

Reed, Alta C.
Interviewer: Libbie Spoelma

Tape No. 009

This is May 5, 1979. On this recording you will be listening to Alta Catherine Reed telling about her experiences and activities since coming to Clinton County. Mrs. Reed has been very active in community and county affairs and has been president of the Clinton County Historical Society for the past year from March 1978 to May 1979. I am Libby Spoelma, interviewing for the oral history project of the Clinton County Historical Society.

Alta, would you like to start with telling us where and when you were born?

I was born [in 1932] in Custer, Michigan. This is 11 miles east of Ludington on US-10 in Mason county.

Is this just a little, small town?

Three hundred population, yes.

And were your parents born there also?

Dad [George W. Mallison] was born Pierport [in 1876] and lived in Bear Lake, Michigan. This is north of Manistee. Mother [Alta A. Heyse] was born in Victory [Twp.], Michigan. Victory was named by my grandfather, Peter [M.] Heyse, after he came home from the Civil War and the north had a victory in that war.

And your maiden name is Mallison?

Mallision.

And this was your grandfather [Peter M. Heyse] on your mother's side that was in the Civil War?

Yes, the grandfather on my father's side was also in the Civil War. He ran away from home and came back with small pox.

He ran away from home when he was how old?

He wanted to be in the Civil War and he was exposed to small pox and did develop them. He came home and his mother put him in a building out behind the main house and served him his food and so on out there and took care of him but didn't allow the rest of the family to become exposed. He did survive.

Were they privates or were they officers or what in the Civil War?

Grandfather Heyse served on the Ladona (?). He served on three ships: the Niagara, the Ladona, and I don't remember the name of the other one but I do have pictures of all three of the ships that he served on. He was the only survivor from the sinking of the Ladona. He was in the water three days before he was rescued. The enemy came up in row boats to see if they could find any survivors. One other man survived and was floating along with Grandfather Heyse and he let a motion to let them know he was alive. They came over

and stabbed him in the water and killed him. Grandfather Peter floated away and he heard them say, "Just another dead Yank" as he floated by.

Now which one of them was killed, the companion?

The companion that was on the Ladona. My sisters can remember floating on grandfather Peter after the war when they were in the water swimming in Crystal Lake. They would sit on his stomach and he would float and he had a "build" and a nice round little tummy.

And they came to America originally from what country?

Peter Heyse came from Ghent, Belgium, and I have pictures of his people in Ghent.

And on the other side, Mallision?

Mallision. I think there's English and Scotch. We haven't followed them back to the—

Do you know what years they came to America?

No. We've got them here on this side from the early part of the 1700's.

And your father was born in Mason County?

In Bear Lake north of Manistee in Manistee Co.

Then I suppose he went to school there.

Yes.

And did he after high school or eighth grade most of them graduated from, did he continue his education?

Yes, dad went to Ferris Institute.

In what year was this?

He was in Ferris Institute in 1895 when he took a federal examination to be a mail carrier. He passed, I think, with a 95% mark that time.

Was your father old enough to have been in World War I?

No, Dad never served in a war. My two brothers never served in any war. My husband did serve in World War II.

Are your parents living then?

No.

And none of your grandparents?

No.

How long have they been deceased?

Mom died in '64 [1967] and Dad died in '55.

When did you come to this area?

My husband came from Muskegon down here to go to work at the Motor Wheel and I followed him down here in March of 1941. We were married in April at Central Methodist church in Lansing.

And I believe you said he was working at--?

The Motor Wheel, and he made \$36 a week at that time.

Now, that gave you enough, you said, that you could get married on?

We had a house trailer and '29 Chevrolet and my bicycle and my hope chest and \$116.

You couldn't get married with that today. You said he was working in Muskegon. Where was he working in Muskegon?

He was working at a dairy.

Do you remember the name?

No, it's no longer in existence.

When you first came here, he was working at Motor Wheel. Where did you live then?

