side of Park Lake. I hope I will live long enough to see that because it's a long ways around Park Lake. You have to drive slow because there is kids on bicycles and playing in the road and I'm afraid some of the kids are going to get run over. I just hope, and I talk to everyone, that I want to see that road on the west side of Park Lake. That is in Bath Township and it's none of my business but I want it there.

That's the new highway?

The new highway will cross it but this will be Webster Road.

The new highway will cross it?

Yes it will cross it. It would be an extension of Webster Road. I'll get that in while I have a chance.

Do you remember trains ever stopping to take on passengers at the Chandler Road crossing?

Yes. I can remember stopping there and either picking up passengers or letting them off. Just how they stopped the train I don't know. Probably coming from someplace, they would tell the conductor. Someone had to get off the train, as I recall, and do the switching but I was on the north side of the train and did not see how they managed to stop the train or start the train.

I think you told me about when the Chandler house burned. Could you tell me about that?

Yes, I remember the late afternoon when it did burn. I can remember that when the building burned it was completely on fire so it appeared to be a large square burning. It was quite impressive at least to me as a child or young man. It was a wooden frame structure with the siding, vertical, and I had ridden up to it a number of times in the school bus where we picked up children. The road leading to it was miserable, almost impassable at certain times of the year. It was of corduroy construction which was logs laid at right angles across the road which is quite bumpy.

Did the county do that with corduroy? Do you think that was done locally?

That road was probably put in by order of Zachariah Chandler himself and that was the way they got to this main house. There was also another one which was called the foreman's house, east of there they say.

The superintendent did live in that house when Trowbridge had it. Did you hear anything about that? Trowbridge was a senator for Michigan at one time and he also was superintendent of Chandler's farm. He lived in that big house on the corner. Did you ever hear anything about that?

Yes. This is true. I think the only times that Chandler ever lived in the house was on occasional visits. I think the main supervisor, this was used by him also. I believe there was another house there for the hired help. It took quite a crew and that was a big thing operation. In fact, I have a cousin whose husband later on lived in that large house and raised a type of hay which was used for packing and shipping. That was about the last that the Chandler estate was operated as a farm.

Didn't a company from maybe Indiana come in here to raise that marsh hay?

I think you're right. I think it was a company from another state that ran it. I probably picked that up from some historical landmark.

You mean you don't remember the name of the company?

No. I know the last foreman over there. His name was Prince.

Was he employed by the Chandler estates or someone else?

Whoever owned the Chandler property, [he] was hired by him. I'm almost certain he was hired by the company who bought the grass that was used for packing.

Did they bring in farm equipment or did they come in strictly to raise the marsh hay?

This Mr. Prince had equipment of his own and apparently quite a lot of it because afterwards he bought a farm down near Shaftsbury, two or three farms, and did quite a lot of farming until his death, so I assume he had quite a lot of equipment of his own.

But it was his own equipment and not some that was sent in or provided by whoever owned the farm or for what purpose they would use it for?

I don't think so, although there might have been some equipment already there for operating a farm of that nature, being very lucky and so on.

Had it been empty before he lived in it?

Off and on the place was empty when I was a child. It didn't seem to me that there was always someone living in that house.

Did you ever go inside that house?

Never was inside that house. The closest I was to it was approximately 75'.

Was the barn on the east side of Chandler Road still standing when you were a youngster?

If there was any left, I was never down in there and saw it. The going was so bad that few people would try to get over there especially after automobiles came in. I know my folks never tried to go over there. We didn't have a car at that time anyhow.

When you went to Lansing what you had to do was go over and down Wood St.?

Wood St. was the way into Lansing.

Or over to 27?

In the early days 27 was just a plain dirt road and not 27 at all. The main road really was Wood St. Any other way to get to Lansing would be around Park Lake which would be terribly long. During the middle of summer vehicles did get through Chandler Rd. if you wanted to take the time and be careful but I never went across it until the farmers built their own road and got it started.

Do you know when the band started at Gunnisonville and or who sponsored it? What can you tell me about that?

All I know about the Gunnisonville Band is what my parents and sisters told me about that. There was a bandstand there. There were several people who mentioned about the band, where they say it played at towns away from DeWitt. Apparently, it was a well-known band and had pretty good musicians but it was located at Gunnisonville and did all its practicing and playing mainly at that bandstand that existed there. At that time there was also a grocery store and a post office in the grocery store and also a set of scales which was big enough to hold wagons or weigh cattle. Someone must of had a business there. The man who operated the store and post office was named Boyden Hubbard. He had a great grandson, Boyden, who died last year. A brother of this same boy whose name is Harold Hubbard is still alive and is approximately 72, 73 years old.

You don't know if the group was sponsored by a group or church or a school group or if they were just a group that got together? You really don't know for sure about that?

