

GERRI WYBLE & SHARON WORRALL

Wayne: This is April 30th, 2024. I'm Wayne Summers, along with Myrna Van Epps, and today we are interviewing Gerri Wyble and Sharon Worrall. Let's start out by Sharon. I think your family goes back to the early history of Essex Township. Is that correct?

Sharon: Yeah, 1836.

Wayne: Could you tell us a little bit about how they got here?

Sharon: I'm not sure how they got there. Lucine Eldridge is my great, great grandfather, I think. He had three different wives, so it's like three different branches of the family. We don't know who the original Mr. Eldridge was. Nobody does in any of the family. I don't know where his two wives are buried. He walked from Oakland County or Livingston to Clinton County to settle on five 80-acre parcels, and then he had to walk to Ionia to pay for them and get them recorded. Up until just recently, there were three of the parcels still in the family's name: the one my father bought from his grandfather; the one that his brother bought from the grandfather; and the other one that was over on Colony Road, that backed up to the one on Kinley Road.

When my dad's brother, Warren, passed away, they discovered a letter that had been sent to Erford [Eldridge], who was my grandfather, asking if his father, Joshua [Eldridge], knew anything about the early settlers. This guy was a genealogist some place out west, and he was trying to search the family tree. Erford wrote back that his father wasn't in good health and he didn't think he could remember anything. You know, by the time you get down to the third or fourth wife, nobody knows any previous history. I'm getting desperate. I think I'm gonna try to go to that guy that does *Searching Your Roots*. I don't want to be on television. I don't want to be interviewed. I just want the mystery solved.

It took me a long time to figure out how my branch of the family ended up with the land, but all the other children that went before were gone. They were older and the girls got married, and I don't think there was too many boys. There was Rodney, but he died in the Civil War, and he's buried down in Alabama someplace by Stone Mountain. There's a lot of them in the Prairie Cemetery: Lucine and Prudence, who was a Wolcott, and she'd been married before and her husband died of consumption.

Wayne: Did your family attend the Prairie School?

Sharon: My brother did. There was a big dispute in Essex Township between Maple Rapids and the southern half of Essex Township. The school had burnt over in Maple Rapids, and they wanted to include everybody that was in Essex Township to help pay for a brand new school and go there. My parents didn't want me to ride all the way to Maple Rapids. I remember going up to the courthouse and sitting while they argued about this, and the township then was split up. The southern half became known as East Essex, Frl. No. 2.

We lived on the south border of Essex Township and Bengal and the Eldridge family had always traded and gone to the Frink School on Walker Road. The Myers family down in Bengal had traded and went to the Prairie School. Well, that worked out fine until Marjorie came along, Marjorie Myers. When the teacher found out that they weren't really supposed to be going there, she went to the school board. She said, "I don't have to put up with these kids anymore. You gotta do something with them or I'm leaving midyear." So the three Myers kids came over to the Frink School, and the school board said the Eldridge children could remain there and finish out the year, but the next year they'd have to go to the Prairie.

Wayne: Why did the Myers kids have such a bad reputation?

Sharon: I don't know. They were just little devils.

Wayne: Thought maybe you had a story or two.

Sharon: Well, the two Myers boys rustled my dad's cows one year and it was in the Clinton County paper. My brother discovered that they were the rustlers. Then they put a dead skunk in my folks's car in the summertime. Not a skunk. I mean a raccoon, and it was in the garage, and it was really hot. You can imagine what happened to it. The maggots got in it and it was awful. Lyle wasn't in on that caper, but Keith was and they had some other guys. The insurance company for my dad's car was offering a reward for information so Keith stepped up and he wanted to claim the reward.

Wayne: And he did it?

Sharon: Yeah, he did it. The whole neighborhood was torn apart. Used to be, you know, all the farmers would get together and they'd all thresh the grain or they'd bale the hay. Somebody had a baler finally, and they'd all work together going around to all the farms. Everybody needed help.

Gerri: I remember feeding those men.

Sharon: Yes, if the crew was at your house, your wife had to feed them.

Wayne: So you grew up on a farm?

Sharon: Yep.

Myrna: Which school did you go to then?

