

ROBERT E. HICKS

Interviewed by Elizabeth Spoelma on 9 May 1975  
For the Clinton County Historical Society – Tape #001  
Transcribed by Myrna A. Van Epps, August 2009

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FOCUS ON GREENBUSH TWP., CLINTON CO., MICHIGAN; 1900 – 1916

Side 1

My name is Libby Spoelma. Today is May 9, 1975. I am talking with Mr. Robert Hicks at his apartment on Burcham Road in East Lansing. Mr. Hicks will tell us what it was like in Clinton Co. during his early youth. Mr. Hicks, would you tell me when and where you were born?

I was born in 1892. My parents at that time lived on the eastern end of Townsend Road and it was the end of the road. We had a gate across the road so people wouldn't go into our yard to turn around. It was on the edge of Spaulding Marsh about five miles east of St. Johns and something like a mile south. Townsend Road runs across there east and west.

Where was your father's birthplace?

In Canada.

When did he come to America?

He was born in 1855. At 11 years old, that would make it 1866 when his parents brought him into Clinton Co.

Then he came to Michigan about 1866.

Yes. That was the year after the Civil War was over.

Then your grandmother—I'm talking about your paternal grandmother on your father's side. She was born in England also, right?

Both of my dad's parents were born in England.

And they were married over there?

No, they were married here in Canada. My grandfather came with a wife and two children. My grandmother, who was married and lost a husband in England and remarried, she came (with a pair of twins by her first husband and a baby by her second husband) with her second husband. Later, in Canada, her second husband died. My grandfather's first wife died. Then my grandfather and my own grandmother were married and each had a family to combine, so it was a case of my children, your children, and our children.

A ready-made family! Your grandmother's maiden name?

Richards, over in Cornwall Co., England.

You tell me that they did settle in Clinton Co. when they came to Michigan, east of St. Johns.

Yes.

Didn't you mention that your uncles came in scouting for land?

Yes. My grandfather's two oldest boys at that time were in their early 20's and they came to Michigan, Clinton Co. There was quite a movement into Clinton Co. The early settlers started coming in, perhaps, 20 years before that. They wrote back that they found out locations. My granddad loaded up the rest of the family and came in on the Grand Trunk Railroad, I think, out of Canada, everything in a boxcar.

Then they had to move it from the railroad department.

I don't know how they did it. I don't know whether they had horses. I do remember my dad telling about the yoke of oxen that they plowed around the stumps with after they had to clear the heavy timber off.

Did they build a house right away?

There was a log house on the property. My granddad bought it from a farmer-owner. I don't know the circumstances of that, but it wasn't taken up from a government deed as some of the earlier ones did. There was a log house on the property. I don't know how long they lived in the log house. When I was growing up, the log house was there used as a tool shed more.

Do you remember your father talking about his early life on the farm, about clearing it and crop planting? Could you tell me a little bit about it?

Part of the farm was in the marsh area and was prairie type growing up to grasses. The bulk of it was in heavy timber, beech and maple. In order to make use of that higher, better ground, each winter they would cut off a small acreage of trees and burn them in the spring. Then they would have to plow around those stumps which probably had stayed in there quite a long while—plow around them the best they could and plant the wheat in there to get the flour for their bread. It was a matter of survival to raise their food.

Then this grain had to go to the mill for grist.

My father had to take it to the grist mill and have it ground.

Did you ever hear him say what mill they used?

No. There were mills in DeWitt, I guess Maple Rapids, and other places very early.

Do you know where he went to school?

I think right there. At eleven years old, he may never have gone back to school in Clinton Co. I didn't hear him say about that. My grandfather only had three months' schooling in England and that was the Church of England school. My dad, who could read well and all those things--I never heard him mention the amount of schooling he had.

When were your father and mother married?

My dad was 30 years old which would put the date 1885, born in '55. My mother was 10 years younger. She was 20 and my dad was 30.

Your mother, where was she from?

She lived, at the time my parents were married, right at the western end of St. Johns, on what was then called "the State Road," the road that runs up to Ionia. She was born in Wisconsin. I don't know how old she was when her parents came from Wisconsin to St. Johns. My great grandparents were born in England on her side, and my grandparents were born in England on my dad's side.

Her maiden name?

Baines. William Baines was her daddy's name.

Her first name was what?

My mother's name was Fanny. Her family consisted of three girls and three boys. Two of her sisters and one of her brothers died of TB when they were in their early teens or just before they got to be teens. Many, many children died young at that time from diseases we don't have any more.

When they were first married, where did they live?

Out on the farm with my grandparents, where I was born. I think by that time my grandfather and my dad had built the newer part of the house, as I remember it when I was born. I think my mother moved into a fairly new house there.

I think you told me that they moved several times.

I was eight years old and my dad traded that farm, the eighty acres, for 320 acres of probably poorer land up in Lake Co. That very summer my grandmother was very ill. She died that summer so in the spring we moved up and lived with my mother's parents and my mother took care of my grandmother. Then, rather than to go up in northern Michigan, my mother said, "We'll wait 'til her family, her boys were older." So my dad rented farms for another fifteen years. The first one, after he didn't get along too well with his brother-in-law, we only stayed there one year and he rented a small farm, 40 acres, from a man we called Hi[ram] Bross. It was the Bross whose wife [Hila Bross] is now secretary of the [Clinton Co.] Historical Society. It was her husband's [Manning

Bross's] father's place. That was in the Parker School District [#1, Bingham Twp]. I forget the name of the road, but that was right east of St. Johns. [corner of Walker and Krepps Roads] We was only there one year. My younger brother and my next older brother, we went to the Parker School--not too many students there, perhaps a dozen or so.

