

Int. – 25th, 1988. I'd like to thank both of you for taking your time this evening to talk to us, and let's start with Mr. Allen. Could you tell me some of your earliest memories of coming to Northville?

Mr. A – I came to Northville in 1934, and I have seen many changes since the time I first came to Northville. I hadn't been in Northville too many years til I was elected to the old Village Council. I served on that for eight years, and then we became a city, and I was the first mayor pro-tem of the City Council. Mr. Ely, who was the mayor, passed away shortly after he was elected and I became mayor and held the position for twenty years. During that time I can reminisce on many things that happened under my administration along with the Council I worked with – all very fine people, a great many of them have left the community. Some of them are still in the community.

One of the major things was what we did with the money we received from the race track, and how it was used. When I became mayor there was not one square inch of public parking in Northville, and me and other people on the Council conceived the idea that parking was the life's blood of any community. And we attempted to provide parking for the merchants in the downtown area. The money to buy these old houses and old buildings and tear them down and make parking came from the State reimbursement to the City of Northville from the pari-mutuel handle at the Northville Down. During those days we spent every cent of State money for public improvements – parking, streets, sidewalks, parking deck and so on that the public is enjoying today. However, when the town was – Mainstreet 78 was enacted, a good bit of the public parking was used up, particularly on the streets and one particular lot across from the bank building used to have 45 spaces. Today, it only has nine.

Prior to the race track in Northville, when it started in early days, we were a Village and we were not subject to the State money – the bill read, “a pari-mutual track existing in any city would receive a percentage of the mutual handle.” Us being a Village, we did not get that, but the management of the race track was good to the City of Northville, and in a sense, they gave the City \$500 a night, which was used to build the Community Building. The Community Building was built with race track money. It did not cost the taxpayer any money to build the Community Building. However, the school was so short for school space, that the first year the city – the Village never did run it as a Community Building because the school needed it. We leased it to the school for \$1 a year. And they maintained it for several years. They used it for school purposes. When the Village – now, we had become a City, and we got the regular State take, reimbursement for the pari-mutuel handle. And when the school got new buildings, and turned it back to the City, it required quite a lot of repair. The floors had buckled and so on. But now it's being used for Recreation Department and City functions.

Another area – some people didn't think could be done, but we did it in Northville. That was when we built a public housing of Allen Terrace. It has 101 units, and it was done with local money. We didn't take a dime of Federal assistance to build that building. And the way it was built, it was a general obligation bond to the faith and credit of Northville taxpayers. But the rent was set up on two phases – the first phase of the rent was what it cost per month to retire the bond issue, and added to that was the cost of heat, lights, maintenance, and so on, which was much less than people could rent homes in Northville for. And a lot of people up there were

shuffling around these big old houses, and they couldn't get anybody to shovel snow and cut grass, and maintain the lawn and so on. So it has worked very well. And these's been people from many, many states come to Northville and talk about this and didn't believe it could be done, but when we show'em it could be done and is being done, and is working very satisfactory, it is a warm spot in many people's hearts.

Another thing, our business – I'm in the monument business, as most of you know – and we deal with a great many old family and old people. We get a lot of the history of the community and the background of Northville through our business. I might mention the Rural Hill Cemetery, which was established in 1885 with public contributions with people donating their teams and wagons and helps and so on to cut down trees and grade and put in drives and so on. And that's served the public very well, and there's probably more of Northville people in the Cemetery than is walking streets today. But people like to go up there and be with their friends and so in.

Int. – Can you tell me what year it is that Northville became a city? Do you know? Approximately?

Mr. A – '55 – Northville became a city.

Int. – So that's while you were serving on the Village Council?

Mr. A – That's right, and I was on the Charter Commission, any my father-in-law, Dr. Snow, and myself had quite a lot to do with Northville becoming a city. We worked very hard to become a city – not that we thought the city was that important, but the State revenue from the race track was very important. And that was our main reason for becoming a city. There was also another – two other votes for the City and Township to incorporate. One time the City passed it, and the Township voted it down. The next time the Township passed it, and the City voted it down because they didn't want to divide the race track money is what it amounted to.

