

Transcribed by Myrna A. VanEpps, Oct. 2018

This is Thelma Jenkins, a member of the Clinton Co. Historical Society and I am interviewing Glenn Osgood in his home at 204 W. Cass St. [St. Johns, MI]. When were you born, Glenn?

I was born October 30, 1894, in the little town of Britton, which is in Lenawee Co., southeast part of the state.

Can you tell me something about your parents; that is, where they were raised?

My mother had a sister who lived down in Lansing, Michigan. That is where dad was born and raised. Dad and my mother got together because she was there.

Where was she from?

She was from Ontario, Canada, and that's about the only thing I know. I don't know when they were married. [8 Oct 1888, Lenawee Co., MI]

What was your mother's maiden name?

My mother's maiden name was Emma Sarah Wereley.

And your father's name?

My father's name was William Rosco Osgood.

At what age did they marry, do you know?

I haven't the least idea.

They were probably so young.

Yes. He lived on a very nice farm down near Lansing.

What do you remember about your grandparents that lived on the farm?

I know very little about them excepting, when I was a youngster, I would visit them out there on the farm. They were very kindly and very fine people. They were religious people. They belonged to a Methodist Church in Lansing. They were very prominent in that organization.

What type of a farm did was it they live on?

It was a general farm, just about the type that existed everywhere back in those days.

You lived then on the farm when you were young?

Yes.

Do you remember their names?

You got me there. I can't recall exactly what their names were. They were always Grandma and Grandpa to me.

Where did your grandfather originally come from?

He came from New York State, my grandparents.

Like many people

Yes.

The language in the home was always English?

Oh, yes.

English background?

Oh, yes; English background. The Osgood's family originally came from England and I think there were about three brothers came across and then it expanded from there.

Do you remember any stories that they would tell about the old days that you can recollect, perhaps that your grandfather told you?

I really don't remember. No. All I know is that he was a very kindly man.

How did he come to Michigan? Do you know?

First they settled in New York State and just like a lot of folks, they gradually came westward. I presume [they] bought a farm and cleared it and built it.

What are your very personal memories as a little boy?

I can remember when I was a baby being put in a baby cab. My sister would come around and give me a ride. I remember that much. And when I began to have ambitions for something, I always wondered if Dad would give me a present of some cart or something like that. I always looked forward to that.

How old were you when you came to St. Johns?

I was 12 years old when I came here; came in 1898.

So your memory would be mostly of St. Johns?

The things I do remember back in those days is that Dad ran a grist mill. Behind the mill he had a chicken yard and raised some pigs back there. And I, just like a youngster, was doing a little exploring and I tried to get into the chicken coop. See, I tried to crawl in through the little door that opens into it and got stuck. One of the mill hands, fortunately, found me there because those pigs were kind of running around there, and [he] pulled me out. I also remember just wandering around in the mill. I remember going to church. My folks were very religious. I think they belonged to a Presbyterian church down there in Britton and on Thursday nights, prayer meeting nights, I was always along with them.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

Unfortunately, I had a brother and sister who happened to be born dead.

So you were raised alone then?

That's right.

How old were you when you came to St. Johns?

We came in 1898.

How did you come to St. Johns?

I presume we come by train. I don't remember exactly. I don't know how I got here.

How did you come to come to St. Johns?

Dad's mill burned and he was looking around for some other way to earn a living. He decided he wanted to be an undertaker, as they were called back in those days, and he heard that there was a business for sale here in St. Johns. He came up here and interviewed the party and made a deal. So he brought us up here in 1898 to live here. We lived at the corner of State and Oakland Sts. in St. Johns. I have a lot of vivid memories of that location and what happened there.

On what corner?

Down on the corner of State and Oakland Sts. on the SE corner. The building is still there. Part of it has been remodeled, but at that time, we had to have horses--that was our only transportation then--and a hearse to go with the business.

Was the business on that corner too?

No, but they had the barn on the south end of it. We had the use of half of a barn there. There weren't any houses so they had a lot of space there to play games. Because of that, we had lots of company. I also remember that, when I was a youngster old enough, Dad purchased a cow for me. I had to take care of her and take her every day out to pasture which is out where the Clinton Memorial Hospital is now [S. Oakland St.] and leave her there during the day; then at night, bring her in and had to milk her. I had some customers to sell my milk.

