

This is Thelma Jenkins, a member of the Clinton Co. Historical Society, interviewing J. D. Robinson in his home in Eureka on Nov. 1, 1978.

Where were you born and when?

I was born April 20, 1908, at Ada, Kent Co., Michigan.

Can you tell something about your parents? Do you remember way back then?

These are things that happened before I was born. My dad used to run a ferry boat across the Grand River on Math(?) Avenue. My dad and my uncle and my grandpa ran this ferry boat because, seemed like every year or so, the bridge would go out and they had to have a ferry boat. He was real busy because people were hauling fruit to Grand Rapids. He also ran a grist mill there in Ada, besides farming.

What was their name, your father and mother?

My father's name was Fred Robinson. My mother's name was Blanche VanTasle.

At what age did they marry: [15 Oct 1897]

This is rather odd. She was probably 16. I should tell you my mother was married to 2 brothers, not at the same time, of course, but she married Frank Robinson. They had 3 children. She married him. She was about 16 and he was probably 34. Then he died. She had 3 children. Then she married my dad who was Fred Robinson and they had 5 children. Probably, when she married Fred Robinson, she was around 21-22 years old and he was 17 years older than she was.

Where were they raised?

My mother was born in Trufant, Michigan. That's in Montcalm Co. My dad was born in Greenville, Michigan, which is also in Montcalm Co.

On a farm?

My mother never lived on a farm until she was married, but my dad lived on a farm, was born on the farm at Greenville. My mother always lived in the little town of Trufant. You might be interested to know that her father was a Civil War veteran and her mother died quite young. She was always being farmed out somewhere to live and I think this is one reason she married so young. She never really had a home.

How did they meet? Did she work?

She met Frank Robinson when she was working for his sister, my Aunt Kelly, and that's where she met him. Being in the family, that's apparently how she met Fred Robinson.

Do you recollect anything about your grandparents?

I only had one grandfather of all my grandparents I ever knew and he died when I was 5 years old. I can remember him.

Do you remember his name?

Nelson Robinson.

When did you come to Clinton Co.?

When I was 4 years old. That would be 1912, wouldn't it be?

What language was spoken in your home?

It was always English.

Your parents were of English descent then?

Yes, Scotch descent; my mother, VanTasle, it was Holland descent, but never[spoken] in their home.

Your grandfather was born in this country too?

Yes, both grandfathers.

Do you know any stories of the old days that perhaps your grandfather told you?

I as pretty young to hear any stories from my grandfather, but my dad, I wish I had listened to him more closely because it would have been real interesting now. He worked in the woods and he also worked on the river floating logs down the river. I heard this story so much. I guess I thought to myself, well yes, you worked in the woods and you worked on the river, so what? Now I wish I knew more about it--where he was. I do know he worked on the Titabawassie River, which is from Saginaw and down, but that's about all I know about that. He probably had some interesting stories to tell about the woods and like that and the river and if I had bothered to listen to him. I was too young to be interested in it.

What are the first memories you have as a little boy in Clinton County?

I started going to school at what they called the Bogus School at that time and later on was the Serviss School. Then we moved over south of Ovid and I went to the Dennison School. This school is located where Sleepy Hollow State Park is and this school will be restored. We moved back on the same farm and I finished at the Bogus School.

Did you have any brothers or sisters?

I had 2 brothers and 5 sisters. Four of those sisters are still living and the brothers are gone.

Would you name them, please?

Frank, Fred, Ellen, Nettie, Beatrice, Mildred, Belva

In order of their age?

I guess I got Frank and Fred first, and Ellen was the oldest.

What kind of work did your father do?

He was mainly a farmer. He farmed all his life, except for the time I told you about when he ran the ferry boat and had the grist mill. In my memory he was always a farmer, except after we moved to St. Johns he fired the boiler at the Steel Hotel and my mother cooked there. Later on he went to work for Colby at the Steam Laundry [in St. Johns].

Where was the farm located that you lived on?

The one that I remember the most was south of Ovid, but he was also on a farm up in Kent Co. near Montcalm Co., near the town of Trufant where my mother was born.

Now, let's talk about your mother a little bit. What were some of her daily activities?

With 8 children you can imagine what most of her daily her activities were. Washing and ironing and canning and cooking on the farm. She always did a lot of canning. She washed on the old scrub board that most of us can remember [using] water from a well. In fact, when she lived at Ada,-- this is before my memory-- they got their water from a spring. This water had to be carried from a spring. She also made butter, sold in Grand Rapids, and [did] mostly just farm-life activities. With that large family there was plenty of activities.

How much did you help around the house and yard and so on when you were a boy?