What was the next place you lived?

From there we moved in the Rochester Colony area, two miles north of the little town on Colony Road. That was known at that time as the McKnight farm, a very good farm. There was another 80 acres my dad was able to rent so we had a considerable acreage. We boys were getting old enough then so we could handle more work.

Would you describe just a regular work day on the farm. You got up in the morning and what did you do?

By the time I was farming full-time, we had gone into "dairy." It was a matter of getting up pretty early in the morning. You had maybe an hour's chores to do, taking care of the cattle, the sheep, and especially through the winter, they had to be fed in the barn. An hour or more, then you had your breakfast. By that time you had a pretty good appetite. In the summer, there was the field work. You usually got your teams ready, the harnesses on before breakfast. As soon as you can get out there, you're out in the field preparing the ground for crops or cultivating through the summer. In the midsummer and fall there was the harvesting to do. The corn harvesting, it took you right up into snow time again. Then the livestock had to be brought back in the barn. There was a little more free time then, but there was a lot of work entailed in caring for the livestock—feeding and watering and cleaning of the stables and all. It was a busy life and long days.

When you were a youngster though and going to school, you probably had hours that you were in school during the day and then you had chores to do in the morning and when you got home.

Yes, although, at an earlier age in grade school we weren't supposed to do a great amount of work. Pumping water, running the cream separator, carrying in the wood—the younger people did. When I got going into high school, driving the seven miles there and back, there wasn't time. I was more or less exempted from doing the chores. It was a long day anyway, but I liked it.

I suppose there was a lot of other things that they did at home, like mending harness and—

There was a lot of that sort of work through the winter that you tried to catch up. You had to repair your machinery, do a little painting, and get ready for the spring again when you were too busy to do those things—a very busy, active life.

What crops did your father raise when you were a young man on the farm?

My dad was quite interested in animals. He had the whole string of them: cattle, horses, sheep, chickens, geese, (My mother took care of the poultry more.) turkeys. They had everything that lives and breathes, I guess, that they could keep on the farm, down to Guinea hens, peacocks, all the odd things, including pheasants later on. Part of the farming then was to raise the food. He also had sheep a considerable length of time. On the other hand, most farmers had to have some sort of what they called a "cash crop" which would be wheat or beans, and later sugar beets, combined with the raising of food for the animals. It was what they called general farming.

You were pretty self-sufficient. You raised your own food and the food for the animals.

Then you had to have something you could turn into money to pay your taxes and buy your staple groceries, your clothing, and that sort of thing; a little left over maybe for a piece of furniture. It was a pretty much a matter of survival, especially when you're raising a large family.

If you took crops to market to sell, the beans or the wheat or whatever now, where did you take those to?

On a farm where we were born, we had a market at St. Johns or Ovid about equal distance. The markets about the same in either town. Once in awhile they'd think they had a little advantage by going to a different--- The stock buyers would come out to the

farm usually. They would set a bid price on the cattle you wanted to get rid of. If you had a considerable number, you drove them a matter of five miles quite often. They had the stock wagons with the racks on, that they were loaded [on]. Hogs were always loaded.

You mentioned that you did sell the wool from your sheep that you raised. Would you like to tell me about that, the shearing ---?

The wool was what was called a cash crop. The sheep were sheared; the wool was put into a box (a wool box, they called it) and bound into a bale with a special twine; and then you loaded that in a wagon and hauled it down to the wool buyer. In St. Johns, at that time, it happened to be a man by the name of Byron Danley. He bought the wool in a considerable area around there. He also bought animal skins, hides, horse hides, cow hides, anything with hair or wool on it. That was a cash crop. In fact, trapping was a quite an important way of getting extra money.

Did you ever do any of that?

Not personally. My two older brothers did the trapping. I used to have to run the trap lines sometimes when they were too busy.

The man's name that owned the place that you sold your wool, his name was?

Byron Danley.

Where was he located?

St. Johns. The first street east of Clinton Avenue, Main Street, about the second block up from the railroad, in that area.

Did you see that building still standing when were over at St. Johns?

No. We were within a block or so of it where it originally was. Seems to me like it was a rather small, wooden building quite close to some of the others. There was a Mason Implement Company [F. C. Mason Co.], a manufacturing company, that was directly north of it and I think that building is still there.

You also mentioned about taking sugar beets over to Lansing by interurban at a later date.

That was on the small farm and I would have been nine years old. I was eight years old when I moved to my grandmother's farm. That was the first year, as I remember, that they raised beets in Clinton Co. or anywhere surrounding the area. The hand weeding was done for two or three years after that by boys and girls. They hadn't begun to get the Germans, the Bohemians, the ones that really knew how to do it to come over and do it. The sugar factory was in Lansing and the interurban that run from St. Johns to Jackson was operating. So you had to load them on an open, gondola-type car, and haul them in and load them on the car of the interurban. The passenger car pulled it over onto a switch in Lansing. Then he had to drive a team over there. I think they hired a teamster. They shoveled the beets out into another wagon and hauled them to the dumping grounds of the sugar factory. As I said, I didn't think he made any money on account of all that expense of getting them to market. He didn't raise them again. It was a good crop and all, but I think the extra expense is why he didn't do it.

Do you remember how they were paid for these beets? How were they measure them out for payment?