I remember a lot of things there. In the garden, a big space, you could do a lot of things there. I remember once that we wanted to make a dugout. **Harry Hulse** was my close companion. So we dug a big hole in the ground and covered it up with boards. Another thing that we enjoyed was tossing rings that were set up between a couple poles.

You made your own toys?

We made our own toys. Back in those days we had no concrete sidewalks. They were all wooden sidewalks and one of the pastimes was top-spinning. We used to sharpen the tips of our tops. The party we played with, he would spin his top and the other would try to hit that top with ours. We wondered if we could hit it and spin it.

What were the tops made of?

Wood.

How big were they?

Oh, just about a couple inches in diameter but it was quite an art to spin it and hit the other top. That was a real recreation, I tell you. If you spin the other guy's top, that was a real element.

Now, your father was an undertaker. What else did he do?

That was his occupation then. He had hard times getting established here.

I know you're some relation to George [Osgood]. Can you clear that?

They are distant relatives of mine. We always thought they were real close. They came from Lenawee o. also.

Did their family come before your family?

I can't recollect that.

What kind of activities was your mother in?

She was a very devoted church goer. They always had prayer meetings on Thursdays, an hour evening services in the church and, as I would say, I was dragged along every time. I had to go.

This was the Methodist Church?

That was the Methodist Church.

This was the first or second church that was here?

It was the second church, the brick church that burned.

The red brick church.

Oh, there's a lot of things I can remember about back I those days. This town had 13 saloons. There was no pavement downtown, just a dirt road and there were the ditches on both sides. It wasn't uncommon to see a young --- laying in the ditch that had been kicked out of the saloon.

What was your first recollection of downtown? What did it look like?

A lot of what it is right now. St. Johns hasn't changed too much since then, except there was a lot of saloons.

Was the interurban here when you came?

That came later.

Do you remember when it came?

I remember that. They came in on south Wight St. It ended right there where the Catholic Church is now because it couldn't make the curve around. When it first started out there was a steam locomotive with just one coach. They would stop right there on the corner, then go back into Lansing again.

You said it was steam.

Yes, then later it was electrified. Then they were able to go around the corner, then down to Main St. [Clinton Ave.] At the head of Main St., where the law offices are, that was their depot then; and then finally they would go down Main St. There was wire down on the bottom of Main St. that they could turn around. You follow to the end of the electrical line. Sometimes they would have difficulty getting up Main St. because the voltage was low at that end. They would try several times and finally make it.

Do you remember riding the rails throughout Michigan?

Oh yeah, sure. There is one thing that should always be recorded in the history of St. Johns--what they called the Sunday School Excursions. That was the main thing people looked forward to every summer. The excursion went to Detroit. I know about it was because my dad was the organizer. Because of the extreme low rate to Detroit and back, I think it was \$3 a round trip. At that time the train was pretty near empty going into Detroit. I'm quite sure that it started at Pewamo. They had one train that started there. They had a set of coaches there; then they would come to Fowler and fill up; then go on through St. Johns. There was another section that would start in St. Johns and go on to Detroit.

But that wasn't on the interurban. That was on a train.

That was on a train.

Why was it called a Sunday School Excursion?

I don't know why it was called Sunday School Excursion, but that was the name of it.

It wasn't necessarily Sunday School?

No, no. Dad was the organizer.

What did you do when you got to Detroit?

Went out and bum around usually and once in once in a while we would take a game down there.

That's baseball?

Baseball.

Were the Tiger's playing at that time?

Yes, oh yes.

What year would you say this is?

I would probably say 1908-1910, something right along in there. I can also remember my first automobile ride.[St. Johns Steam] laundry, which was right across from where the Methodist Church is now because on the corner there was a laundry there.

Do you remember the name?

I don't remember the name, but some way got ahold of an automobile and somehow got the man to take us around distributing the tickets for the Sunday School Excursion. That was one of the highlights of my life, I tell you

Do you remember what kind of car it was?