Not much around the house but I was always busy around the farm from the time I was 6 -7 years old and even to drive a team when I was old enough to drive a team on the hay loader. I was always working on the farm until we moved into town. Then my father's health failed, and [he] had some financial reverses on the farm and we moved into St. Johns. This is when I told you about that my mother worked at the Steel Hotel. She cooked there and my dad fired the boiler. That was hand-fired in those days. There was no stoker.

Did you live in the hotel as a home?

No, we lived at home. My dad almost lived there in the winter time because he had to get up about 3 o'clock in the morning to get the boiler going, so he wasn't home very much. He'd get home for a little while during the day and then go back. He slept there of course.

Were you born in a home or in a hospital?

I was born in a home. The doctor was late getting there and so the neighbor lady helped deliver me. I was already there when the doctor got there. They had to go clear to Ada to get a doctor. By the time he got there, it was too late and this lady by the name of **Mrs. Turner** is the one who helped deliver me.

Can you remember some of the home medical remedies they had when you were a child?

I can remember hen's oil that they gave me when I had the croup. That was from the fat of a hen< My dad had a favorite remedy. It was cattail root made into a poultice. One time my sister was very sick with pneumonia. In fact, the doctor had almost given her up and my dad went with his old remedy. He got this cattail root, made a poultice out of it. He put it right on her chest just as hot as she could stand. The next morning, when the doctor came, he couldn't believe how much better my sister was. He used that some other times too. That's something he learned from the Indians.

Getting back to your mother canning, do you remember what kinds of fruits and vegetables she put up?

She put up a lot of tomatoes. She canned pears and strawberries, most everything that could be canned, I guess.

Anything different than we do nowadays:

No, not I can think of. I suppose her canning operations were somewhat different.

Like apple butter?

Oh yeah, she used to make apple butter.

Outdoors?

No, I think she always made it in the house. She always canned beef too because we would butcher a beef and she would have this canned beef.

What kind of transportation did your family use most of your childhood?

Most of it was horse and buggy, although when we moved over south of Ovid, we did have Buick car that was probably about 1916 or 1918 car.

When you moved from Ada to Clinton Co., do you remember when you moved and how you moved?

Yes, we moved from near Trufant, Michigan, when we came to Clinton Co. My father and 2 brothers came with a team and wagons, and they chased the cattle through and they slept along the road in church sheds and like that. It probably took them 2 or 3 days. I remember one incident they were telling about: They were so mad because they had a chicken that they brought with them and the dog got it and ate it all up; so they lost their chicken that way.

What were the roads like at that time?

They're certainly not like--a couple of wagon tracks and that was it! There was no pavement. I can remember when they built the pavement from St. Johns to Lansing and we thought that was quite a thing we had pavement that could go about twenty miles.

Going through Ada to Ionia?

I wasn't there. I'm sure it was just wagon tracks.

How did you get here then?

We came by train, my mother and the smaller children.

Did your father ever tell you about his school days and your mother; how much schooling they had?

My dad, I believe, had probably what would be comparable to an 8th grade education. He went to school in Greenville. I don't know but I imagine my mother just had grade school [education].

Do you remember any of your playmates you had when you were real young?

Yes, I can remember most of them. In fact, there's one of them that lives within a couple miles of us now. That is **Paul Vitek** and he and I were very good friends.

How old were you then?

Since I started school. I'd have been about 5 years old and he was about the same age. He's a couple years older than I am, but he was not quite so far along because he had to learn the English language before he could do very much in school. That was one thing that took him a couple years to get caught up because he came from a family of Czechs [Hungarian], I think they were. They didn't speak the English language at home. His dad got very fluent with it later on but his mother never did learn it very well. He lives over here in more or less of a rest home. He's quite well crippled up. I see him every once in a while. Most of my other school mates are—, some of them I see once in a while. The Jumpers; **Alice Jumper**, she was in school when I was.

What about your teachers? Do you remember anything special about your school teachers?

I was real surprised to run into one of them two years ago down in Florida. They had what you call the "Ovid Picnic" and this lady got up and said her name was **Irene Cook**. I couldn't believe it. I went over and asked her. She was one of my school teachers when I was in Dennison School.

What grade would you have been in then?

I would have been probably the 5th-6th grade. She said that she went to County Normal and she was about 18 years old, when she started teaching. You see she wouldn't have to be an awful lot older than we were.

She probably had a normal instead of a college education?

Yes.

Can you recall any poems or recitations you did back in your school days?

I can remember being in school plays and I can still recite most of the poems we had when I was a kid. I seem to have a good memory for that. I can remember one school play that I was in. I was a hired man and my name was Jake. I carried that name, Jake, for several years even after I moved to St. Johns.