On West Wood Street with his Uncle and Aunt but shortly after we were married we moved into our house trailer. Then he was laid off due to lack of work at Motor Wheel but was fortunate enough to find another job at Wheeling Corrugated (?) until Motor Wheel called him back.

All this time you were living in Lansing?

Yes.

You mentioned that he went into the service?

Yes.

He was in the Army?

Yes.

And when did he go?

1944, August 17th in the afternoon. He left me in the hospital because our second son had been born a day previous. He said when he went out, "Don't you dare cry or I'll cry too." He never saw the baby again until the baby was twelve weeks old then again until the baby was 14 months old.

Then he was in the service about fourteen months?

He was overseas for that length of time. When he was home on leave the atomic bomb was dropped on Japan and they surrendered so he did not have to go back to the fighting area.

How did the people that you knew in your immediate family and people you knew feel about the atom bomb?

I think we were relieved in our own personal life that they would not have to go back to war.

But about the bomb itself and the kind of weapon that it is and the damage that it would do?

I don't think that we could visualize or even realize what it was. You read about it but you can't know.

You just don't know how really devastating it can really be.

My husband just mentioned the other day that none of us have any idea what war is. You have to be in it and see it, feel it, live it to know what it is.

I want to go back and ask you about your schooling. You went to school in?

Custer, Michigan, graduated from the twelfth grade and have some classes here at LCC [Lansing Community College] here in Lansing.

I would also like to know, back in grade school, if you were interested in history and politics?

No, I don't think so at that point in time. More sports and camera club, basketball, baseball, anything to do with the outdoors, hunting, fishing at that time.

You mentioned scouting too.

I was a "Lone Scout" at that time. They didn't even have a scout troop but I wrote in and became a Lone Scout.

Now, how did you go about doing that?

We had a book in school that explained how to do it so I did it.

Did you have to meet certain requirements like earn badges and this sort of thing?

Yes you did this. Then you sent your requirements into the headquarters and then they sent you back your badges and so on.

You've been interested in scouting, I know, because you've taken part in it here in the county haven't you?

Yes.

Were you a scout leader?

Never been a scout leader, just help as much as I can.

And the history sort of thing, did that hold an interest for you or do you know how you became involved in that?

Just because I like the antiques and the old things. In Ludington we had the historical village and museum and these things just naturally become a part of you, I think.

How did you become interested in politics?

We were out of the station in '72 and there was a void that needed to be filled so I ran for office and was fortunate enough to be elected to the Clinton County Board of Commissioners. This did fill a need that I had at that time.

And how long were you on the Board of Commissioners?

Two Years. It is a 2-year term. And I was not reelected at that time.

And now you're holding office in the township?

Yes, supervisor since 1976.

This is in Dewitt Township. Do you think politics is something you would like to make a career of?

This is questionable. I have not decided at this point in time.

Let's go back now to when you first came to this area. When you first came here, you lived in Lansing for a while and then you moved out here to Clinton County. When did you come out here again?

In the spring of '42. The first baby was brand new. He was born in that spring. He was a month old when we came here.

You came here right after your husband got out of the service then?

No, before he went into the service.

You did?

Yes, because that was the first baby.

And where were you living then out here?

Jones Lake Street. We were there 10 years.

That was almost a mini-farm then?

Yes, we had rabbits and chickens and dogs and cats and a large garden, fruit.

What did property sell for then?

We paid \$2,500 for our acre and 50' chicken coop and our home at that point in

time.

Prices have certainly gone up.

That's right. When we were digging out the basement to put a basement underneath this house we found the dandelion wine that the previous owner had buried. We just took it and threw it out.

That's when you lived in on Jones Lake Road?

Yes.

When did you open the service station?

In 1950.

How many years were you in there?

23 years.

This home that you live in now?

Was on the corner when we came out here and connected to the service station. The house had been built in 1916 and was a showplace at the time it was built. In fact, the man that built it owned a lumber company and put the very best material into it. People used to drive out from Lansing in their carriages by the house and come out just to see the house.

It is a pretty house, a beautiful dining room that we were talking about before we started taping. You've lived in that house how many years?