Int. - And they it was successful eventually?

Mr. A - No, that's when he means they wanted to be one unit – not a township and a city.

Int. - Oh, the whole thing wanted to be –

Mrs. A – To be one entity, but it failed both times.

Int. – The next question I wanted to ask you is what year was Allen Terrace built? And how long did it take to build?

Mr. A – I think it was started in '74 or '75 because it wasn't all completed when I gave up as Mayor, I don't think. I think the dedication come after that.

Int. – So it took about three years to build, two or three?

Mr. A – It was about two years in construction.

Int. – So you served as Mayor of the City from 1957 to 1977?

Mr. A – And eight years on the Village Council.

Int. – eight years on the Village Council, prior to that?

Mr. A – And I've been on Boards and Commissions ever since And under the old form of – the Village form of government and City form of government, I was on the Wayne County Board of Supervisors fourteen years. Because before they reduced the size of it and that District, all the mayors and supervisors were on the Wayne County Board of Supervisors. And I got to know a lot of people and worked with a lot of people in Wayne County from that aspect.

Int. – Did you found Allen Monument yourself when you first moved to town in 1934?

Mr. A – Yes, I moved, really, Allen Monument from Flint to Northville. I learned my trade in Flint, but I always wanted to be in a small town. I had an opportunity to start in a small town and came here in '34.

Int. – And when you first, when you first founded Allen Monument – where was it located?

Mr. A – On Cady Street and Marr (?) right next to Foundry Flask now which was the bell foundry then that made dinner bells found almost all over the world. Even in England, we know that for a fact.

Int. – And can you tell me about some of the other businesses that were in that area when you first founded it?

Mr. A – Well, Stimson Scales was in the business where Bellingers is now, and there was another building. Shortly after that, they went out of business, and there was a Packard dealer in one of the buildings, and when they were – he got it – he bought the building, and when he got the deed to it, he owned both buildings at a bankrupt sale. And on down around the corner across from the Chamber of Commerce office was a factory that built church furniture – pews and so on for churches. That burned down about in the late 30's. And then the Petz brothers built a garage – that building there was a garage, and they were Studebaker dealers.

Mrs. A – We had nine car dealers.

Int. – About nine different car dealers here?

Mr. A – Yeah, yeah, and at that time, we had about nine automobile dealers in Northville.

Int. – So, most of the automobile dealers were represented in the community?

Mrs. A – That's correct.

Int. – And you mentioned earlier this evening some information about the springs in the community?

Mr. A – Yes, I'd like to dwell on this for a moment. I think many of the people driving through their town and seeing Joe Denton Park would be very doubtful if they ever thought that that was Northville's water supply. But it really was. Now, try and inertiante (?) where Joe Denton Park now exists was Northville water supply. There's about five springs there, and it runs across Seven Mile Road, and on down below there's a watercress bed and the watercress – the Lawrences used to gather that and sell it to hotels and restaurants in Detroit. Then we got into wells in Northville, so there was a pumping station at the northeast corner of the Joe Denton Park under those oak trees and a high fence about eight-foot cyclone fence around that. It was watched very careful to keep birds and ducks and things of that nature out. And that was Northville's water supply for many years. And those springs are still in existence, but they're tiled under Seven Mile Road. And then there was an individual in the Council at that time, when we abandoned that – well, it had been abandoned, but it was still there, and he had a friends that wanted to build a house there, and some of us got busy and got that dedicated in memory of Joe Denton, who was the police chief here for many, many years. And that's the way it is today and it's a nice neighborhood asset.

Int. – Mrs. Allen, could you tell me when your family first arrived in Northville, since I see you were born here?

Mrs. A – That's correct. My mother and dad – my mother was a trained nurse and my father was a doctor; and they each graduated from the University of Michigan. And then they came to Northville – first they went to Leslie, then they came to Northville and settled. And dad has his practice on Main Street. He was – in addition to being an allopathic doctor, he was a homeopathic doctor. He was very proud of that degree – to be able to practice homeopathy. He was very active – he ended up being president of what was called The American Institute of Homeopathy in the United States.