Sharon: East Essex, Frl. No. 2. The Prairie School was elementary and the one on the north end of Essex Township, I can't remember that school over there, that was another elementary school. They bused sixth, seventh, and eighth to the Lowe School by the Lowe Church and that little cemetery that's west of there [Lowe Cemetery]. I can't remember the name now.

Gerri: They called it East Essex Elementary. I remember that, on that corner out there.

Sharon: Yeah, across from the church. There was a one room schoolhouse there [Lowe]. That's what I went to.

Wayne: Did you go on to St. Johns then?

Sharon: Yeah. By then, Earl Lancaster wanted to annex all the rural districts and make it one huge school district for St. Johns. I think he had thoughts of going someplace better if he could do that, and he did do that. Then I left home because I was on a business course. My last year in high school, I was on the co-op program, and I had a job. I worked for the city manager in St. Johns, so I couldn't ride the bus anymore.

Wayne: You weren't gonna hitchhike in?

Sharon: No. My grandmother lived in the 700 block of East State Street across from the old East Ward School, and I lived with her.

Wayne: Gerri, where did you grow up at?

Gerri: Right here in St. Johns. I was born here before the hospital opened. I missed it by about two weeks. Some of my classmates were the first to be born, first boy and the first girl to be born. I was born in the house. It's one block from my friend, Donna. It's still there. The Wards live there now. That was my grandparents' home, so I was born there, and I've lived in St. Johns all my life. I'm still here.

Wayne: Myrna told me you were involved with 4-H. Is that correct?

Gerri: I did. Yeah, that was after I married my husband. He had Southdown sheep and showed those and he trimmed them and did work with the boys, so we had started our own club, and I taught sewing and cooking and that kind of thing for quite a few years.

Wayne: Were you involved in 4-H also, Sharon?

Sharon: Yes, for a few years. My mother was the leader for a few years. She also drove the school bus for the East Essex Frl. No. 2 school.

Wayne: Was that back when the buses were blue or other colors?

Sharon: Yeah, I think they were red, white, and blue.

Sharon: Myrna's farm backed up to my dad's farm. Their house was on Colony Road, and my folks's house was on Kinley, but the property backed up to each other.

Myrna: I don't know what color the school buses were. I couldn't tell you.

Sharon: I think they were red, white, and blue.

Wayne: I think a lot of them were back before they decided to go to yellow.

Sharon: They don't see the yellow school buses any better than they did the red, white, and blue ones.

Wayne: I understand that, Gerri, you also do some art. Do you help with your brother's carvings or something? I see the beautiful birds up there, yes.

Gerri: I carved all those.

Wayne: Did you carve them or did you just paint them?

Gerri: No, I did them. I just finished a couple new ones. I just incorporated them with those a couple days ago, so I still do it.

Wayne: How did you get into carving?

Gerri: I got into carving because, when I retired, I wanted to spend time with my brother. My brother, Dick Woodhams, carves. He does owls and things like that but I just wanted to do songbirds. He and his friend, Mitch, would meet out at his workshop and so I went out and worked with them. They taught me how to carve. It takes time to learn how to set the feet and the eyes. They do the blank for you, and then you carve and do a lot of sandpapering.

Wayne: I assume some of the parts are separate and attached or is it all one piece?

Gerri: Most of them are all one piece. One of them in the center there, my chickadee, with the wings coming out, he has separate wings. This one is the one I just finished a couple days ago. That's one piece.

Wayne: Is that a cowbird?

Gerri: This is a song sparrow. I just finished it.

Wayne: Have you been, basically, a bird watcher all of your life?

Gerri: Not really. I love the birds, but I don't I don't feed them now because I have a problem with squirrels. Squirrels got under the hood of my car once and they just made a mess. The barn is such a wonderful place for them to get in. I mean, they can just find all kinds of places to get in. We've trapped them. We've tried to do everything. I'm still fighting them. Anyway, my brother was a carver and I wanted to spend time with him, so that's how I started carving.

Wayne: Do you sell any of your birds?

Gerri: No, I never have. My grandchildren and my children have been recipients of the birds. It's kind of like my quilts. I've made probably, I would guess, close to 200 quilts, and all of my children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, have several of my quilts, each one of them. I have 11 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren, so my family is the recipient. There again, I don't sell them. I just give them away. I've given them to the neighbor's kids. I enjoy doing that.