Did you have spelling bees and things like that in your school?

Yes, we had spelling bees. It sounds like bragging but I was always a very good speller. Spelling was always one of my strong points and I used to spell down this whole school.

Can you think of any fun things that happened to you or your friends while you were in school?

I can remember one time when the snow was quite deep and we kids were putting blocks of snow in the doorway and when the teacher came to the doorway to ring the bell, it all piled in on her. She wasn't too happy about that.

What kind of games did you play at school?

We played the regular games, pom pom pull away; fox and geese; and some of the running games. I can't think just what they call them now; skating and sledding.

Where did you parents go to do their shopping most of the time for food and clothing and other items?

Mostly Ovid, when we lived over there, and St. Johns when we moved over in this area. Most of it was by horse and buggy. I can remember coming to town and stopping at the Byerly store and Happy Hearn(?) which a lot of people around here remember--she was in the Byerly store. They would always come up and blanket the horse for us because when you drove up, the horse had to be covered up.

Did your mother make most of the clothing?

Yes, practically all of it.

Did your family take vacations?

Our vacations usually were—we would get into the car and go up to Montcalm County to see my uncle, my father's brother, and I had some cousins that lived there too.

Did you stay longer than a day or so? That's quite a little ways.

Yes, we usually stayed maybe 2, 3, 4 days. My cousin, who was about my age, we used to sleep together and talk way into the night.

What particular stores do you recall in St. Johns?

I remember the Spaulding store in Ovid. That's where we did our grocery shopping. I remember the Burks store where I later on worked and the Byerly store. I can remember practically all of the home-owned stores in St. Johns because I drove a delivery wagon and delivered groceries to all the home-owned stores.

How old were you when you started that?

I was about fifteen years old when I started working on that.

Did you have a truck or horse and buggy or what?

I had a horse and wagon. I wished I'd saved a picture of it because it was a regular old horse and wagon. You stood on the side to go with the horse and we delivered--

Was it covered?

Oh yes it was covered over. It had a step that you stood on the side. It resembled quite a lot these milk wagons that you've probably seen.

You delivered for all the stores?

We delivered for all home-owned stores. There weren't very many chain stores at that time. All the what they called home-owned stores we delivered to. We had 3 delivery wagons. A man named John Ennis owned the business and my brother and I worked for him. Several other people in St. Johns have worked on this same delivery outfit.

That was just in the city limits?

Yes, although after I started working for Burk's store, I drove a truck for them for a while. We did sometimes go out on the pavement maybe 3 or 4 miles if we had a big order of barrels of flour, a hundred pounds of sugar, or like that.

Do you remember talking to any old people when you were young? Did they tell you stories about St. Johns or Clinton Co. in years before your time?

I've heard so many things about the Hicks's. I remember one man, Mr. Parr, who was also related to the Parr's in the Parr grocery.

You mean Parr's Drug Store?

Yeah, but he was Parr's grocery then.

I remember telling about Armistice Day and the big celebration they had Armistice Day. I remember them telling us about two businessmen who were celebrating so much that they drank just a little bit too much and they got up and tried to stand up and make a speech and could hardly stand up and make the speech. This was their way of celebrating Armistice Day.

What are some of the differences between growing up now compared to when you were a child?

One difference is, I always lived a mile and a quarter from school, both places I lived. We always walked to school and back. Very seldom did we ride to school. My folks might come and get us if there was a downpour but usually we walked to school. Things are altogether different as far as entertainment is concerned. We had to make our own entertainment—get up a bunch of fellas and go somewhere and play ball or something like this. We didn't go so far from home as kids do nowadays because it was harder to get anywhere. Even when we had cars, they were Model T's and like that and bad roads.

When you were a child, what did you expect to do or be when you grew up or didn't you make any special plans?

It's rather amusing in what I always thought I would like to do. I always thought I'd like to work for the post office and I think I got the idea more or less from rural carriers than anything else because that's about all we saw. I remember **Lyle Steves**, who is still living and worked here at the post office, and he was our mail carrier. He was quite a young man when he started in and I used to look at Lyle and think what a wonderful job that would be. There is a little more work to it than what I assumed at that time. That is one thing that I always wanted to do. When I was a kid, we used to have the hucksters who came through from different towns (Shepardsville, Price, Jesse) over here. They would have their grocery wagons, a team of horses on it. My brother-in-law built me a little thing to go on my little express wagon, which was a grocery wagon, and I used to get some empty cans and like that and go around and [pretend to] sell those groceries. Later on, it turned out that I was selling groceries.