Int. – Can you tell me the difference between allopathy and homeopathy?

Mrs. A – Well, there was a homeopathic school at the University of Michigan, and there's some in Washington and out in California, and in Philadelphia; and it's more or less a "like-cures-like." If you have like poison ivy, they take a minute, a very tiny bit of that and inject you – give you a shot – or in a tablet form. And that cures. And it takes a while. Their bible, like they call it, is called "Interia Medica" book. And you have different symptoms, and they treat by symptoms. Homeopathic – hm, hm.

Int. – What is allopathic?

Mrs. A – That is more like these drugs, these wonder drugs. He called them wonder drugs, and they usually have contra indications – they can give you something – a shot or a tablet; it can cause something else. Where in homeopathy, there is no – nothing of seriously happen from taking whatever they prescribe in their tablet form.

Int. – So they came here and set up practice?

Mrs. A – Practice in the ‘20’s. Mm, hm, and they – the hospital, they were very happy to have Sessions Hospital. They know the people – Mrs. and Mrs. Ed Sessions that started the hospital. They were very fond of that family. And now their daughter – the Session’s daughter still lives here – Amy Siemasz (?). And then my dad was very active in politics and civic things. He truly enjoyed Northville. He was president of the Village, and then he was in school – he was president of the School Board in the ‘40’s for several terms. He started the Northville Optimists Club – he was the first president. And then he took another term at that later on, but that is no longer in existence in Northville.

Int. – When did that cease to exist – do you know, or how long?

Mrs. A – I can’t tell – it was in the ‘40’s though – in ‘48 or ‘49 that the Optimists Club was started, as I remember. And then he was interested in politics, and he got – he was given the job as manager of the Michigan State Fair in Detroit. That was in 1939 and ‘40. He was head of the State Fair. And then after that was when he was asked if – if Northville would like to start a pari-mutuel race track. So they pioneered harness racing in Michigan – in Northville. Correct.

Int. – And that was in the 40’s?

Mrs. A – Yes.

Int. – Have we had racing in Northville since that time?

Mrs. A – Yes, every year since then.

Int. – And the race track, which we all know where it is, was built on the site of the former Wayne County Fair property?

Mrs. A – Right.

Int. – Do you have some childhood memories you might like to tell me about, like the long walk you had to school?

Mrs. A – Oh, yes. When I was growing up we were lucky enough to live right across from the school. So for my twelve years of my education, I just had to cross the street. I also remember the night – the morning – it was a morning the school burned down. And we could get in our front bedroom and watch it burn.

Int. – You’re talking about the high school?

Mrs. A – It was the grade school.

Int. – Weren’t you very little when the grade school...

Mrs. A – Yes, it was on the street that’s closed now, but we watched it burn down and then they had to put all the classes in different buildings in the City. I went to school down by the – it was

called then the Legion Hall, and it is down by the Gandy Dander – the next building – it may be an antique shop now. But that's where I went to school for two years, and one of my teachers there was Mrs. Babbitt, a lovely lady. My brother went to school – it was the second grade and he went to the bank, the Lapham Bank, which was on the corner of Center and Main at the time. That was also the time I believe, when they were repaving streets because that was quite a deal – it was all cement and a lot of work – it was a mess down through there but I guess, I said I went right across the street to school, but those two years I did have to go down...

Int. – And it took them two years to rebuild it?

Mrs. A – Right, and then we went back to the new grade school, and that was in 1936. It was right across the street from my home again on Main.

Int. – What's – do you have any memories of the teens that stand out? What kinds of things did you do in Northville as a teenager?

Mrs. A – I don't... It was just the football games. I guess things centered around our school and our church activities mainly. And then my father had hay fever – we did go up North in the summer to Bois Blanc Island which is near Cheboygan.

Int. – And your father acted on behalf, acted as a physician for the ...