Wayne: Let's start with Sharon? How did you get involved with the [Clinton Co. Historical] museum?

Sharon: Well, I worked for a local insurance agency as a secretary, and he finally sent me to school to be an insurance agent. Then my husband tagged along so he could be an insurance agent too. He passed the exam by the skin of his teeth, but he passed. Then I thought, "I know the businessmen like to have their employees be involved in something." I thought, "I'm gonna pick out something that I like to do, not something that they want me to do." So I happened to see a piece in the Clinton County paper about, "Come to the next Clinton County business meeting because we're talking about a museum." I thought, "Great, that's right up my alley. I want to go."

So I went and Catherine [Rumbaugh] stood up and said that it had been a dream of hers to have a county museum in St. Johns. She had been doing trunk shows at the schools. She'd take a trunk with artifacts that she had and she'd explain to the kids. Most of them didn't have any idea how the early people lived and what they had to use for everything and so she wanted to have a county museum. Tom Hollen was there. He was an engineer at Federal Mogul, and he agreed to be the first director. Now Tom was a young man. He had a young family, and he had a full-time job, but he managed to go all over the county and talk people into donating stuff to the museum.

I have to back up because first, we had to find a place. The county had this little red brick house next to the hospital. They said we could rent that for a nominal fee and we could fix it up and have it. Oh, it looked like we'd never get it full. Well, we did! People were really reluctant to donate stuff, but they'd loan it to the museum. So Catherine would take the donations and she would record them, insure them. This went on for, I don't know, three or four years, can't remember how many. We were outgrowing that building.

Then it was rumored that they were gonna tear that house down on Maple. Everybody was really dead set against having them tear that down, so Catherine and I --I just went along as a spectator--went to the county commission meeting. Geneva Wiskemann, she was from the southern part of the county and she was a force. I mean, she was known in the political arena and really respected. So Catherine got up and gave her spiel about why we wanted to take that house so it wouldn't get torn down and we'd give the other little house back. Geneva got up and she just torpedoed the whole thing. She said, "Oh, you'll never be able to do that with just volunteers. You won't be able to get any money. Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah." Catherine looked at me and she said, "You gotta get up and say something!" Well, public speaking's not my forte and I wasn't prepared to speak. I don't even know what I said, but I must have been very angry, 'cause I got up and I let them have it. I didn't say anything nasty about her, but I wanted to. So the long and short of it was they agreed to rent that house to the Clinton County Historical Society.

Gerri: Lots of city offices were in that house.

Sharon: The health department was in there.

Gerri: The Health Department, and I worked upstairs. I was a secretary for special ed. That county school commissioner's office was in there; prosecuting attorney was downstairs first and then the health department came.

Wayne: So you were in the building already before it became a museum.

Gerri: Right. My office was the very top of the stairs, the little place that we had Indian things in there for years. Now it has christening dresses in it, but it is just that little, tiny space. I practically sat on the roof of the porch because the window was right there.

Wayne: What was your job there again?

Gerri: I was the special education secretary and it had been voted into existence. Carl Bates was the superintendent and his daughter, Dorothy, did the work as a secretary for that summer, but she was in college. Carl's secretary, Iva Mae Warner, was a neighbor of mine and she came to see if I would be interested in doing that 'cause I had worked for John Pouch before that in the courthouse. Anyway, they hired me and let me work from nine to three so that my kids never knew I worked. I was home when they got here. I went in after they started school. I worked that way for quite a few years. I ended up working there almost 30 years. That's where I retired from. They built the new building out on [US] 27.

Wayne: So you're taking over this new building that had been used for the health department and education, what was it like to go in there and what did you have to do to get it as a museum?

Gerri: Well, I was still working. I'm sure Sharon had a lot more to do with the beginning, fixing it up to make it a museum.

Sharon: I wasn't there all the time 'cause I had a full-time job, but I'd go when I could. John [Rumbaugh] didn't like to go ask for donations. Catherine wasn't shy about asking for donations, and they would get people. Everything needed to be painted and woodwork stripped. There was a green that a lot of the woodwork downstairs was painted. I got so sick of stripping that green paint off. John and Catherine would go over by Flint someplace. They bought a good stripper over there that worked really good, but it still was a lot of work.