The same way it is yet today, I think, by the ton and by the sugar content. They were tested. There is a formula. There is so much sugar content. You were paid in relation to that by the ton. I think it's the same way that they do today.

We're talking about the same sugar beet factory. That was the one over in North Lansing, corner of Grand River, I believe it was at one time.

Yes, out on the western side of Grand River beyond the river bridge. There's a wholesale house there and other things now. They went out of the business several years ago. Now it's done up in Alma and one or two other places, I think.

When your mother was shopping, where did she go?

We were talking about the Steel Hotel which has been in the news. It's burned. There was a grocery store in there they called, The Mercantile Store. She would bring her butter and eggs in and then trade the value of those for part of the groceries and it

maybe took a little cash which was pretty hard to get to buy the coffee, tea, sugar, maybe a wedge of cheese—just the very staple groceries.

Did you make homemade cottage cheese?

I think so, yes.

Was St. Johns about the only place that she did do her shopping?

Yes. We occasionally took the beans or wheat out of town. Shopping was done almost exclusively there. Our aunt lived in St. Johns. She had lived there too in her girlhood. It was just natural. Our doctor was coming out from St. Johns.

What were the roads like back when you were a boy?

Pretty bad! Very little gravel and they weren't graded with the drains along the sides like they are now. I don't actually remember way back then, but I've heard that in the spring of the year, when what they called "breaking up," and the frost was out of the ground, they would have to put a team on a cart-like to pull through the mud. Even Main Street in St. Johns, before it was paved, was a mud hole in the early spring. The ground was the type that would form into mud very rapidly. Pretty bad, the roads were, but they were improving all the time. They were hauling gravel and grading and all that. Really, by the time I was going in to high school, I rode my bicycle over a fairly good gravel road, the seven miles there and seven miles back.

Whenever you needed things for the farm, like farm tools and machinery and this sort of thing, where did you buy those?

They had farm machine dealers probably too. I don't remember their names. That was something you didn't buy very often. Or you could go to what they had at auction sales, to see where somebody was selling out. My dad, -- for a number of years there that money was pretty scarce-- he was always expanding and he would buy his tools or an extra horse something at an auction sale.

How about hardware stores? Were there places to buy nails?

Yes. In St. Johns there was Fowler & Ball and Spaulding & Son.

About what year was that?

I'm talking about 1900. I would have been 8 years old. We moved away from that area in 1912 so it was in that period in my memory of those things are the best.

You mentioned several other people around on farms throughout the area that had a foundry or a blacksmith shop or something like that.

In the Rowell School District [#31, Duplain Twp.] (We lived in that district 6 years and when I was there I put in my 2 years in the high school.) there was what they called the Rowell Foundry. The building was still there. In that place they made plow shares, cultivator points. It was a foundry. They cast them and ground them. We moved from that neighborhood over into Greenbush Twp. on the Davies farm. There was a building there that had formerly been used to make fanning mills that they used to clean grain with to get ready for seed and all those things. Some of the parts were still there. In that general area was what they called the "Pump Factory Corners," where at one time they had made pumps (bore a hole in a wooden cylinder and then you put your leathers to make a suction in it) and so they were doing that all throughout, I guess. They had their little industry going to supply those things—quite ingenious.

Do you know man's name that owned the foundry and ran it?

That was Stephen Rowell for whom the school district was named. It could have been his father in the foundry because Mr. Rowell, at the time we were there, was a fairly old man himself. I don't think the foundry had been used for maybe 20 years or something like that when we were going to school.

Do you know who had the fanning mill in Greenbush?

That was the two Davies brothers. We lived on one of those farms. The two brothers lived on opposite sides of the road and the factory was on the farm where we rented for three years. That's the farm we moved from when we came into East Lansing.

Now, on the pump factory, can you elaborate on that?

I don't know the particulars. They just called it the Pump Factory Corners.

Was there a settlement there?

None of these other places, just the residence of the person who did the work. They hired help but they came in from some other farm. There wasn't a collection of houses.

At the Pump Factory Corners, that was just a few farm houses and that was it?

As I remember, yes. There may have been a more before that.

One other thing I'd like to know where you purchased, is where did you buy your boots and shoes and things? Was this from a regular store?

Yes, in St. Johns always.

Did you do any shoe repair at home?

We would buy the leather patch and we had a shoe last, the metal. You pulled it on and nailed your own soles on and heels too. That was commonly done all around. We didn't do any sewing or anything like that, but to nail on a new sole, a new tap ---

My grandfather actually sewed on shoes.

He was a cobbler then.

I was really a jack of all trades.

Most farmers were more or less too. There was the Wilson Brothers clothing store in St. Johns, Clark & Hulse. I'm not so sure about the shoe store where my dad usually took us to in to outfit us with shoes and rubbers for the winter and all that.

Did the real young children still wear copper-toed boots?

Not as much. They probably did in some areas but not around where I lived. They seemed to become popular later for the kids to wear. We had the tennis shoes for summer--went barefoot as much as we could. In the winter there was the heavy socks, the overshoes and the rubbers, the rubber boots. One way or another we managed to keep our feet fairly warm, although now and again, someone had frostbite. How they would itch! We called them chilblains, if you remember, when your feet were frozen a little bit.

I never had it.

They used to have them.

Do you remember ever ordering from a catalog?

Not so much in my early childhood although it was coming in. You were more apt to order a watch or something. But then it wasn't long before most of the children's clothing, you just sat down and wrote out an order. After a while they would come in the mail and that's all there was to it. That saved all the driving into town and one thing and another.