Mrs. A – That's correct – he was the team physician years ago, and he examined all the boys for their sports activities – the football teams, the basketball teams. And he did this all gratis out of the goodness of his heart because he truly loved Northville and everything it entailed. He did also test eyes for children that needed to through the school nurse, Miss Knapp. She would send over students that needed glasses, and he did all that free of charge. He also drove teams to away games. We took teams because at that time, there were no buses. We had to do all that – have different people take teams. And then one year, since the football boys did not have blankets or covers-up – you know, something to keep them warm – he bought the whole team their hooded robes, whatever, to keep them warm. Those that weren't on the fields and off, he was a big donator in that.

Int. – Where did the teams play their home games?

Mrs. A – Down, we went down to the park--Edward Hines--down in that field down there.

Int. – Can you think of anything else about your childhood or teen years that I haven't asked you about – you might want to discuss?

Mrs. A – Oh, I don't believe so.

Int. – Can you tell me a little about the Chamber of Commerce and the building of the ...

Mrs. A – Yes, I'd be happy to. The Chamber of Commerce is about 25 years old now in existence in Northville. First, we had a little office in City Hall. The very first was Margaret

Zayti was the Secretary, and she took calls for the Chamber of Commerce from the race track. And then we had a – Ed C. Nyriker was our Director, and he had an office in City Hall. And then from there we moved to the front part of the Community Building, in the front where the glass office is, and that wasn't very visible. So then in 19-, about 1977, I came on the Board and got interested in the Chamber, and we felt that it might be nice to have a more visible place in Northville. So through the help of my husband, we proceeded to see what we could do about getting a place for the Chamber office. So we went to the C & O Railroad and asked if we could rent some – get some of the property owned by the railroad down by the well. We thought that would be a nice place to have an office – there would be a nice little entrance to Northville. So we contacted several people, and everybody was receptive and I went in as President and during my term, we were happy to be able to put up a nice little building. And we moved in May of 1982, and it was all paid for – the entire building through public donations. And we – it is on railroad property like I say--so if we ever do not have a building and do not have a Chamber, that building will be moved off. But we hope that we grow, and I think we are, and we feel that we are doing quite a bit to Northville, promoting Northville, and we're very happy to be down there. So that's one of the things that I'm proud of – accomplishment in my years in Northville.

Int. – Still actively involved with the ...

Mrs. A – I'm Secretary now of the Board.

Int. – Approximately, how many members does the Chamber have?

Mrs. A – We have about 200, 214 or so. They started out with a small group, but it's growing. And we're happy about that.

Int. – Mr. Allen, could you tell me what you might consider to be your greatest, or some of your greatest accomplishments during your time as Mayor?

Mr. A – Well, I guess one of the things that I was most proud of – there were several things accomplished during my tenure of office as Mayor. And when I chose not to run as Mayor again because I was becoming involved in the race track, and I thought some people might think it was conflict of interest. But I'd like to say that we built a new City Hall, and it was paid in full the day that the contractor turned the key over to us. A little bit of a story, but I happened to be on the Wayne – I didn't happen to be – I was on the Wayne County Board of Supervisors, as I mentioned earlier under the old system. An right after, shortly after World War II, the government – you know we went into a kind of recession – the government was putting up fifty percent money for public buildings, and I came home and reported to the Council that our old City Hall was an old house, and it really wasn't big enough, and we had a watchman and his family living in the same house. They kind of laughed a little bit but this touched me, so I pursued the money matter, and we have a new City Hall in Northville. In 1963, it was dedicated, and we didn't owe anybody a dime. Allen Terrace was built – I mentioned that earlier. All the parking downtown was accomplished through race track revenue at no cost to the tax payer. Griswold Street was put through to Beal Street. We bought four houses there, and that's all paid. Wing Street was put through to alleviate some of the traffic problems for the development west

of town – one had to use Main Street one hundred percent. We put Wing Street through there, and it has become very serviceable for the community.