I think it was Dean's [Hardware] had donated a lot of paint that people picked out a color and then when they saw it, they didn't like it, so they wouldn't take it. There was like 50 cans of paint one night when we went, in the kitchen. Of course, once they mixed stuff, they was never gonna be able to duplicate. So they picked out something and they mixed up stuff and it came up that kind of rose colored. Then there was painting parties. You took your lunch or you took your supper and you went up there and painted.

Gerri: Backing up a little bit, the county offices only used the second floor. Helen and Charles Fowler lived on the first floor. They rented that.

Wayne: It was a residence on the first floor with the county above?

Gerri: The offices were above. Then Charles Fowler died so then she moved. The health department then moved in the downstairs. Originally, we just used the upstairs 'cause Charlie was a cripple and he was in a wheelchair, and he'd get stuck in the doorway between the bathroom and the bedroom. He had a pole, and he'd hit the ceiling. Iva Mae and I'd go down and get him unstuck.

Sharon: There was a lot of people that come and volunteered a little bit.

Gerri: The Broses, Manning and Hila; Bob Walling and Lee, they helped a lot in the beginning; and Dick and Marie DePond from Ovid or Elsie. They helped a lot. There weren't too many of them, probably eight people that were really dedicated..

Sharon: They lived there practically and Catherine babysat with her granddaughter the redheaded girl, Karen's daughter [Allison]. She grew up there, and she's [Karen Kusenda] our co-director now. I think it was Janice's daughter, the one that died.

Gerri: Karen, she talks a lot about being there when she was young.

Sharon: She was probably there when I wasn't there 'cause it was a lot of hours of the day I wasn't there.

Gerri: Karen's, she's 70, so she would've been there. Well, she probably wasn't real young. This is the 50th, so she would've been 20.

Sharon: Dan [Kusenda] had a problem too.

Gerri: Yeah, but that was after they were married, so I don't think she helped a lot with the museum at that time. It was just when she was younger.

Sharon: If anybody could be excited about getting a big cardboard refrigerator box from Kurt's Appliance, would be Catherine because they would unfold it and paint it black, and then they could stand it up so they could post stuff on it. I mean, they operated on a shoestring.

Gerri: She repurposed, many, many things. She really did.

Sharon: They did buy a few things. That big painting of--now I can't remember the girl's name, that hung in the living room there for so many years.

Gerri: I know that the big blue velvet couch, the Broses gave; the organ. There's some beautiful furniture in there that people--, but it's all donation. I don't think they ever purchased anything much.

Sharon: No. Catherine finally made the decision that all this loan stuff that people had loaned, they either had to donate it or take it out because the museum had been insuring it for years.

Gerri: Right. You can't be responsible for all that. When people come in and go through, you never know what's gonna happen. If it's a loan, it's a concern, and like you say, we do have to pay insurance on all of that.

Wayne: When the museum first opened in the new building, how was it set up? I'm assuming it was set up a little differently than it is today.

Gerri: That I don't know, because I did not start at the museum until after I retired and I retired in 1989. So I started there 34 years ago.

Sharon: We didn't have much furniture to begin with. The rooms were kind of sparse, but gradually people would donate stuff. Mark Barber was a painter. He donated quite a few things too. He's the one that bought Central School and there were cabinets in there and different things that the school had left and he donated things like that to the museum that we could use for storage.

Gerri: Glaspie's Drugstore also. We have nice cupboards and cabinets and things from there, display cases.

Sharon: We had a big party up to John and Catherine's. I don't think Glaspie's ever got rid of anything. There was these great big, tall, brown bottles that had been in the basement, full of lord knows what. We went up there and we dumped that all out and washed the bottles out. I don't know if they let that go.

Gerri: We have a lot of those big, brown bottles. There are a lot of bottles still have the Glaspie label on them. I know there's an old dentist chair. There's a one out in the general store that's newer, but this is an old metal one, that and an operating table. They used to be in a doctor's office. Things were donated by families when they didn't know what else to do with it. They'd see if the museum wanted it and that still happens a lot to this day. "Do you want this? We don't know what to do with it." That still happens.