If you lived on a mail route, you didn't have to go into town.

The first RFD we were on was while we were on the Bross farm. That would be when I was 9 years old. I don't think they come out past my granddad's farm when I was eight. When we lived on the old home farm where I was born, I know my uncle used to go into St. Johns a couple days a week and pick up the mail. Or if my dad was going down, they'd allow the neighbors. They had to bring it out from the post office.

I suppose you used oil lamps.

We had our lanterns. We had various types of lamps in the house. The chimneys had to be cleaned every day to keep them shiny, sparkling. That was one of the daily tasks of whoever run the house.

And woodburning stoves?

There was coal used quite extensively. Out in the country where we lived all during those years, you didn't bring out too much coal. You depended on the wood lot. We were kept fairly warm.

Cooked with the wood?

You had split wood. It went in the range and I wonder now how the women did so well with it because that fire wasn't a steady, even fire, although they were careful to add a stick every now and then. It had its ups and downs.

You had wells for water. Did you have kitchen pumps right inside the kitchen?

There were cisterns. That was for your laundry water. You put that in your wash tub, soft water for various purposes. The drinking water and for your livestock, it was a driven well. Earlier there were what they called "dug wells." You dug a hole down there maybe twenty feet and put a stone wall around it. I remember my grandfather had an odd-type pump. It was a little chain that run over a cog wheel with little buckets on. As the chains were going down in the bottom they'd come up, every little bucket full of water. As they turned over at the top that threw it into the spout and out it come. You just turned the crank. That was a different type than the plunger type. You had windmills in your barnyard to pump the water for the livestock and that was a great help too.

Were they quite dependable?

Now and then, if you had a dairy farm and the wind didn't blow for a couple days, then you were up against it. Somebody had to stand there and pump and pump. Surprising how much a thirsty cow can drink. You usually had a stream in your pasture to use so in the summer they had a way of drinking out of it.

The windmill pumped up the water, it pumped into some sort of storage?

A stock tank.

Then it just came back down with gravity or something or was out in the tank they drank from?

You'd have to turn them loose from their stalls, and out in the yard they'd go and drink out of the tank.

The windmill pumped it directly into the tank that they drank from?

Into the tank. Usually the windmills were right in the barnyard where the animals were--various ways. Now each cow has a little bucket they drink out of and the water is under pressure.

Remember when you got your first telephone?

Approximately, I would say around 1907 or 8. I can remember the farm we lived on.

Which farm was that?

That was on the McKnight farm, west of the Colony. We had to turn the crank. You rang two long and two short and so forth. You had to memorize your own numbers but to make sure, why everyone on the line usually would take their receiver off the hook. They would do a little eavesdropping. That was one way of making sure that it wasn't your phone.

You mentioned something to me about your older brothers doing some work to earn a little extra money, cutting wood for these railroads?

No, that was my uncles. He [my dad] had three older uncles. One of them left for the west soon after that. They cut the wood. They used part of the wood clearing where the farms were; hauled it all up; piled it along the railroad track because the locomotives were wood-fired. I don't know for how many years. When I come along there were coal-fired. That was another way of getting cash money. When the train come along to where there was a wood pile, they stopped and loaded on another load of wood to keep it going 'til they got to another pile of wood down the track.

Did you ever see any marsh fires or fires that had been started by the train in your time?

There had been marsh fires in the marsh where we were at and I heard of them. I never actually saw one. The little odd thing about that, when a marsh did burn over from fire, there was a weed they called "fire weed" that would come right up. It wouldn't grow until there was a fire, but those seeds must be in there and it takes a fire to activate them. That was a commonly known phenomenon. You burn off a piece of marsh and the fire weeds come right up.

Did you have to do any draining to reclaim land on your father's farm that you remember as a boy?

No, but there were drains being cleaned out or deepened. Then later, when power come in, they dredged the ditch out. That's when they could dig a ditch deep enough to drain those swamps. Before that they grew up to swamp-type trees or something and were

used for pasture. When they got the dredges through, that's when they started growing peppermint, corn, and all that sort of thing on the swamps.

Would you describe the early type of machinery that they used to dig a ditch with the horses?

My brothers had a section that they took the contract for. They weren't that old but they could handle the horses and then they could handle that scraper. They had what they called a "slip scraper" which was just a sort of a board nailed on a couple 2x4's which formed the handles with a metal cutting edge. There was a bucket scraper that was formed more like a scoop. You just tipped it up and it turned itself over. There was the horse-drawn, wheel scraper which they used for grading. They couldn't dig the ditch with it. Digging a ditch with the bucket scraper or slip scraper, you went cross-ways of the ditch. Your horses went down in; you pulled a load of dirt up; dumped it on that side; turned around and went down in again and up a load on the other side. Very monotonous! Very hard work both on the men and the horses. So they didn't dig them all that deep. When these power dredges come along with a gas engine on it at first, and a long crane-like type with a heavier bucket, they could go down in there and really hike that dirt out. Later were the steam-driven dredges.

I read somewhere about a man--I really don't remember his name--but he operated some type of dredge right in the ditch on the water to clean out the larger drain ditches and I was wondering if you knew anything about that.