We moved in '52. Then we moved the house in '59 two blocks down State Road because we had to build a new a service station on the corner due to widening of US-27 at that time. We were fortunate enough to have been able to move the house and put it on a new foundation on the property we now have at 581 West State Road.

How many acres do you have out there?

Two acres at that place.

Makes a nice little place out there though. I like that house. You were saying that the house was attached to the station. Wasn't there at one time a grocery store on the corner?

Yes. It was called the Quaker Grocery Store and it was in the basement of this house. When we moved into this house, we didn't realize there were cockroaches in there. They had come up from the grocery store. Anyway, the owner at one point in time decided there was too much business at the grocery store and it was interfering with his gas station business so he closed the grocery store but the cockroaches remained until we had them fumigated.

He didn't bother to take those with him did he? Who was the owner of this grocery store?

Mr. and Mrs. Baxter at that point in time.

Let's go back to Mr. Reed. Would you tell me his full name?

Levi Ivan Reed.

He came first to Muskegon, then to Lansing, then out here to where you people live out here?

Yes.

You also mentioned that he was in the service. Did we get all the information on that?

I believe you told me that he was in the...yes we did you told me he was in where was it?

He went across. He was in the Battle of the Bulge, then across Germany. When the war ended in Europe he was in the hills of Czechoslovakia.

He didn't have to go back once he was discharged because the bomb was dropped. When he first came home where did he work?

Back to Motor Wheel. Then he went into business in an excavating business, then from there to the service station.

And did you work at all during this time?

I went to work for a restaurant down town after he came home from the service.

I was only there only for two weeks when I was offered a job by Walter Hahn with his bookkeeping company [Walter A. Hahn?] and I worked for Walter for seven months until Levi called me up and said he needed me at the service station and I came out and was with him after that period.

You did work in the station quite a bit then didn't you?

Yes, quite a bit.

How many children did you have?

Six.

How many boys and--

Five boys and one girl.

And you were doing that--

The babies were in the crib right behind the counter in the service station all those years.

And you were doing all this work out of the home and having six youngsters at home and doing a small amount of farming at the same time, were you not?

When we came out to the station after we moved out here. Of course the Jones Lake house was gone. That was rented out.

But you always raised your own produce?

Not always. This was only in the last five years.

But you do it now, don't you?

Yes I do.

Alta, was there been a big change in the business or service station business or was there a big change in the business since you people started the service station business until the time you stopped?

There is a change in the way of life that we'll never see again and that is the way people used to buy gasoline at 29¢ and 32¢ and go north every weekend, sometimes taking two cars up to the cabins and cottages, hauling their trailers up there, and their snowmobiles in the wintertime, skiing every weekend. With the price of gas we have now, we'll never see a way of life that we saw 20 years ago again.

Did you go up north very often yourself?

No, we stayed home and watched all the rest of the people go, looking forward to the time that we could. Now that it's here, gasoline is 75¢ to 83¢ a gallon.

You mentioned that you had sort of a loyal, steady customer trade.

Yes, this is very true. We would have the father and son and even the grandfathers coming into the station and there was a loyalty at that time that you do not see in business.

Do you think you would like to stay in any business of any kind the way things are today?

No, not with the federal government and the red tape and the paper work and the cost of insurance and the cost of workman's comp and the cost of Michigan Employment Security Commission. It is almost impossible for the average small businessman to remain in business in this day and age.

This is a change that I don't think any of us like to see coming about either.

This is very true. There is no longer an incentive for a man to improve his lot in life.

You mentioned, when they widened US-27, that at that time you moved the home that you're living in now. Can you tell me anything about the widening of 27? Do you remember anything about that?

There were two properties along the highway that had never sold out to the highway department. Mrs. Bridinger(?) had never sold her frontage and the Skates Radiator Shop never sold their frontage. So when they wanted to widen the highway, they had to pay these two people off and Mrs. Bridinger received enough to side her home with aluminum siding. I do not know what Mr. Skates received but at the time that the rest of the frontage had been purchased the landowners received a dollar.