Sharon: There were times that you'd go to open up the museum and there'd be stuff on the front porch that people just dropped off.

Gerri: That still happens now. Yes, it does, and that's sad because we like to thank the person that gave it, give them credit for the donation.

Sharon: -- or you have to get rid of it because it's something that you don't really want.

Gerri: And then what do you do with it 'cause they would have just left it on the porch.

Wayne: Maybe they're hoping that you would want it or you'd get rid of it for them.

Sharon: There's so many artifacts up there. Catherine was good about trying to come up with a system on how to number them.

Gerri: Do you remember when they got the 720 pairs of salt and pepper shakers? We numbered every one of them. Now they're all on the porch on display and we're just selling them for a donation, 'cause what are you gonna do with 720 --? Catherine was so particular about numbering everything, but to

take in all those things in the first place and to think ahead. She just took them because it was a fun thing to have. We never put them on display. We have a few very special ones, like Kennedy and the rocking chair and some things like that that we kept. We've got some Disney ones that we still don't know what to do with 'cause when you look those things up online, like Jiminy Cricket, for instance, is worth \$340 or something. You're never gonna get that kind of money for them. We do have a few Disney ones there yet to figure out how we're gonna sell them. There's a lot of things that came in that just--

Sharon: Early on when Tom was still there, he was going all over. I can remember it was cold and I conned my mother into going with me. We drove over by Laingsburg. This man had his own little museum. If we took stuff, we had to take it all, everything. He had gone, when they were making Sleepy Hollow [State Park]. You know, they condemned a lot of houses or bought them, and he went in and he took doorknobs, hinges, shelf brackets, whipple trees. I think there was like 14 of those that we had. I think they've whittled it down to just a few now.

Gerri: I know all those things down the line are helpful. I know Catherine and I went over when they were gonna tear down the courthouse. All those beautiful shutters and everything they had in the windows, we just couldn't turn those down. Well, there's still a lot of them sitting out there. We're trying to decide what to do with them but we have placed them in several windows in the museum.

And desks, old, old. One of the desks, the teacher's desk we call it, that came from the courthouse, and that had been a teacher's desk in a one-room country school at one time.

Sharon: Before the steeple came down, there was big crowds that was watching. The guy had the flag pole and he was poking at the brick and this stuff to make it fall down. When that came down, the public lost interest. Catherine wanted some of those corbels that was way up high, so I went over there early one morning and I talked to the guy that was working. You couldn't get in the site. I said, "Can I have at least one of those corbels?" I said, "I work for the museum. It's right over there. If you'll get me one, I'll just take it over there and put it in the building." So he did. They got it someplace. I dunno where.

Gerri: I think you're talking about the big--

Sharon: Up by the roof.

Gerri: Oh, on the roof.

Sharon. They were decorative; they were about this big; they were L-shaped because the top would, and then you had the bottom and there was scrolls and fancy stuff where they--

Gerri: I think one of them is on top of our showcase there now, and then the other one, I don't know what they're gonna do with, but I think one of them is there.

One of the windows is a display case that I filled it all with red felt and every military ribbon and pin and thing. I fastened them all. It's only about this deep, but it's the whole window casing and so that's from the courthouse.

Sharon: There was a young man, his name was Ken Coin and I always think of--who's the guy on television that does all the specials about historical--Ken Burns, and Ken cut his own stencil. That fancy gold paint that's in the entranceway, he put that on there with his finger.

Gerri: He did?

Sharon: Yes, dobbed that on with just his finger!

Gerri: I didn't know that.

Sharon: But he's passed away. Way too young.

Wayne: It's quite a loss.

Gerri: You mentioned Central School and I just took a thumb drive from a tape up there a couple weeks ago. Dr. Ho, who was a physician here in St. Johns, had gone around to the schools and videotaped various things and a lot of it was Central School. I had a friend named Marvin Rhynard, and he said, "You know, I think I've got a copy of that tape." He gave that to me and so that was really a keepsake. That was just a matter of a few weeks ago that that happened. Things like that turn up, you know .

Wayne: We'd love to get a copy of that.