The Hayworth Drain which starts west on Colony Road there and makes sort of a circle around and comes back in the Maple River, I remember when that was cleaned out with that type of a dredge. They built the dredge right at the start of where they wanted to deepen it, built it right there on dry ground, and dug the hole deep enough. Then the water came in by itself naturally because it was in a low area. The whole thing was a boat-type thing. [They] pushed it in the water and from then on they just kept digging ahead and it floated on the water in the ditch because there was no way for that water to run until they actually got to the river, so it didn't drain itself out. That worked out pretty well. They could move very easily on the water. It was heavy and all but they could follow their work and pull it along so many feet every day. I remember that very well.

I had heard about it but didn't know if it was a fact.

They did it on the Hayworth Drain. They did it on all the rest probably. Stoney Crick had a good many of those.

Did they employ somebody to come in and do this?

They let a contract. It was usually an outsider who had a mechanical bend. The contract was so much a rod for so many rods. The county drain commissioner did the surveying and he inspected it. There was a pretty good system of doing it.

Who paid for this then, the farmer himself?

Usually there was drainage district and they were taxed for it, the farmers who were benefited by it.

How did they feel about the tax?

There was not too much opposition. It was a way of getting that land into production. It was an improvement they needed.

Yes, and it paid off. A lot of that low land was drained and became the best ground. It had better, deeper soil.

I wonder if you heard about or remember of any illnesses that might have been caused by the swarms of mosquitoes or typhoid fever?

Not by the swamps directly, but as you know previously, although they had what they called, malaria, that was spread by mosquito off low ground that way, but that didn't affect the neighborhoods where I lived. We had problems with well water. Typhoid was still around. I had typhoid and scarlet fever both. Typhoid was directly attributed to your well water.

I'd like to say malaria was the ---. The old peopled called it "ague."

That was because you come down with chills and fever. You shook all over.



The early settlers really had quite a bit of difficulty with it, many deaths attributed to it.

That was why earlier I read the report come back that Michigan wasn't fit to live in because it had so many of those swamps. They settled in Ohio and Indiana and those higher places.

Where was the nearest doctor?

In St. Johns. Dr. Gillam. That's where they took me when I broke my arm a couple of times when I was 3 years old. They would come out. My mother had a doctor too, from Ovid, Dr. McGillicuddy, who saved her life one summer, I understand.

What was she ill with?

They didn't tell me for a number of years. I never knew. She was that near dying that they brought my uncle and aunt, (my older brother living with them), they brought him over and they woke we younger children up. We just sat around in the living room and wondered what was going on. They didn't tell kids about that sort of thing back then, but she aborted a pair of twins and it nearly killed her. You don't have the doctor so close, so probably the doctor was quite late in getting around and it was a very complicated thing as I learned many years afterwards. I didn't know what my mother was ill from. They didn't tell any of the younger children about those things.

Quite an experience for a young child though!

Well, yes.

### Side 2

You went to school?

My first experience with a country school was in the Cramer District [#5 Bingham Twp.], the district where I was born, a fairly large district. I remember, too, the teacher there, Mrs. Merrihew and Miss Lua Hamilton. Some of the families, I recall their names: There was the Cramer family, two daughters there, Susie and I don't remember the other. Going up that road, there was the Bond farm, two of the Bond children; the Harris's; three Henning families (Mike Henning, Phillip Henning, Andrew Henning); a Karber family; a Smith or Schmidt, as they called their name then; a family--their names were Hettler--sent their children there. It was predominantly a German neighborhood.

What road was that on?

The Cramer School was on Townsend Road, corner of Townsend and Krepps Road. I went there three years, from [age] 5 to 8, Then I moved down to my mother's parents' farm, west of St. Johns. That was the Lamb District [#1 Frl., Bengal Twp.], a rather small district. I think there were only about a dozen pupils there. Three or four of them would have been my own brothers. My sister at that time went into St. Johns to high school. We were there just the one a year. Then we moved the next time out to the Bross farm, east of St. Johns again. That was the Parker District. Not very many students there, as I recall. There was the Parker family for whom the school was named; the Ormstons; Carmen Tranchell down on the Krepps Road; Charles Rathbun. I think both of those people are still alive. A \_\_\_\_\_ girl; and two of my brothers and myself. That's about all I can remember, not too many pupils there. From there we moved over into the Rowell District, two miles west of the Rochester Colony, a larger district, probably upwards of 30 pupils there, a great number of boys. The families there were:

- 2 families of Bonds, boys, Jack Bond's and Sam Bond's.
- The Burgess boys, about 4 children there, 3 boys and a girl.
- My own family. (I'm going work west of the Colony).
- The Morris's: 2 boys and a girl.
- The two Rice girls, Mina and Nina, (going towards the Rowell School).
- The Annis boys.
- Around on the other road was the Holbrook family with a daughter.
- Freeman Mc Clintock
- The DeVries family with a boy and a girl.
- The Crockett family. (Those are east.)

- The Ewer family.
- A family named Moore, one daughter coming in there.

A very large school! There I went there 6 years. During that time we were playing baseball. We organized into a baseball team.

Where was this school located, on what road?

The roads weren't named then. Those names all came in afterwards. It was a half mile south of Colony Road. That was 2 miles west of Rochester Colony.

What was Rochester Colony like then? Was it a little village? Was there stores and things?

They had a grocery store. At that time some of those little village groceries delivered door to door. They stocked a sort of horse-pulled van with groceries. They'd start out in the morning and make a tour around certain areas, then drive in your door yard. You could go out and buy your groceries right direct.

It was like a general store that carried a lot of different things.

Yes, and the groceries, your needles and threads and things. That was a pretty convenient thing to have.