How would you have described a successful person at that time you were growing up?

I presume at that time I would probably have thought of what they had and what they owned. That probably would have been my idea of success in those days.

Describe a typical 4th of July when you were a child. Do you remember celebrating the 4th?

Yes, I do. I can remember we always had little firecrackers. There was nothing very dangerous. Sometimes we had sky rockets which my older brothers would set off. After I got a little older, we would come into St. Johns where they had the fireworks. I can remember one instance coming up to St. Johns over where the park is now (They called it Emmons Woods.) where they were putting on the firework display and the fireworks all caught fire and were shooting every which way, and it was quite scary. I remember that I fell in sort of a hole trying to get out of there. They had a place where they had rubbish and like that and I fell in that, scrambled out. One of my friends, **Eddie VanSickle** that I went to school with, he was so scared ran the other way. When he found out where he was, he was out in the middle of the woods somewhere, but he did find his way back.

What are some of your earliest memories of Christmas?

I think the one I remember the best was the year I got my air rifle. We were very hard up which we always were when I was a kid anyway. I was old enough to know where the presents came from and I had hinted very strongly for an air rifle. My folks said, "Remember, the younger children still believe in Santy Claus. We have to get for them first because we don't want them to lose their faith in Santy Claus." When I came downstairs in the morning (We always hung our stockings up and had them on a chair), on my chair there was an air rifle. I don't think there was ever a kid any happier in the world than I was to get that air rifle because I was just positive I wasn't going to get it, you see.

What effect did the 1929 depression have on your family?

Probably not as much as it did on some people because we were always so hard up, my dad on a rented farm and raising 8 children, that we never had very much even before the depression, so it probably didn't hit us as hard. I remember one winter though we had a pretty good crop of beans and I never got so sick of beans in my life as having beans for breakfast, beans for dinner, and beans for supper. Then the depression was still on when I more or less grew up. I had to quit school and go to work. That's when I was on this delivery wagon too. I can remember, later on, I went out and worked in the peppermint for a dollar a day, 10 hours a day. If you lost an hour, you were docked 10¢. At the end of the week you had \$6 if you worked right on through. So that's how I can remember the depression too. Later on, I went to work for Burk's Grocery [Burk's Foodland] for, I think, \$11 a week and I thought that was a pretty good job. I was still helping support my folks, helping put my 2 sisters through school. Then I studied my sisters' school books and I always liked to read. I more or less educated myself in that way. Then [Dorr] "Andy" Anderson came in and bought out Burk's Grocery and he raised me to \$18 a week [Anderson's Foodland]. Before that I was getting about \$12 and running a Sunday paper route.

About what years was those or that?

Those would have been, let's see, I was married in 1936; it would probably be 1931-'32, or like that. I was still running the Sunday paper route when I got married. I paid my rent by running the Sunday paper route. My brother and I, we took our cars and delivered *The [Detroit] Times*, *[The] News*, & *[Detroit] Free Press*. Each one of us took half of the town. We made 2¢ a paper on the *Free Press* and *News* and 1-½¢ a paper on the *Times*. The paper sold for a dime then.

What was your brother's name?

Fred Robinson. He was somewhat older than I was. He was about 10 years older, but still hard times. He was married and had a family. He lived in St. Johns.

Did you or your parents belong to any church or club or any other group?

We always attended church. I don't think my dad ever had a church membership, but my mother was always a Methodist all her life, from the time she was a child. Her dad was a strong Methodist and her mother was a United Brethren. So there was a second marriage for them. He was a very strong Methodist; she was United Brethren. I can remember her telling about one time (As I said before, she had no mother.) and she got up in the morning and had a rip in her dress, probably only had one dress, and she was sewing it up and grandpa said, "What are you doing?" She said, "I'm sewing up my dress." He said, "You don't sew your dress up on Sunday." She said, "I can't go to church then." He said, "You'll stay home from church then. You won't go to church." That's how strong he was on that.

Did you belong to any other club or group?

I don't believe that they did.

Farm Bureau?

The Farm Bureau was not so active at that time. They used to have parties around the neighborhood where you would go for dancing parties and like that. I always remember those as a kid and later on when I grew up.

When did your family first have electricity and plumbing and a telephone?

I don't think we ever had until we moved into town. We never did have it when we were in the country. We never did have it until we moved in St. Johns--was the first time. In fact, one house we lived in in St. Johns had the outside plumbing but it didn't have electricity. Until we moved into town, we never had electric lights.

What is the first date in presidential elections that you can remember?