Oh, one of them chug-chug things with no windshield on it, just the ---up front. That was a wonderful thing. The roads were just dirt roads. They tangled around to Maple Rapids and so forth, and we never got as far as Pewamo because another party had charge of that, but we made that circuit in about a day's time. I tell you that was wonderful because we were just accustomed to horse-drawn vehicles back in those days.

Where did you start school?

I started school at what they called the East Side School down on the east part of town. **Sarah Pouch** was my teacher and I'll always remember her.

Was East Ward?

Yes, East Ward School now. It didn't have the addition on it at that time. It was just a 4-room school back in those days. She was a lovely teacher.

What was her name, did you say?

Sarah Pouch. I was talking about Mrs. Merrill, but it was long before her.

How long did you go to that school, all the way through?

I made it up to about the 5th grade or something like that, and then I was transferred up to what they call Central School now ... lower grades.

Then you finished your schooling in that building?

Yes.

What year did you graduate from high school?

In 1913.

Who were some of your close chums then, did you say?

Harry Hulse. He was younger than I am but he was my constant companion.

How about **George [Osgood]**?

No, I didn't. They used to live across the road from us on Oakland St. in those days but he had other connections, I believe. I didn't see much of him.

Is there anyone else that you can remember that you played with and played ball with that were in school at the same time?

I saw Jerry Daniel [probably **Gerald R. Danley**] who was our neighbor. Ones that I had more squabbles with were the neighbor girls next door. We had a tall wooden fence between us and they had an apple tree. I'd get up on the fence and walk along there. Katherine would come over there and try to shoo me off. Then there would be a squabble.

What were their last names?

Parr; **Kathryn and Esther Parr**. We had to make up our own games. We had what you called, Run, Sheep, Run that we organized, our groups. We had a lot of fun that way. Another one was called, Buck on the Rock.

Do you remember about your parents going shopping, buying clothing or food? Where did they go what stores that we had here?

They did all their shopping here in St. Johns because Lansing was a long ways off.

How long did it take to get to Lansing on the interurban?

On the interurban it didn't take very long but this is way before the interurban. I remember when, I think, one of the presidents came to Lansing and Dad hitched up the sleigh and we drove over there, and that was a day trip.

You don't remember what president it was?

No, I don't remember, but I remember going there and that's the first time I ever saw Lansing. It was quite a trip taken even by car even though it's only 20 miles. In those days it was about a day's trip.

Do you remember what stores were here when you were young?

Like I said, there were 13 saloons here. I always remember that. Mr. Chapman had his store where the Penney Co. is located.

What kind of a store was that?

It was a general dry good store.

He didn't sell groceries?

No. I can remember the places but can't recall their names right now who ran the grocery stores. I also remember right down there where the State Discount Store is located, that they had an express office. Dad went away on a trip and I thought Dad would send a card or something like that. I would always beat it to the express office hoping a card would show up there. I remember that. It never happened but that was my interest then.

What about the Hicks Store?

That was there. I didn't know the Hicks's very well until we moved over to where I live now. Then I got well acquainted with the girls. They were our backyard neighbors.

Do you remember anything special about that association or adventure?

No, other than that they were our backyard neighbors and they entered into the group games we would have.

Do you remember when the Hicks house was built?

No, that was built before my time. That lot was owned by the older generation, not the young **John Hicks** who ran the dry goods store down there.

What happened to the original Mr. Hicks?

I think he ended up in the dry goods business there but I think he made his money in furs and so forth back in those days.

Was that house sort of a hub of social activities?

Not particularly. Mrs. Rawson [Ida H. Rawson] who was John's [Hicks's] sister, was a very religious lady and very prominent in our church. She organized a Sunday School class of young men. She was very generous. She bought the property right across from our church now where the Shell station is located. It was a nice little building there and furnished it for folks to gather around. They had a piano in there. One man named, Billy?, who was a good pianist, he would come down there and practice. She had two tennis courts adjoined and we certainly enjoyed that.

Did she have your Sunday School class in that room?

No, it was just a meeting place. I think only one time she had Sunday School there but it was only for the general use of the community.

Do you remember talking with any old people when you were young that lived here and what went on in forming this town and so on--any of the prominent men?

The Allison's [**Robert G. Allison**] ran the jewelry store; the Schofield's lived across from us; a young fellow named, **Howard [S.] Schofield**, was one of my competitors, now I remember.