No. I think it was a group that was organized as a band. I don't think they were supported by anyone. There were a few people who were musically inclined, I think. At about the same time, they had what they called a mandolin band and perhaps some of that group was in it. One of our neighbors, Adam Rupp, played cornet/clarinet(?) in the band and lived about two houses west of us at that time, but this is before my day. Most of it that I know about it I heard from my parents and from my sisters.

I suppose the bandstand was torn down by the time you were a youngster that you could remember.

I never saw any indication of either the bandstand, the post office, or the scales. Many people, when they had reunions, spoke about those features in Gunnisonville.

You said you had your own orchestra but you never told me what you called yourselves.

Yes. I had a five-piece orchestra, based on five musicians and instruments, which I would expand to as much as nine if somebody wanted it. I operated that orchestra from about 1930 until about 1940. We played all over central Michigan and we played for mixed dances. –we used orchestrations.

What did you call yourselves?

Cushman's Night Owls.

Was the dance hall still over there at Merle Beach?

I played in that dance hall several times.

Just exactly was that located?

Right where the park is now on the north side. It was a 2-story building and the dance floor was on top. It was a beach and I think there was a restaurant below.

About what years are we talking about now?

The years that I played there would be around 1935 or '36 I think and it was quite an old building then. I may be wrong about the restaurant down below but there might of been rooms for people that might come out there to fish. You would have to stay overnight because you drove horse and buggy. That's when this was built. It was intended to do business.

I did not ask you when and where you were married?

I was married June 3, 1939. We were married in Lansing at a Lutheran church on Saginaw St.

which no longer exists. There is a much nicer and more modern church there now.

How many children do you have?

We had just one child, Johanna Grace Cushman. She's Johanna Grace Balzer now.

And she has children, doesn't she?

She has two children, both girls. One is Katherine Grace Balzer and the other one is Shannon Marie Balzer.

Now Mrs. Cushman's maiden name was?

Cressman.

And she was from this area, wasn't she?

Yes. She lived north of here about a ½ mile east and 3 miles north. Her folks had a farm there. In fact, she and her sister and brothers still own the farm.

And what were her mother's and father's name?

John [C.] and Bertha [D.] Cressman.

I'm going to ask Mrs. Cushman if she'll talk about the disaster at the Bath School, if she'll tell me a little bit about that.

Did you want me say anything about that depression?

Oh yes.

I got out of high school in 1930. The market crash was in the fall 1929. I don't think me and the class were aware of how bad it was going to be. Before it was over, most of the young men who had gone to work at Oldsmobile and had bought a car, lost the car, as everyone was out of work. My father had all of his crops in the granery for that year. He couldn't pay the taxes with those crops. During the first winter we needed some money to buy some groceries and we loaded up 100 bushels of wheat and took it to the elevator at Bath and we got \$34 for it. It was 34¢ a bushel. So you can imagine what things were like. We replaced our heating stove with a furnace so that we could burn wood and my dad and I cut wood all winter. There were small companies in Lansing, like brake repairs for automobiles, came out and cut wood on our farm. The employees and the boss would cut wood so they could heat their building in Lansing and repair cars. There were as many as six or seven crews at one time. It's interesting that, when the depression ended, we could almost tell it because one by one these crews left the woods. At the end of the wood cutting, I believe there were at least 20 or 30 cords of wood neatly piled up that no one ever came back to get. The depression ended just like that and they left.

Do you remember what you were paid for the wood that they cut on your property?

I think we took half of it.

Of the wood itself?

Yes. We burned it in the furnace. We'd go down to the wagon and get it. It was a very cold winters--and of course the wood was green--we weren't prepared for such a cold winter and so my father and I would cut wood any day that it didn't snow so much that we couldn't. We would just about stay even with this big old furnace in this house. It would burn so much wood.

Did you see that happening to many of the farm people in the area here that depend on the farm for livelihood?

It was very, very hard. I think the St. Johns paper, that print as fine as we're looking at upon this table, I think there were 7 or 8 pages of property for sale in Clinton Co. Very little was sold. No one would make any offers partly because they didn't have money and partly because they probably wouldn't want to take money away from people who had worked a lifetime to save it.

You say these were for sale. Were they for sale by the bank or county or foreclosing for taxes?

The county took it. The bank at Bath failed at that time and anybody that had savings lost all of it. Incidentally, the village of Bath did not get another bank again till the Clinton County Bank went in

there about two or three years ago. The first time I walked in to cash a check there, I said, "This is the first time I've walked in a bank at Bath for 50 years." That's how long it suffered.

Where was the bank in Bath located?

You know where the general store is at Bath? It's a meat market now on the west side of the street in the brick building with a brick front.

Which street are you talking about?

The main street of Bath.

The one that goes north and south?

North and south. You get half way down the hill on the west side, it's the largest building the north side of that. You'll notice there's a separate office-type arrangement that's where the bank was.

Mrs. Cushman (1915-1999), Mr. Cushman just told me when and where you people were married and that you were born out in this area and you grew up here. Can you tell me exactly where you were born, what road?