It makes me sound like Methuselah, but I can remember when Woodrow Wilson was elected. My dad was a strong Democrat and I can remember when, I think it was Charles Evans Hughes was running against him. Wilson was elected. I can remember that even though I was a small child. My dad was quite a reader and they talked quite a lot of politics around home. I couldn't have been very old but I remember when Wilson was elected.

Can you remember the train that ran between Lansing and St. Johns, the interurban?

Oh, yes. I remember it very well.

Did you have occasion to use that?

About the only times I used it--it used to run from downtown to the fairgrounds when they had the county fair, and quite often we would ride it out there. Also, I can remember before we moved to town when we used to come with a team and wagon from Ovid to the county fair. Everyone would pile in the team and wagon and we'd bring a picnic lunch.

You were talking about the fair. Can you touch on that a little bit, what the county fair used to be like?

You probably know where the fairgrounds are out here on the south of town.

On the end of Lansing Street?

Lansing Street, yes.

Was it Taft or ...?

Just beyond. Anyhow, it's in there where Tom Park's folks live now. They bought the ---

Townsend Road

Yes. We used to come in. The schools used to give a day off for the kids to come in to the fair. School children had "free fair" into the county fair. I used to try to take in practically everything that was there. I remember my folks telling about one time they wanted to know if I was ready to go home and there was one thing I hadn't been in to see yet so they tarried long enough for me to see this one thing.

Did they have 4-H clubs in those days?

Not to my knowledge.

The farmers did exhibit though and got ribbons and prizes like they do now?

Oh yes, they always exhibited. It didn't seem to mean so much [about] the kids as it does now. I think this 4-H thing has been a very good thing for the children.

Was it a carnival type thing?

Oh yes. They always had their rides and side shows and things. The fat woman and the thin man and all these things, you know.

Did they have main shows that came to town.

Yes.

Would you tell us about when you met your wife and what the courting patterns were in your day?

I met my first wife, Mariam [Haynes] (1909-1862). She was teaching school over near the [Rochester] Colony. My sister's children were going to school there and I met her at a party out in that neighborhood. We went together for about 3 or 4 years before we were married. We were married in 1936. She passed away after we were married for 25 years.

You have one daughter?

I have one daughter, Jean, who is Jean Martin now. I have 4 grandchildren. In 1962 Mariam passed away and late in 1963 I married Erma Wagner who has 2 daughters, 4 grandchildren. One daughter, Barbara, is in Chicago. She's not married. So together, we have 8 grandchildren. When I lost my first wife I thought that--, I just felt like my life was ended. Having met Erma, I found out that it wasn't. I've been very fortunate to be married to two such wonderful women as I have had.

You said that when you were a boy that you always thought it would be great to work in a post office or be a postman. How did you come to be eventually a postmaster? How did you start in the post office?

I started in as a sub. I was working for Andy Anderson and I took the civil service examination hoping to get into the post office. About August of one year, I got a letter wanting to know if I would sub during vacation time. I took this letter to Andy and showed it to him. He said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "What can I do? I can't quit my job here to go to work in a post office part-time." And Andy was one of the best friends I ever had, a very generous man. He said, "Listen, I would like to see you get into the post office. You can do better there than I can ever do for you here. You tell them you'll come. You work here when you're not working there." So, I went to work for the post office and I

would go 3 times a day up to the post office and about 3 times a day working for him. I would go in in the morning at 6 o'clock, sort mail until about 9; then I would go down and work for Andy until noon. Then I would come back after dinner and help tie up mail for the train after dinner and sort mail. I would go down then and work for Andy until about 5 or 6 o'clock, then I would go home and get my supper. Then I would come back and work in the evening for about 2 or 3 hours to tie up mail for the night train. This went on for some time. I did this in 1943. That's the same year my daughter was born.

I was drafted into the service. I was in 27 months. When I came back from the service, I went back to the post office again. By the way, when I started the post office, I was getting 65¢ an hour and that seemed so good to me because that's so much more than I had earned before working by the week. I can remember how good it seemed. Sometimes I'd have 10 hours a day and have \$6 and ½ for that day. When I came back from the service, went right back to my former job working in the post office. Finally, by retirements and so on, enough people left so instead of a sub I was a regular. When I was a sub, I did everything. I did carrying mail. I did sorting mail, clerk work, even did some sub janitor work. I can remember one of the jobs I disliked the most was emptying the old spittoons. I'll never forget them. I don't know whatever became of them but I'm glad they're gone anyhow. So, then I kept to work there as a sub and then I made "regular" which is more regular hours. There's more regular hours although you might not make as much as you did as a sub.