Gerri: Fred Olmstead(?) has the tape right now, but he's gonna give it back to me.

Wayne: I'd love to get a digital copy.

Sharon: I took the thumb drive to Judy [Hubler]. Judy has a copy of it at the museum. She copied it a couple weeks ago.

Wayne: Maybe we'll get one at the archives too then.

Gerri: Marvin just died. I know. I felt so bad. I always went to his class reunions and he invited me to come. I graduated a year ahead of him, but his best friend, Dick Culver, was in my class and Dick and I were corresponding. Anyway, I went to the reunions and we both had a love of Chinese food. That was a terrible shock. He seemed perfectly fine. He was in the hospital and I went over to see him, but he had fluid around his heart.

Wayne: Were you involved in all with the expansion of the two additional buildings on the museum complex? You have the carriage house and then the old general store.

Gerri: Oh, the general store, that was a doctor's office in between the church and the home. He built that for a doctor's office. It was a doctor's office for years 'cause dentists were in it. Dr. Oatley was there for-- I can't remember the name of the man after him. He was my dentist for years and years.

Catherine, when she knew they were gonna tear things down, I think, said, "I would like to make a general store out of it." So they moved it around in back, and now Karen wants to move-- We have what we call a doctor's office on the second floor, and that's filled with all these signs and bottles and all that stuff, just hundreds of artifacts in there, and she's talking about moving it out to the general store because that was originally the doctor's office. I don't know whether that's gonna happen or not. Catherine's dream was to have it be a store and that's what it is now. There again, things came from all over to use in that store: that great, big coffee grinder, huge, big coffee grinder, cash register. When [Joseph] VanRooyen died, they gave us his shoe last, all the things that were--; McKinnon's [department store] had a cash register in there. So things just came in. I don't know where the counter came from.

Sharon: I can't remember either but that's a big counter.

Gerri: It is a big counter. For some reason, I think Jean Rand had something to do with that. I think she might have had it at Jean's Beans [restaurant] or something. I think it came from her somehow. People just are very helpful.

Wayne: You never have enough space for everything either.

Gerri: Oh, we need space. So bad. So bad.

Sharon: Well, that's hard to explain to people too, that donate something and they come in and they, "Where is it?" We say, "Well, we can't display everything." We rotate stuff.

Gerri: We stopped putting names on things. We used to always put little cards out and the name on it and then we stopped doing that because people would say, "I donated a dress or hat or whatever. Where's that?"

Myrna: How many quilts do you think you have?

Gerri: Oh my goodness, 30, 35, 40 maybe. I don't know. I just remember there was a girl named Eve that changed our life at the museum. Let me tell you. She came in. She'd worked for the state museum. We had everything packaged. We had plastic over things and wire hangers and our papers were just everywhere. She said, "You've got to get all archival." Oh my goodness, what a job! I spent hours and hours making a muslin bag for every quilt to go in. Every hanger had to be padded with cotton padding. We had to take all of our plastic covers off of everything. We had a lot of things just put away in plastic bags to keep them clean, but because of the chemicals in the plastic, you couldn't use that anymore.

Then Ron Matson, who is a historian, he spent--oh my goodness! You know what the closet looked like where Catherine put everything. I think, maybe you and myself are the only ones that could ever find anything in there, because we'd been in there searching so much, but she had a system. Ron has worked hours and hours and weeks and months and years getting that system set up so that now, when we wanna find something, if we wanna look at schools, we can go in and there's a section for schools and a section for the counties and a section-- It's just very well organized. He's done a terrific job, but that was a game changer when she came in and told us that archival materials had to be used or everything would eventually just disintegrate.

Myrna: Do you have to take them down and re-roll them?

Gerri: The quilts? Yes. When you take them down, they're folded carefully and put back in their bags.

Myrna: I mean, do you periodically have to go back and refold them some other way?

Gerri: No, we don't do that in particular. I got a stack of quilts, like 25 quilts, upstairs that I've made. Once in a while I take them out and lay them all on top of each other on the bed up there so that they can relax and then I refold them, but we don't have room to do that at the museum. Our quilts are just stacked on top of each other in those bags. It's not good, but we don't have any place to store them. There just isn't a spot. Very few of them are hanging on the wall, just a couple of the velvet ones, the one that Karen wanted to put away, I told her she couldn't do it. It's all velvet and it's a crazy quilt made with all silks and velvets and every stitch is just beautiful.