Was there anything else there?

They had a blacksmith shop. There were the 2 churches there.

Who ran the blacksmith shop?

His name was George Moore, I believe. That was quite an important thing in those days. We all had to take our horses in there and have the shoes nailed on.

Would you go back and tell me about the type shoes that they put on the horses; that you heard your father talking about them; that they made shoes for the marshland?

In the swamp; that was an open prairie type swamp. It was sort of a quaky soil. There was that much water under it. So in order to get them out on there to haul the grass in--my grandfather was a blacksmith by trade so he knew how to make a wooden type shoe big enough so the horses had that much more support when they walked around on there.

So it was almost a snow shoe.

That's right. I don't think it was commonly done, but in that situation and my granddad being a blacksmith, I think that was his own idea.

Now, we'll go back to the Colony. Could you tell me the name of the people that ran the grocery store at Rochester Colony?

Alderman Brothers' Grocery Store.

The Parker District School, where was that located?

On Krepps Road, about three miles north of the Cramer School. It was going directly north on Krepps Road. It's still in there. The Rowell School was off the Colony Road to the south.

How old were you when you were going to this Rowell School?

I probably was 10 by that time. There, we were 6 years. That would make me 16 when we moved away. I was in shape to do quite a bit of playing of various sorts then.

They were all one-room schools.

Yes.

The classes were combined. One teacher taught—

One teacher and the grades were 1 to 8. In 8<sup>th</sup> grade you went down and took the county examination from which you graduated from the 8<sup>th</sup> grade. That was the end of the bulk of their education back then. A very few were then able to go into St. Johns to high school. I was one of the very few. Another neighbor boy, that's Freeman McClintock of McClintock Cadillac Co. over here, we drove a horse and buggy. We alternated each week. One would drive and then the other, the seven miles. In the summer we rode our bicycles to high school.

What about your teachers out at the Colony and the Rowell School?

At the Rowell School I only remember one and it think it was because she taught possibly 4 of those years. She was an elderly, maiden lady at that time. We called them

old maids. Her name was Sadie Ingham. During that time she married another school teacher, a gentleman who taught at Rochester Colony, and his name was Edward Seagle (sp?). So she became Mrs. Edward Seagle. Later, when we moved on the Davies farm, they had retired from teaching and had a little place over there and we were neighbors to them, very nice people.

Did any of these schools have electricity?

No, they had the oil lamp hanging up higher up on the wall so the kids couldn't just play around with it and all that, very seldom used unless it was an evening meeting or a very dark day. It would have to be very dark before the teacher would bother to light those lamps.

Your water supply came from?

A well out in the yard. One school, their well was condemned and one of the girls, their daddy brought her in the morning with a milk can full of water which we kids could drink.

They were heated with?

A wood stove in the winter.

Did you have blackboards or slate boards up on the wall?

A blackboard was definitely art of the day. We used the slate at our own desks individually and a slate pencil. They were sort of a screechy thing to write with and sometimes the boys would try to make it as loud as they could. That was to save paper, the expense of a tablet. That disappeared shortly after that, the slates. The blackboards were just like they are today.

Would you say the teachers were more strict then than they were when your youngsters were going to school?

I would say so. They had to keep discipline. They didn't have a principal down the hall or any of that sort of thing. It was up to the teacher to maintain discipline. They did it with a ruler they had. It was a little longer and it had a brass ferrule that made it a little heavier. The ordinary punishment was to the boys especially, "Hold out your hand." Then you (whack sound) that! That really could hurt! My punishment, I remember and always will: I sat there on the bench near the teacher's desk and I made some sort of a brash remark and before I realized what was going on, she clipped me against the side of the head with her book. I was so embarrassed. It was so unexpected. That was the best history lesson I ever had.

What were some of the games the children played?

Out in the school yard for recess, during the noon hour--recess was my favorite subject—we had the running games, Ring Around the Rosie, Drop the Handkerchief. The girls played that too. The boys would play One Old Cat with the ball and any sort of [thing] to hit it with, a bat; Duck on the Rock which was putting a stone on a larger rock and then throwing another stone at it which was a little dangerous. They could fly off anywhere. We skated in the winter. We had a little pond there. We didn't have much equipment. We had to devise our own games.

Were marbles a popular game?

Not so much. I guess previously. I heard about playing marbles. My friends, we had a bag full of marbles we would swap here and there.

I understand you that were quite interested in baseball. When did you start playing?

When we got to Rowell District there was a lot of boys there and it was a popular game all over the countryside back then. So we organized a little baseball team. We could go down to Rochester Colony. They had a larger school. They had a 2-room school. We'd go down on a Saturday. We'd have a game between us. A lot of fun!

Did your team have a name?

They were the "Blue Jays." That was simple. We had white painter's caps, I guess they were. Our mothers or someone would cut a "J" out of a blue piece of cloth and sew that on there. You would have the whole thing on one letter. It was a blue "J."

Where did you get your uniforms? What did you do?

The boys didn't all have one. I was such a baseball nut that my mother and sisters made me a pair of bloomer-type pants. They had a little padding in the front, knicker-type. Bloomers, I guess, is what the girls wore back then.

You were captain of a team somewhere now.

More or less. We had a telephone and I could call the other teams up, someone in another district. That fell to me both there and when we got over into Greenbush where we organized a bigger team, a better team.

Tell me about the Greenbush team.