What did his father do, did you say?

I really don't remember what his folks did [1900, dry goods salesman], but the Allison's were connected with him and they ran the jewelry store.

Do you remember when St. Johns had their first electricity or running water?

Oh yes. Back in those days there was just a --- pipes. Finally, they built a generator down by what they called the old water works and started generating electricity and I think at that time it was both alternating current and dead current. ... on the corner there. Dad then wired our house. (Actually, we rented it.) The lines weren't embedded at all. They were just all open. And the thing I remember about that, he'd always have the porch light on. That light would always attract the drunks that were on their way home. Once in a while the drunks would stop there and the custom them days was, my Dad would send them to the preacher. He was accountable for all these drunks and all these people and he was supposed to take care of them.

When did you decide what you wanted to do with your life?

Well, I really had no particular ambition, no plans at all. I think I wanted to be an engineer and Dad made arrangements for me to go to Michigan State that was "MAC," Michigan Agricultural College, back in those days. I graduated from there in 1917 just at the beginning of WWI. We were very patriotic back in those days, never realized what war was like and a lot of us folks over at the college went down to enlist. Both my roommates and I were turned down the first time. We weren't contented with that. We went to a different place. I was turned down but my roommate was accepted. I finished school, graduated, and the draft was in order back in those days, and was waiting now to be drafted. The first draft came along and I was turned down again. The second draft came along and I was turned down because I had a hernia. Then they began to scrape the bottom of the barrel and I knew when the third draft came along they would take me anyway and fix me up. I would have no choice of just what branch I would like to go in. So I managed to go down to what they called a Hart Clinic and got patched up, not realizing I was under the orders of the draft board.

When I was well enough, I enlisted in what was called a "Signal Corps," which was then the branch of the Aviation Corps. They took me and I was sent to Washington, College Park, Maryland. Because of my education, they decided to give me a course in electronics. I got some of the basics there at Washington Park, Maryland, and finally was sent to Columbia University in New York City. That was quite a strenuous course. And I can tell you right now there wasn't any fooling around. The boys that were there, they paid strict attention to what was going on because they knew if we didn't pass that we would be sent across in the trenches, and we didn't like that.

Did you eventually go overseas?

No. After we finished our course at Columbia University, we were sent down to Fort Sill, OK. Our job then was to equip and maintain radios in the planes, spotting planes. They were used mostly in those days just as spotters in those days. That was our job to equip and maintain the radios in those planes. Finally, we went down south anyway, to another place. This happened to be on another airfield which had been cleared from a swamp. Because of the location, we had quite a time with mosquitoes down there. When we'd go to bed at night, we had mosquito netting over our bunks. Then we became what was called the "lost squadron." That was the tail end before we were sent overseas. For some reason or other, other squadrons would come through and complete their course and were sent overseas but we were left there. We don't know why. So we were named the lost squadron but there was one advantage of it. We always inherited the mess of the squadrons leaving. They might be there a short time and be well equipped with food and so forth and hadn't used it up so we took advantage of that and we lived pretty well. I just wanted to tell you about this time when everyone was dying off.

With the flu?

Yes, flu that was raging in those days and then we were fortunate again. They began to experiment on the men in the different squadrons. Fortunately, they left us to be the control so they left us alone and would experiment with the people in other squadrons. Unfortunately, they didn't know very much about it and they began to die off like fleas and we were left alone. The good Lord was good to us, I'll tell you.

Then did you get out of the service?

We were left there, as I said, for some reason we couldn't understand. We were well equipped. We knew our business, but other men would come and go through and be sent overseas and we were just left there. I remember one time word came through that Armistice was going to be signed. We were down in the shack occupied by the YMCA people at that time and the word came that Armistice had been signed. We were happy about it, no big flare up. We came back to our barracks. Nothing happened until the next day when people began to realize that something had happened and then they went wild. Celebrating!

So were you discharged shortly after that?