You're saying that's all you people got out of it, you and Mr. Reed got out of it?

The people that owned the property before us received a dollar.

That sounds ridiculous to me. Do you remember much about the actual work on 27?

What was the road like before they started widening it?

There was only two lanes to St. Johns at one point in time. Then I can remember when they made the four lanes and then this widening come along, a fifth lane.

Where we have the turn lane in the center now. Do you remember the year that that was done in?

In '59

1959. Someone else was mentioning when they were doing something to 27--I don't know just what year this was--, that they dug up old logs out of the corn that had been a part of a corduroy road through there.

I would imagine that would have been along Stoll Road on the muck.

You didn't see anything like that?

No.

When did they get the stoplight out here on 27?

Rev. Bretz was very instrumental in getting the stoplight on the corner of US-27 and State Road. He had, at his church, a Sunday school. One Sunday one of his little children was killed there on the highway and Rev. Bretz went down and demanded a light so that his Sunday School children could cross the highway in safety. He told the highway people that he was going to take two church buses

and park them crosswise of the road and allow his children to walk between them if he did not get a light. Subsequently he was given a light. It's remained there ever since.

Rev. Bretz would have done just that too. Do you remember what year this was in?

No, I do not but I do remember that was actual.

Was the Burk's Old School House being used when you first moved here?

As a school, yes. When we came out in 50's it was still being used as a school. My first youngsters went to school there.

What about the white one that sits back behind there which is older?

That was still being used too?

They were both being used at the same time?

Yes.

How were the grades divided up among these two schools?

I don't remember that.

But your youngsters went to the Burk's, the brick one that's right on the corner?

Yes.

That would of had a much larger lawn on the front of it before the highway went through, wouldn't it of had?

Yes.

Do you know anything about the school that used to set on the corner of State Road and Wood Street?

That would be Gladden School. No, that was never there at that time. But I do remember a lady that told about going out one afternoon when she was in school and going out on a raft in a puddle of water behind the school and falling off. And coming into the school all wet.

We should have lots of swamp stories in this area. I was told that there used to be quite a bit of ice skating right here in this area where Colonial Village #1 is. I mean Clinton Village, I'm sorry. State Road itself was opened up. Was that opened before or after you came here, all the way through to Chandler Road?

No. State Road going through to Chandler Road was only done in later years.

When the new US-127?

It was some 23 years before that.

It always went west though.

Yes.

When was it paved out as far as Airport?

It's not paved as far as Airport. It's only paved as far as Dewitt Road. State Road is not paved beyond DeWitt Road. It's gravel after Dewitt.

That's right. That mile stretch between Logan and Airport is not paved. And that is all going to be closed?

Yes. If the Logan corridor comes out and the new terminal is built for the airport off of State then that would close State between Dewitt Road and Airport Road.

And what are they going to do to Airport Road? Something has to be done there too.

Airport Road has to be moved further to the west. And that's being planned at this time.

At one time that went right straight across Grand River and joined into Waverly Road. Do you remember that?

No.

There's another interesting thing. I've heard you mention that, I believe, the second or the third house on West State Road behind the service station was built around one of the old interurban cars.

Yes, Alan Campbell's father bought both the cars in 1933 and he had them parked side by side. They rented one and lived in one. Then they built their house around the car and it's still inside of the house. You have the formation of the old car, circular ceiling in the front of the house. She has three rooms in there: the bathroom, the bedroom, and the den in the old car.

They built more onto it?

Yes, they did. The other car went to DeWitt and was a home over there for a while. Then it burned down. Alan and I went over to Dewitt to find it one day and we found people that had lived in it and found when the fire had occurred and where it was when the fire occurred.

The Interurban had been discontinued by the time you moved out here, hadn't it?

Yes, it was discontinued previous in 1933 because Alan said his father bought those cars in 1933.

Were there any tracks remaining when you came here?

No, the tracks were gone.

I believe that we're going to have to turn this tape over and we'll continue on the other side.

Yeah, we'll do that.

NO FURTHER RECORDING!