About 1949, I guess, **George Osgood** was ready to retire and I was asked if I would like the job of postmaster. My first thought was, I didn't want it. It was too much responsibility. It kind of scared me because I had no more idea I'd ever be postmaster. But I went home and told Mariam, my wife, about it and she kind of talked to me a little bit. She said, "I always thought you wanted to get just as far ahead as you could." I said, "Yes, probably that's true." I had to first be acting postmaster which meant that somebody else might get the job. So I had to write in and ask what my fate would be if I didn't get the job as postmaster, whether I would be out or if I could still have my former job. This man, Peterson, who at one time the inspector here, he was head of Postmaster and Rural Carrier Division in Washington, D.C. I knew him slightly and wrote to him. He said I'd be a clerk on leave without pay until such time as you are appointed or not appointed. If you're not appointed, you go right back to your clerk job. So I had nothing to lose and everything to gain and I decided I would take it. I did. It was about a year and a half before I was appointed regular postmaster.

You followed George Osgood?

I followed George Osgood. George was the one who was retiring.

What year then did you become postmaster?

I misspoke myself before when I told what year I was appointed acting postmaster, December 1, 1958, and I was appointed regular postmaster on August 15, 1959, which would have been less than a year.

How many years were you postmaster?

I was in the postal service for 29 years and the last 11 years I was postmaster.

Retiring when?

Last day of October 1969.

And now J. D., we'll turn the tape over and --

I was drafted July 1, 1943. I was in 1-A and I had a child coming, so I went down to the draft board and asked if I could have time until the child was born. They allowed me that time. She was born on March 16th of '43 and I went into the service July 1st of '43. We went into Fort Custer for just a few days and my wife and mother and sisters came down to see me. Jean stayed with Mrs. Lance because she was so small at that time. They were down there. About 3 or 4 days later I was sent to Keesler Field, Mississippi. We were quite happy on the train when we found that we were going into the Air Force because we had an infantry captain who was in charge of our group and we all thought we were headed for the infantry. Then we found out we were going into the Air Force. We went to Keesler Field, Mississippi, right in July and I tell you it was hot. Contrarily to what you expect here, when it rained it just got hotter. We'd be out drilling and rain would come up and finally, when we'd be good and wet, they would send us back to the barracks, and that old steam would come up from the ground.

In November of that year, I was sent to Denver, Colorado, at Buckley Field [AFB]. I was made an instructor in gun turrets. I was supposed to go overseas after that. Instead of that, they sent me over to Lowrey Field [AFB] as an instructor on B-29 gun turrets. I instructed there until 1945. But I'm getting ahead of my story. After I got to be an instructor, I was allowed to live off post, separate rations. My wife and daughter came out and lived with me, so they were there with me. In 1945 they were going to make the "returnees," they called them, those who were returning

from overseas, make them instructors. Then the war ended and I was still supposed to go overseas. Then they came out with a directive that anyone over 35 years old or 2 years' service would be discharged. I was discharged right at Lowrey Field. I never went overseas. I was at those two bases. I was discharged right there at Lowrey Field, came home, and went right back to my former job in the post office.

Thank you, J. D. for the interview. Now, is there anything else that you can recall that you might like to put on this tape that we haven't covered so far?

There is one thing I did think of. My grandpa Robinson went into the Civil War from Eureka Twp. in Montcalm Co. In the *Shiawassee and Clinton Co. History* [1880], it has him as going into the service from Eureka, Michigan, which would be here, but it was another township of Eureka in Montcalm Co.

What was his name?

Nelson Robinson and he was a lieutenant in the 10th Michigan Cavalry.

And now we will interview Erma, J. D.'s wife, who was the former Erma (Randolph) Waggoner and former postmaster of Eureka. Erma, where were you born?

I was born at Eureka. That was the address then, but actually, I was born in a farm house 1/2 mile west and 1/2 mile north of Eureka.

Can you tell us something about your parents?

My dad was Orley Randolph and my mother, Ethel Pruden. They were married October 31, 1905.

Where were they raised?

My dad was born right here in Eureka April 27, 1880. My mother was born in Riley Twp. July 19, 1882. When my mother married my dad, they were on a farm right across from where my dad had bought some land.

Near Eureka here?

Yes, out where Dale Randolph lives now.

What do you recollect about you grandparents?

My grandfather was James Fitz Randolph, and my grandmother was Katherine Shoemaker. They came here from Ohio. My grandfather was a Civil War veteran and after he came back from the service, he built a house right here in Eureka which is only next door and where I did live for about 25-30 years.

What stories do you remember of the good old days that your grandparents might have told you?