I was discharged around the 1st of Dec., just before Christmas we were sent home, but one thing I'll always remember that we were given one day to go into town and have a good time because the lieutenant and so forth had that badge over us we were able to leave before we were because we were just ordinary enlisted people. They would go to town and take up all the accommodations and we had to pick up what was left. This I'll always remember: My buddy and I finally found a place and paid,

deposited our money, and thought we were all set for the night. It was a hot day and we finally went to bed and I'm perspiring like everything, sweat just running off my face. We slept for a while. Then I turned on the light and we were just covered with bedbugs. Did we get out of there in a hurry! We spent the rest of the night on a park bench.

You got home then the first part of Dec. 1918?
1918.

When did you start working with your father or as an undertaker?

By that time Dad ran a furniture and undertaker business in partnership with Ed Osgood. That is George Osgood's father. He finally bought out his share and when I came home he just owned this whole business and I helped on weekends when I was home.

You were still going to college?

I was still going to college on the railroad, I would commute the interurban. I got a job over at Lansing, the Reo Motor company, and then with the state highway department and was probably sitting around waiting for somebody to come along and draft me.

For what kind of job?

Well, anyway that was really before the war had ended. I'm just a little bit ahead of my story but I can remember one time we came home and a tornado had come through St. Johns here and had ripped off the top of a building downtown here and leveled the depot and turned our barn around about halfway.

What year was that?

That must have been about 1919.

After the war?

Right after the war and I'll always remember that.

Did it affect your father's business?

Oh yes. We had a storage right down where the post office is now, right at the head of the alley, and that's where we stored our hearse and our burial boxes. I'll always remember what happened then. That tornado lifted that building right up and left all those boxes standing up the hearse intact.

It didn't damage them?

Never damaged them at all. All the roof and everything was strewn down the alley.

What year did you get married?

My last year of my college I got acquainted with my wife at a dance. I belonged to a fraternity over there and we would have an annual big dance. There was one member who always had a very fine reputation for always having a very good dancing partner and in those days we had cards to fill out if we wanted to swap dances. Because of his reputation, everyone wanted to swap dances with him. It was my turn and the only opening he had was just before intermission. He was a good fella. He never had any problem getting dances anyway and so he agreed to swap one with me then. Now this is one of those sneaky things I very seldom do and I didn't realize at that time. I liked the girl I was dancing with, so when intermission came we didn't swap back until after intermission. That's how I got acquainted with Fay [nee Still].

Where was Fay from?

Her mother was running a rooming and boarding house out there at the college. He dad was killed on the railroad. He left her mother a small amount of money, insurance money, and she was determined to have Fay and her sister, Elsie, and her brother, Murdo, given a good education. She determined to have them a college education. So she settled there.

Where was she from originally?

I don't remember. I know they were from Traverse City [MI], and up along that way [born in Bay Co, MI] That's how she put the girls through college and her son, Murdo. On top of that, she helped out some of her nieces, put them through school downtown.

When were you married?

We were married on Aug. 25, 1921.

Then did you come back to St. Johns?

Yes, we came back to St. Johns and then I was in business with my dad. I finally settled down and went into business with my dad.

How many years were you together in business? How many years did your father live?

My dad was killed in 1930 on a hunting trip. My Dad went hunting with **Ray Merrill**, our preacher, and **Francis Shafley**. On the way up there, near Shingleton, they hit some loose gravel. The car turned over and my dad was killed.

What year was that?

1930. I'll always remember that. I was in charge of the business back home here when word came that he had been killed. It was Friday the 13th.

So you were in business with your father from 1921 to 1930?

That's right.

That wasn't very long, was it? Can you think of some interesting things? Have you always been in this one building where you are now?

No, we finally bought the building where Curt's Appliances is located now.

Was it a furniture store then?

It had furniture and undertaking. It was called W. R. Osgood and Son. That was the name of our firm. We had very good competition back in those days. Our funeral business was going very good. We really knew very little about the furniture business. Our competitors owned a factory, I think in Grand Ledge, and so forth and was well up on furniture.

When did you convert from horse-drawn carriages?

I remember back in those days. In the winter time, they had no snow plows then and transportation was by sleigh. That was one of our occupations back in those times, fun times, the kids could always catch a ride on sleighs. Farmers were very kind to us. They'd go by and we would run and catch on a sleigh and ride a ways. Then when the winter came we would have to equip our hearse with sleighs. That's the way we got about.

At that time did you take the family to the cemetery like you do now?