It's on Chandler Road just south of the Looking Glass bridge on the west side of the road.

Is the house still standing?

Not the one I was born in. That burned but there is a house I was brought up in.

And your maiden name was?

Cressman.

Cressman, And your full name is?

Wilma Grace.

I believe you had brothers and sisters in your family, didn't you?

I have one brother, Willis, and one sister, Thelma.

Did all of you go to the Bath School?

Yes.

Were you the only one that was in the explosion?

My sister graduated that year in '27 and she was over at the church practicing for graduation. And my brother was in the library. That didn't go down and he jumped out of the window in the back but I was in the part that went down.

And where were you exactly at that time, in a classroom?

In a classroom on the second floor. My homeroom was the first floor but our teacher had other classes. The classroom upstairs had come down to our room for a test and we had gone upstairs.

What can you remember about it? Can you remember the noise or--

We heard no noise. The papers on our desk all blew up into the air and we shouted, "Shut the windows," and then everything went. I was never unconscious. People say that isn't possible but I was never unconscious. I blew up in the air a long ways then came down and kept settling and settling. You could feel yourself settling, you know, as this dust and stuff under you settled. I was in the part where the roof sort of protected you. You could see arms and legs all under there.

Were you injured?

Not too much. I didn't go to the hospital. I have two scars yet but not--

I believe Mr. Cushman said your brother got you out?

Yes

Were you pinned in or not?

This roof was on my leg and I didn't know enough to turn around and wiggle my leg out. I could see that roof on there and so I just sat there. Then my brother came. I don't remember. I think he ran to get an ax to break this roof so I could get my leg out. I don't know where he thought he would get an ax. One of the neighbors that knew me--His name was Harry Barnard--came along and told me just how to

move. He said, “now you move this way and you move that way” until I worked myself out of there and then I crawled out, but I had no broken bones.

Now how old were you at this time?

12.

And your brother, how old was he?

I think about 15.

A little bit older than you.

Yes, and then my sister was, I believe, 17.

Do you remember anything about the reaction of the people coming in there? Do you remember anything about the excitement or the fright, the attitudes of the people, and what was going on?

As I walked out these children were all lined up that they had gotten out. I went across the road to a house, Smith's, and I said, “I don't want to see this.” They said, “You can go upstairs and sit in the window upstairs.” So I went upstairs and set down. After I sat down I started getting stiff all over and I thought, how am I going to move out of here, and then the second blast went off when he [Kehoe] blew up his car. I didn't worry about that any more. I was gone. The window all came in and everything and I ran down the stairs and started running for home. I got down, I think, as far as the railroad tracks. I think then my brother and sister met me or something. I remember we all went into Harry Dolton's down on the other side of the tracks. Then the neighbors brought my brother and sister home and another neighbor brought me home. Valentines brought me home, I think.

Weren't your parents terribly frightened?

My folks didn't know about it, except that my dad had a watering tank up by the house and he was pumping water for the horses. When this blew those horses reared right up in the air. He said, “There is something terribly wrong” and then they could see the smoke.

But he didn't hear a noise?

Yes. He heard noise, but they said because we were so close to it that's why we didn't.

You don't remember hearing it? You were right at it!

No.

Were the young children there terribly frightened? Was there a lot of chaos, a lot of fright?

No. I think they were more puzzled as to what was going on. You really didn't see them too much.

There was so much going on and at 12 years old you are going to miss a lot of things because you're feeling this fright yourself. All you could think of was, get out!

This is why I'm not in the book or anything because I took off.

I didn't even realize you weren't in that book?

No. I'm not in anything. I was a survivor. I lived in DeWitt Twp. and they kind of missed us.

Now what grade were you in at that time?

Fifth.

And so the children from Dewitt were going over to Bath?

If you were in the Bath Consolidated School District. We were in that district.

Do you remember anything about Chandler Road itself or anything that is particularly outstanding, that would be interesting about the area that we don't know about?

When I was little there was just the two tracks with the grass growing up the center. That was to Clark Rd. From Clark Rd. on it was just an old trail. Once in a while--my dad had a Model T Ford; he liked adventure--and he'd try driving down that road.

From Clark Rd. on you mean, going south, and there was just a trail coming down from the north to Clark Rd.?

It was called a public road but grass would grow up the center.

Was it named Chandler at that time? Did they call it Chandler?

No. I don't think any of the roads were named at that time.

Did you ever ride the trolley?

Yes, very few times because my dad always had a car of some kind. As far as I can remember we always went by car.

If you took a train, did you have to go to Bath to get on it?

Yes. You would but I never rode a train till after I was married.

You didn't?

Never. I rode the bus. The Indian Trails bus would come down Round Lake Road and I'd ride the bus into town.

How often did that run?

I think every day, the Indian Trail Line.

Like, went over in the morning came back in the evening?

I think so.

I want to thank you very much for talking to me I have enjoyed hearing what you have to talk about.