Sharon: The embroidery people knew they would display them.

Wayne: Hand stitched, I assume. Do you put these on display? Do you have quilt displays from time to time?

Gerri: We have. We usually have a good turnout when we have quilt display or wedding dresses is another thing. People are very interested in those too. Interesting enough, I wanted to put all of the christening dresses that we have, 'cause we never had a display for the baby things. So at the top of the stairs in my old office, she let me put a display of the christening dresses. Duane Davis—you probably know who he is. Actually, his daughter [Cindy Kindle] is on your board.

Myrna: She works at the archives.

Gerri: Anyway, her sister, and I think she maybe did too, wore that christening dress. There's like 20, 25 names on the list of babies that have worn that dress. It came, the family originally, from France or Germany or someplace is where it was made. Anyway, I wanted to do that and the first day the museum was open, I think there were like 16 Davis people there to see their christening dress. Every once in a while, you put something out that is really of great interest.

I think the last display that Ron did with Art Wainwright and the boxer [Bob Every], that was well attended too. Sometimes, like when we do a Civil War or just of military, that's not as well attended as some of the others. Local businesses, that was a good display. There's so many things there that there's no way to display them or to have them all out and show people what we really have.

Wayne: Have you ever had any famous people come by the museum?

Gerri: I don't think so.

Sharon: Who was that couple that parked their little motor home in the church parking lot? They were related to-- I think it was Gillam family, wasn't it? I don't remember now.

Gerri: One of those families did. We had a reception for them in the yard and had a big to-do.

Sharon: They had driven from far away to come here.

Gerri: Yes, some of them did. Catherine was responsible for that. I think somehow they contacted her and that's how she got that all set up. That's quite a few years ago 'cause I remember Elaine Rise was still alive and really helped with that too.

Wayne: Do you have any interesting events happen, strange things happened at the museum?

Gerri: I can tell you one strange thing happened. We had a group of ladies that wanted to come in and they were clairvoyants. They came. There were five of them and they walked in. They'd stand and they'd look around and they'd look at everything. One of the girls came to the bedroom and she said, "Oh, I can't go in there!" She just went sailing out of there. I don't know what she saw in there, but she didn't even wanna go near that bedroom door. Things like that happened. What did she see? She didn't wanna tell us what she saw, but something in that room really spooked her. We had that group of ladies come in.

By the way, you know that we have a tape that Catherine did. Before she left her directorship, they talked her into going from room to room and talking about the artifacts and we have that tape. I think its just an 8-track. Her granddaughter and her husband came to the museum and they talked to

Catherine and she gave a lot of history on the artifacts and the things that are in that building. That's available too.

Myrna: Do you wanna talk about the floors you found there, Sharon, when you were first there?

Sharon: Yes. Fortunately, whoever had occupied that house had covered up the floors downstairs with carpeting and they took that carpeting up. They had to cut it. There was that black backing stuff that had been glued down and it had to be scraped off. John

and somebody else did that and it was just painstaking work, hours and hours of being on your knees, scraping this off, and trying not to damage what was underneath. There's beautiful floors down there.

Gerri: Those old parquet floors are just gorgeous.

Sharon: Once there was some exchange students came in from Europe. They got really excited because they had those kind of floors and they knew all the kinds of wood that was in this parquet stuff around. They didn't really care about anything else. They were so enthralled with the floors. They couldn't believe that a house in Michigan had those kind of floors in a little dinky town like St. Johns.

Myrna: Did I read the kitchen was a cement floor?

Gerri: Well, the kitchen, that one had layers of linoleum and then when they found cement--

Sharon: That was to level it up so it wasn't so wonky.

Gerri: The little fireplace in the kitchen had been cemented over. They discovered that when they were cleaning things.

Sharon: There's a cistern under that back room out there.

Gerri: Those old houses had cisterns in them, absolutely. I didn't know that though. In where the laundry room is?

Sharon: Yeah, there's a cistern under there.

Wayne: I assume it wasn't originally wired for electricity, so was that an issue at all?