I remember very much about my Grandpa Randolph telling about... He said that he built this house here in Eureka. He only had \$25 but he said you just go out and cut any of the wood you wanted so all the expense you had was the saw bill or your nails and you just built the upright part of it. That's where my dad was born. Then they moved to a farm 1/2 mile west, 1 mile north and 1/2 mile west again which is just on the border of Gratiot and Clinton Co. I was always fascinated by his telling us about when he'd go for supplies into St. Johns. He would take a gunny sack and get his groceries, the supplies that they needed. It was a corduroy road and a very bad road near the onion farm where Livingstons are now. You would have to jump from one log to another, especially in the rainy season [because] it would be so terribly bad to get across there.

He would walk then?

Oh, he walked it. Yes.

What are your first memories as a little girl in Eureka?

I always lived on a farm out there, although we had a Eureka address in those early days, at least when I was born. I was born in a log cabin there on that farm. When I was 2 years old, my folks built the house which my brother still lives in.

You have 2 brothers and a sister?

Yes, I have a sister, Katherine or "Kay" Holmquist and a brother, Dale Randolph, and another brother, Gordon Randolph.

What kind of work did your father do for a living?

He was a farmer. I do remember when I was a child he had a cider mill. He did custom work for all the neighborhood around, people who brought apples to be done. He would have cider to sell and also vinegar for canning pickles and stuff like that.

What kind of transportation did your family use that you remember through your lifetime?

When I was small, I do remember going in the horse and buggy with my mother with just a one-seat buggy with one horse. I remember the horse's name was Fly. She'd go out and catch the horse and put the halter on her. I remember going to the Eureka church here where I've gone to church for all my life practically except for a few years in St. Johns. We'd put the horse in the shed back of the church.

Tie it there and feed it while you were in church?

While we were in church.

Do you remember what the roads were like?

They were just dirt roads. I remember my dad doing--every farmer was to do so much road work. He would go and do (I don't know how many days it was he would do--) for his share of the road work. But they were just dirt roads.

They didn't have a county road commission?

I don't think they did have. It was more like township. I always went here to the Eureka school.

And your parents, did they go to school here?

My dad went to school in Gratiot Co. which is called the Church School. It's no longer in existence. My mother, I don't know where she went to school, but over in Riley Twp. somewhere.

You lived just north of Eureka here. Where did you go to do your shopping for food, clothing, and other items?

We always went to St. Johns. That was our trading center. I think it is for most of the people in this area.

You didn't have a general store here in Eureka?

I've heard my folks tell about the stores but I don't really remember too much about it. Frank Summerville had a dry goods and general store where you bought groceries. My mother used to bring eggs and she'd bring butter up there and then do her trading, they called it.

What about their cream? Did they bring their cream to be tested?

Yes, they did. They would walk to Eureka. They said there was meat markets, millinery stores there and a pump factory and a cheese factory.

That was during your parents' time?

Yes, and Ed Gowers' hardware. I think that's been here for many years. It's no longer Gowers; it's now Eureka Hardware.

Do you remember talking with any old people about early days in Eureka?

I do remember a Mrs. Ingersol who was such a faithful member of the Eureka Christian Church here where I attended since I was a small child. She always dressed in black and wore a black shawl and always sat in the same pew. She was such a kindly person and seems to me that I always looked up to her as being such a wonderful gal. She was a hard worker in the church too.

Can you tell us anything about the history of your church?

It was originally called Greenbush Christian Church which was the oldest religious organization at Eureka. It was formed May 14, 1856, at the Sherwood Schoolhouse which was then a log structure. The organizing members were Mr. and Mrs. Walter Pierson and Mr. and Mrs. Albert Pierson, Samuel Westbrook, and Esther Thompson, all of who had been members of Christian churches in Ohio.

I understand that your grandfather also had a part in organizing the church.

Yes, in the building of the church. The building was built here in Eureka and was dedicated in 1871. I remember hearing my grandfather tell about going over there and working on --I'm sure all the members of the church were active in the building of it. There was a merger of Congregational Christian churches [which] took place in Seattle in 1931. Our Eureka Church was destroyed by fire on August 20, 1951. Immediate plans were made to rebuild the structure. It was burned--because I was at church, I remember that very Sunday morning. Mr. John Halleck(?) asked about some wasps in the balcony of the church. He asked Ralph Silvernail, who was one of the members on the board, if he could burn those wasps out of the balcony and he told him not to do it. But, come Monday morning, he decided to try it anyway and it was soon all afire and was burned to the ground except for the Sunday school rooms in the back. That was a very sorry day for all of us. It was rebuilt though and the first service when the church was rebuilt was April 6, 1952.