We were near the Greenbush Center Methodist Church then where I lived and we had a little playing field, part of a pasture right across the road. That was the center, you might say, of the social life. We had boys there that came from maybe three or four different [school] districts because they attended church there. That give us a better opportunity to get bigger boys to play. We had to have 9 boys. So that was quite a successful time. We would play teams in other small towns around: Eureka, Maple Rapids, and teams up north. We played the St. Johns High School team once. They came out half way just as a practice game for them. We managed to get a game nearly every Saturday. In that area as I was growing older, over in Eureka, a busy little farm town, they had a better-known team of older boys. Some of them were men. We had a couple men on our little church team. They come over and asked me if I wanted to come over and practice with them one day. I went over and I started going over there and playing with them Sunday with the big boys.

How old were you then?

I was getting up into my 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> year by then.

And you were playing with these adult men.

A lot of fun!

Some of the teams that you played against, you actually set up the games and had the competition--

You had to phone or write them a letter. We played Elsie. They had pretty strong team over there.

You mentioned some sort of corners--

That was Bridgeman Corners. That was where the US-27 crosses the Maple River out north of St. Johns. There was just a grocery store there and they had a baseball field around the corner. With the Eureka team we'd go up to Carson City and those towns up further into Gratiot Co. We had a little problem to get there. We had to go with a horse and a dray- type wagon or something with our stuff loaded in. We made out to have a lot of fun at it.

What position did you play?

Various. On the little team, we didn't have a catcher. It wasn't because I wanted to, but in order to have someone who could hang onto the ball, I had to learn to become a catcher. I didn't like it too well. That's where I got this crooked finger. I caught for the church team in Greenbush, but with the big boys I played second base or in the outfield or something. I played in high school and there I played in the outfield.

What was your batting average at that time?

Not too good. I wasn't a heavy hitter. I only hit one home run in my life. That was because it rolled down hill faster than the guy could chase it. It was a matter of getting on base. Then a lot of the bigger boys could get you around. I was pretty good at getting a walk or getting a little hit to get on base. That was my specialty, get on base.

You had special uniforms on that Greenbush team.

We sent away somewhere and bought—I think we had 10 with an extra one. The boys had to pay for them themselves. I don't remember where we got them. We sent away for them.

Those were the ones that had the little green caps?

No, we had the letters printed right across the chest on the shirts, "Greenbush Cubs."

Was there a great deal of interest in the ball games among the adults?

Some, especially the church team. We'd play at church picnics and things and then there'd be more [people]. Farmers, in general, they didn't pay too much attention because they were pretty busy. Not too many boys were lucky enough to be able to get away every weekend like I was.

Did many people come to watch your Saturday games?

Not too many. There would always be maybe a couple dozen or maybe 25 or 30. It wasn't done for an exhibition at all. It was done for our own fun.

What did the winning team do then? Did they have a celebration or something afterwards?

No. The losers would go home a little dejected. We'd both be pretty tired. There was no official. We barely could get a good umpire. No record to be kept or anything, not even in high school. There wasn't organized that well back then.

So when you were victorious, you didn't really feel like going down to the corner soda shop or something.

It took too long getting home and all that sort of thing. We were hungry. We wanted to get home for supper. That became the uppermost thought in our mind—something to eat.

What did the older people do, especially the farm people for recreation and entertainment?

Not too much. It could have been rather dull for the women. They had their church doings where they were near a church. Then the school districts, there was a few occasions when they would gather in a schoolhouse. There wasn't too much social life out in the countryside. They had their square dances occasionally. The grange came in and got organized. They developed more social life. The farmers' clubs began to spring up. My parents belonged to that and once a month they would go into another area. There would be quite a gathering there. So there was more social life developing. Until the automobile come along, it was too hard to get any distance.

Did they visit back and forth or have things going on sometimes? Did they have quilting parties or anything like that?

I've heard of those more. I think they did some, the women, but usually, unless your neighbors were close together, an afternoon party for the women and they might have to walk.

What did the fellows do on a Sunday afternoon, just sit around, or did they get out and pitch horseshoes or what did they do?

You'd go out in the yard and you'd practice with a ball. They had the horseshoes to throw back then. That was quite commonly done. There wasn't the sports going on all the time like there is now.

Going back to that ball thing, I think you mentioned to me that balls were a little difficult to come by and sort of expensive and that just for practice you used something else.

When you started off, when you were younger, you had a yarn ball, something you'd make yourself even. You had to go into town to buy a leather covered ball and then you got a cheap one that wouldn't last long. To get a good, regulation type ball on a regular team when we got organized, I think they were a dollar and a quarter or something like that. You took pretty good care of them.

That was a lot of money then too.

You had to take up a collection. That was a day's wages, believe it or not, for a man.

Did they have a county fair?

Yes, in St. Johns. That was quite an occasion in the fall of the year. Most farmers managed to get down there. They'd let the school out so the kids could go. Then along come the holidays when you went down and did your shopping and all. There was various things going on in the churches. We had Decoration Day in the spring and they made quite a thing out of that. There was some, more or less organized, social life.

What sort of 4<sup>th</sup> of July celebration do you remember?

I remember a couple where we had ball games for one thing. That was a big day. We had a pretty good crowd those days. Then we had the fireworks. Early in the morning

you'd hear your neighbors shooting off a gun or something. Now and then they shot off the anvil. They did that. The old blacksmith-type anvil had quite a hollow space in it. That was a large anvil with the long horn that they made the horseshoes over. If you knew how to do it, you could put a certain amount of black powder in there with a fuse and set that fuse off on the ground with the powder confined under it. When the fuse burned in and ignited the powder, up went the whole thing, the anvil and all. That caused quite a boom. That was a big thing. They used to do that down in Rochester Colony. That was a big deal on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July morning.