Yes, we used to have what they called "livery barns" here in town and the owners would have two or three vehicles called "hacks" back in those days. Any prominent funeral, we would arrange with them to use the hacks for the family to ride in.

You didn't furnish the transportation?

We didn't furnish anything.

What year did you move into the building you are in now?

In 1928 we decided, I guess, we'd enough of the furniture business and we thought we would just do the funeral business only. Things worked out very well for us. At that time we had a very good competitor, Mr. [Clarence D.] Ebert. Dad remodeled the home that we're in now, not to be used as a general funeral home, but back in those days most funerals were held in the home or in the church.

You didn't have to have a parlor?

No parlors at all, but lots of times we have what you called "ship-ins." The people had no place to go and dad would bring them up to our home and have it here. That's why this big building right here.

This was your father's home before you?

Yes.

Then before you had the funeral home where it is now?

Yes. I don't mind telling about it. Mr. Ebert didn't like us to have a place as good as this to do business in so he did a little conniving. He worked with our neighbors, got them worked up. Now before then, they were very nice. They thought it was very fine that that Dad would open his home to unfortunate people who had no place to have a funeral and they would bring flowers over and so forth. That didn't settle very well with Mr. Ebert. I think people who knew him knew he wasn't the kind of person to stand back and let things go our way. So he managed to get well acquainted with both neighbors on both side of us. In fact, he would bring pies and cakes and after we had this place remodeled here, we weren't really using it for a funeral business, but he was afraid we would be. He managed to get our folks upset about it and first thing we knew, we had notice that they weren't very happy about having a funeral home here.

This wasn't zoned a business area?

No, it wasn't.

Was that when you bought the parlor you have now?

Not yet. I'm getting to that. The next day--we had a joint drive down through here--and Mr. [probably **Richard B. Canning**] was very easily upset and to set us off, he built a curb right down the middle of the drive so we couldn't drive in or out of our place here. And the next thing we had a legal notice that we couldn't use this place. Because of our trouble here, we were looking for a place now to build a funeral home. The place down there across from the Catholic church where we're located now, became available and we managed to buy the place and set up business there. That was 1928 and we've been there ever since.

How large an area did your business serve?

Because we were hemmed in on the east by Ovid, and their business came as far west as Shepardsville; on the west, the Goerge Funeral Home kind of divided up the business between Fowler and St. Johns. Then the Abbotts had the funeral home over at Maple Rapids. I guess we were kind of hemmed in, in the little area of St. Johns.

St. Johns and the rural area between--

Yes, and the rest of it was divided up with our competitors. Before the Eberts took over the business, E. I. Hull & Sons were the ones who ran the furniture and funeral directing business as our competitor. They knew a lot more about furniture than we did. That's why we finally just left it alone.

You had to be a good furniture salesman to be a good undertaker in those days.

You really had to know about furniture. Anyways, I'll always remember this one occasion. This family happened to be divided a little bit and their mother was to be shipped in from away. One half of the family came to us to take charge. The other half went to our competitor. Everything was all set up. The body was to come in on the interurban. Not knowing that there was any trouble in the family, we expected to meet the car right there at the station. At the time that the interurban came in, we met there and no corpse! Finally, we found out the fact that our competitor got ahead of us. He had gone out south and got on the car on the edge of town and took charge, so when it arrived here at the station we were on the outs.

What hotels were in town at the time when you were a boy?

I remember we had three hotels. The Steel Hotel was already built. There was another one where the Gamble Store is located; then another one down on Railroad St.

You know the names of them?

I don't remember the name of them. I do remember we didn't have very good places to go out and eat. So, if Dad wanted to take us out for a nice meal, he would take us to one of these hotels. The one I'll always remember--it wasn't a hotel but it was an eating house. It was called, The Merrill House, just about half a block down from where Dr. Russell [E. Walker St.?] is.

What about any big fires in the community?

Because when I was a youngster Dad's building burned, his grist mill, I was always afraid of fires and I can remember when the St. Johns Table Factory burned. I was scared and I kept away from it. Another fire that was big at that time was when the Bunday Bedding Co. [burned].

Describe a typical 4th of July celebration as a child.

Of course, 4th of July was a big thing-- **TAPE ENDS**