Another thing that hasn't been mentioned I don't think, is the United States Fish Hatchery that is a block or so west of the Joe Denton Park that I spoke about a while ago. That was quite a famous fish hatchery, and there were several people in Northville that worked there, and they raised millions of little fish, and they were shipped all over the country in like our milk cans. And the reason it was located there was because it was spring-fed like the Joe Denton Park. But the springs originated west of Clement Road. And when they started building houses up there and putting in septic tanks, apparently, they got into the veins of water, and the water was no longer conducive to raise fish and the fish began to die off. The Federal Government finally closed it, and it was dormant for several years and some of us got after the Federal Government to work out a deal whereby we could get it and tear the buildings down and create a park. And we were successful in doing that. And the buildings were burnt, and the burning was a training program for the fire department, which served two purposes. And it's been a very active place with tennis courts and so on, and I think it's something the City should really appreciate, and a lot of people are very proud of it.

Another thing I might mention that when I became Mayor, Main Street was the only way to go through Northville. There was no Seven Mile by-pass and there was no Eight Mile by-pass. And there was four gravel pits west of Northville with all the trucks hauling gravel to and from town, and they'd have to go Main Street to Rogers Street out Seven Mile Road to two pits out that way. Well there was two pits out Eight Mile Road – they went Main Street and cut over to Griswold – no Randolph, Randolph and out that way. At the same time we had parking all up and down Main Street, and the north side of Main Street was angle parking and parallel parking on the south side. And I don't believe we had any more traffic problems than we do now. Well, maybe less.

Mrs. A – Maybury San – they came out – a bus line.

Mr. A – And all the traffic to Maybury Sanitarium which was very active in those days. Buses and so forth had to go through town.

Mrs. A – Lots of buses – from Five Points out to Maybury San to see the people.

Mr. A – Another thing that should be mentioned was the Detroit United Railway or the interurban it was called, came to Northville. Well, there was a lot of other communities, but it came from Plymouth direction – the west side of the then PM Railroad tracks and crossed where Main Street is now – well that was the D.U.R. right-away, and that was across that hole in the ground – the stream there – on piers – that was all hollow underneath and water under there. And the only way out of town then to the east was the bridge at Cady Street – Main street traffic had to go to Cady Street, and the Cady Street traffic – well the abutments are still there yet, but the bridge was active when I first came to town. That's been done away with, and the hole has been filled up. People started using it for garbage and rubbish, which is where Dr. Handorf (?) built the office, and then part of it was deeded over to the Foundry Flask for a parking lot. That's all taken care of.

Another thing that the D.U.R. – when it came through Northville didn't go uptown. It turned at Griswold Street – there was a Y there, and they backed uptown. And went on to Farmington or visa versa. And the old right-away is still out Randolph Street (means Griswold) – you can see it yet. But these are things that people would like to know about.

And another thing that maybe some people have forgotten about – but that's the spring, Northville Silver Springs which had a bottling plant back of where the depot used to be, which burnt a few years ago. And they used to have the PM train – in all the dining cars, “We serve only Northville Silver Springs Water”. And a great many of the better hotels found in Detroit and other places had this water in their restaurants, and some of them – they also had signs to that effect. And there were several people worked there during the years, and after it was eliminated, the last people owned it was Nesbit Orange Company, and they used that water to make their orange pop out of. And then the mining out of gravel pits hit the vein of water, and it dried up, and the City spring dried up. No other action has been taken, and I'm sorry to say the spring is dried up, but it is. I think we'll get it back, get it in operation some way with a well. It has operated in a well capacity for ten to twelve – maybe more years--and the same quality of water was produced in the well as come out of the spring. That's a little bit of my history of Northville – probably things I've left out, but I'll do better next time.

Int. – Can either of you think of anything that I've failed to ask you about that you feel might be important to include?

Mrs. A – Not at this point in time – probably like he says, later, but right now, I guess not.

Int. – Well then, I'd like to thank both of you very much for you're taking your time to talk to me this evening, and I know that this is going to be a great addition to our collection.