Did people go on picnics on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July?

Different people did different things. They'd go to the little lakes. We had a little sort of a park along the Maple River there. That went on various times through the summer on a hot day.

Were there parades in the town?

Not like there are now. Not that I attended.

Or political speeches?

I wouldn't remember that too much anyway. For the kids they used to have a 3-legged race. You and a partner put one of your legs in a bag so that left two legs that was in a bag and the others, and then you raced down against half a dozen other pairs that way. [There were] various running games. I wasn't too bad at that. I collected a few prizes.

Do you remember any one particular president very well from when you were a youngster, the one that you remember best as a young person?

McKinley died when I was going to the Lamb School. I remember our teacher explained that to us, that our president died. Queen Victoria died, I think, the same year in England. My parents who were English, all their ancestors coming from England, they made quite a thing of that when Queen Victoria died. That's as far as I remember about McKinley, was his death. Then Teddy Roosevelt come on the scene. My dad was quite interested in politics. He had pictures of old Teddy going up San Juan Hill with his cowboy hat, riding a noble looking horse. So I remember Teddy Roosevelt. Then we went into Wilson and the war came along.

I wondered if your father was interested in politics.

Yes, and he become a highway official in the township. Some politics connected with that.

What township?

Greenbush Twp.

He was like a road commissioner?

That was it. I don't what at that time. They used to call them path masters. He was a commissioner of sorts for Greenbush.

Do you remember what year that was in?

It had to be between 1910 and 1912.

When roads were improved--as time went on the counties did come in and improve the roads and take better care of them--were the people taxed then? Did they have like we call a millage now, a special tax?

I don't know the system, but they called it a road tax. That was against the value of your farm, the amount of road tax you had to pay. That commonly was worked out; that is, you were allowed (if you put a team in the gravel pit to haul gravel or a man with a shovel) and you worked it out. All the money went directly on the road except the salary of the path master or the commissioner that had charge of that. They were beginning to do grading. That was mostly gravelling. They were grading more or less. My dad was the commissioner in Greenbush Twp. He sent me over into Gratiot [Co.] to bring the road scraper which had high wheels and then a blade that was raised and lowered. That was early in the spring and their roads over there was pretty slippery. I wasn't that old and didn't have all that experience, and I went around the corner too quick. The back end of that started to slide and there was a ditch there. First thing I knew, the thing was hanging in the ditch. I had to get help to get it out of there.

I bet you were frightened.

It was kind of embarrassing. You learned. The boys started working pretty early and that's the way they learned, the hard way.

If they worked their tax out, they did this every year?

Every year.

When did you move to East Lansing?

In 1912.

This was with your parents?

With my parents. Until up to that time we had been renting. About that year or the year before my dad made a sale of the farm he'd had up in Lake Co. By that time my mother's parents were both gone. Her brothers weren't interested in farming, so she sold the old farm. The money that came to her then combined with what my dad got out of what was left of the equity in our farm where I was born went into buying a place over here to East Lansing. It was the down payment. That was in Lansing Twp. at the time. It was out on Harrison Road near the Trowbridge area.

When were you married?

In 1916 here in Lansing. My wife was a city girl then although she was born in Wisconsin and lived different places. Her mother wasn't too entranced with the idea of her daughter marrying a farmer but it worked out all right.

Her maiden name was what?

Thurber. Zoe Thurber. It's a Greek word meaning "peace," I understand.

How many children did you have?

Seven; 4 girls and 3 boys.

Then you moved here where you are now?

A year ago. We'd gone back and forth to Florida. From that farm around which the city of East Lansing grew, part of it, were 62 years on that, and then a year over here; plus the 20 years in Clinton Co.

I understand most of Lilac Farms was your development, your subdivision. It was the first subdivision the area.

The "flower pot area." It was quite a migration to move out of Clinton Co., that 35 miles, in the winter. By that time we had a lot of equipment and a pretty good supply of livestock. We moved it by horses: 3 teams, 11 trips, 35 miles each way on each trip, in the wintertime.

There was just another little story that I wish you would repeat for me. You did tell me once before about your trip over to East Lansing to Michigan Agricultural College. You went by the interurban to buy the pig.

That was out of Clinton Co. when we lived on the Davies farm. Purebred stock was coming into popularity then. My older brother at that time was interested in the cattle. They went somewhere near Port Huron and brought back a purebred Hereford cow. My interest had to be something different so I came over to Michigan State to buy a pig. They didn't have a hog collar there they so they wouldn't sell me one. They directed me over to the farm. That was to the west, on the farm right along Harrison Road. The Woodbury farm they called it then. There I bought a purebred Berkshire pig with sort of a snubbed nose if you're familiar with the swine family. Going home, I had to go back and get the streetcar into Lansing and then take the interurban home. When I went out on Harrison, it had been planted each side with maple trees by one of the neighbor's years and years ago. It was a very nice-looking road.

You were quite impressed with the road, weren't you? You thought it was a pretty place and you had no idea you were going to move over there.

I spent the rest of my life there. That's why I come over here.

You really saw the area before you moved over here, didn't you?

That could have been two years before.

I appreciate the time you've given me, Mr. Hicks. That brings us over to East Lansing out of Clinton Co.

I've enjoyed talking with you and it's been most interesting.