And you have since gone on and added to it?

We've built on what we call "east wing" which was the basic part of it. That was in 1976. Then they built the St. L?-sanctuary and the present structure was finished and dedicated on March 13, 1977.

Do you recall you parents belonging to any other organization or club in Eureka?

Mother belonged to the Ladies Aid Society, then they called it.

That was of the church?

That was of the church. When I was in school, they belonged to the parent-teacher association. That's about all.

Did they belong to any farm group?

No, not that I recall. I think they might have belonged to the grange at one time.

Did your family have electricity and plumbing or a telephone on your farm home?

I remember when I was a small child that we had a telephone and I remember getting on the telephone when it was storming and getting knocked down over a chair and badly frightened. Then, there was a time when there weren't any telephones in our area. No one had a telephone again. I remember, when I was married for the first time, my folks still didn't have electricity. They got electricity, I would say, in about 1938 was the first electricity we had. They didn't have a telephone then.

Now about your schools, what schools did you attend?

I attended the Eureka school from beginners through 9th grade and then I went to St. Johns High School and graduated there in 1934. There were no school buses then.

How did you go to school in St. Johns then?

I worked for my room and board.

Where did you work for your room and board?

At Matthews.

You stayed in St. Johns through the week and came home weekends?

Yes, I also lived with Charlie Randolph's, who are my uncle and aunt, Charlie and Grace Randolph, one year. One year I worked for my room and board at Busy Bee Restaurant. I really stayed and helped with the housework upstairs.

After you graduated from high school, you were employed in St. Johns?

Yes, while I was still in school I worked for J. C. Penney Co. I continued there afterward.

As a clerk?

Yes, as a clerk.

Was your husband a resident of Eureka?

Yes, when I married him, but he came from Clio. We were married in 1937.

I know you were postmaster here in Eureka for many years. Would you like to tell how your life led up to that position?

After my 2 children were born, Sharon and Barbara, I kind of had the urge to go back to work. My husband wasn't in accord with it, feeling that I would be away from home so much. But when the opportunity came up that the post office was going to be reopened in Eureka, he consented to my working there. It was reopened Sept 6, 1949. Originally, there was a post office here since 1867 and then on May 20, 1935, it was closed. There was that period of years that there wasn't any post office and people got their mail on Elsie route or St. Johns route. When I was a child at home on the farm, they still had a Eureka address and they would walk up to Eureka and get their mail every 2 or 3 days.

It was all general delivery then?

Yes, it was all general delivery.

When you first worked for the post office, you worked for Mr. Gower?

Yes, it was through the efforts of J. O. Gower that the office was reopened. I started on the day that it did reopen working for him, but then I got my appointment in 1952 and I retired in 1972.

When it first opened up then, it was in Mr. Gower's store?

Yes, it was. Then it was later moved to another building on the four corners.

Erma, tell me about Eureka now, the school system and the businesses that are here and what the people do in Eureka and around Eureka.

The businesses that are here at the present time is the elevator and the hardware and that's about all the businesses. We just lost the very nice antique store that we had. The man retired. As for the school, it was about 1950 that Eureka school district built a new school ½ a mile south of Eureka. Then we eventually voted to become a part of the St. Johns school district. They added on to it, making it more than double its size where children in this area go to school, beginners through 6th grade. Junior high and high school go to St. Johns for their training. The people that live here (mostly, this is a "bedroom community"), they live here and work in St. Johns or Lansing or some of those places.

Can you think of anything else that you would like to talk about that happened either in the old days or the present days that you would like to be recorded?

We were just talking a few days ago about the cost of borrowing money, the high rate of interest now. Some of the old notes that my mother had kept that were from her father, Hughy Pruden. One of them here is dated Sept. 25, 1875, and the interest rate on that was 10%. So, I guess our money situation is going back to a hundred years ago of high interest.

Thank you, Erma and J. D. and we will sign off now.

As we were playing the tape over again, we noticed a few things that should be corrected, and one of those was that the east wing project [at the church] was started in 1969, and the new sanctuary was finished and the first service was held on Mar. 13, 1977, but dedicated July 10, 1977.

Also, as we were talking about this afterward, I did want to say I recall when we had a stage which brought the mail to Eureka when I was a small child. It was always a puzzle to me why they called it a "stage," but it brought the mail in and they took it back out that same afternoon. Anyone who wanted to could ride the stage to St. Johns and back for a very small fee. I don't know how much that might be.

Something else which I wish to clarify too is the popping noise, especially in the beginning of this tape. We were having a fireplace fire and the popping is the crackling of the fire. It sounds like it was a gun going off but it was just the fireplace fire.