Sharon: There's still some knob and tube wiring there, I think. It was the last I knew.

Gerri: You get up in the attic and it's still a problem because you don't have plug-ins where you want them and things. It's just done so many years ago that they didn't need that many things to plug in a lamp or something. The oil lamp things were still the original fixtures.

Sharon: I remember they had to install electric fixtures so they could be removed if we ever got kicked out of the museum. That was always a fear. The museum had to sign a form saying what would happen to the artifacts if they ever went belly up. They were to go to the historical society

Myrna: That's if you have a 501c3, that permit you have to get tax free [non-profit status], that's part of. You have to say what you're gonna do with the stuff. I think it's part of a legal issue.

Gerri: It is still a concern if the county ever— So far, I think it's leased to us.

Sharon: No, we bought it afterwards.

Gerri: Did they sell the house to us?

Sharon: I think we got it for a dollar.

Gerri: I thought it was a permanent lease for a dollar.

Sharon: No, they sold it to us 'cause they wanted to get out from under the liability.

The county was still using the carriage house as tool storage, lawn mowers and stuff, and we really wanted that because we needed the space. There were big things that we were getting like that manure spreader that's out there. Clyde Anderson modified it to sow mint, I think, or do something with the mint farms. Clyde was the resident inventor in Clinton County.

Gerri: They spread their “cheeses” with it. I don't know if it came from the Martis family or Livingston maybe?

Myrna: The straw left over from the mint, did they spread it with that? Is that what they did?

Gerri: They called them cheeses. After the mint has been distilled and they laid these cheeses out, then they would spread it back on the ground.

Sharon: Is that still sitting up there?

Gerri: It's still there.

Sharon: Finally, the county wanted to get out from under the museum because they was worried.

Gerri: I was there when that happened. I guess I just understood that it was-- I know Bill McCarthy had a lot to do with that.

Sharon: Bill and Rosemary McCarthy worked there a lot.

Gerri: It was a forever lease for a while.

Sharon: Then, things weren't going so well over at GM and they had all these old workers come in and skilled trade workers that they had to show up. They had to go to work but they sat there and played cards and drank coffee but they still got paid. So GM decided they would loan the workers out to non-profit organizations and they would come and do things for you. So we jumped at the chance to do that. I think we had a crew of seven that come. Every morning I'd meet them down there about 7:30 after I retired. They did a lot of work.

They did some excavating because it was not a full basement under that house and they had an elevator that they poked out a window. It was a messy job, dirty. That dirt was terrible. You couldn't hardly see when you got down there and they had to wear masks and suits. They dug that out and put it in that conveyor\elelevator to get it outside. They did a lot of work on the carriage house too. That was in bad, bad shape. They fixed it so we had a stairway to get up.

Gerri: We've got a lot of pictures at the museum of them redoing. They took pictures of them working.

Sharon: They worked at a lot of different places while in St. Johns. That was nice. It was free labor.

Gerri: That really helped 'cause that basement was--

Myrna: That went on for several years, didn't it?

Sharon: Then I think things got better so they got called back to work and was eligible to retire. One guy I remember, he had a dump truck, and boy, we unloaded a lot! He took everything, dumped it at-- One of the guys said, "You should go by his house." I said, "I don't think I want to."

My brother donated some barn beams, big chunky beams. They took them up there and I don't remember what all they did with them, but they cut them up and did stuff with them.

Gerri: --and braced things somehow probably--

Sharon: --because nothing was very stable.

Gerri: Just recently, when we were gonna move that display case that was in the front parlor and put it in the middle parlor, when they took that out, there was a bad space in the corner and there was a hole there. Bill Irrer, bless his heart, he spent hours and hours and hours repairing that, but when they got down there, the way they braced that was unbelievable. They didn't know how the whole corner-- Back in those days, when you're talking about those big beams, that's what they did. If those started to rot out or something, then you were in real trouble, but they got it all fixed up.

Sharon: You never know what you're going to uncover when you fix stuff.

Gerri: They've had a lot of help doing these projects. We always seem to come up with someone that will help us out.

Sharon: Over the years they'd come and go.

Wayne: Thank you very much for sharing the history with us.