

June 22, 1989

Mrs. Alice Eaton
730 Babcock Apt 2305
San Antonio, TX 78201

Dear Mrs. Eaton,

Thank you very much for your kind responses to our recent letter regarding the Northville Oral History Project. We would very much like to have your memories recorded on audio tape. I have included a tape for you to use to be recorded. I hope that you will be able to have someone interview you and return this tape to me.

Below you will find a list of questions that we would like to have you discuss. Thanks again for your cooperation. Please feel free to call me or write again if you have any questions. I can be reached at 313 349 9005. We will be happy to pay the cost of shipping the tape.

QUESTIONS:

Could you begin by identifying yourself and telling a little about your family and childhood?

What first brought you to Northville?

What are your first memories of the community?

Can you tell a little about where you lived and what that area of Northville was like at the time you moved there?

Do you have some memories you might like to share about your children growing up in Northville?

I see you have been a member of the Northville Presbyterian Church. Do you have any church memories you'd like to repeat?

What can you tell us about the Northville Women's Club in your many years as an active member?

Can you tell us anything about your husband and his family with regard to the Northville area?

As a member of the Volunteer Auxiliary at Northville State Hospital, what did you do and what memories do you have?

Have I left anything out that you might like to discuss?

Do you have any particularly significant memories of the community?

Thank you for participating in the Northville Oral History Project.

If you are unable to answer these questions on tape we would appreciate your written responses. Thanks again for your help.

Sincerely,

Diane M. Rockall
Northville Oral History Project
Director
727 Thayer
Northville, MI 48167

I am Alice Eloise Eaton, born February 23, 1896, in Toledo, Ohio. I am the fifth of six children, having four older brothers and one younger sister.

My father, Louis Comlossy, was a jeweler and watchmaker, with a store on Madison Avenue for many years.

After my graduation from high school, my sister and I lived with my brother in Chicago. My father did not believe in higher education for women, so my entrance to college was delayed. But after two years, I enrolled at the University of Michigan, and became a member of the Kappa Alpha Theta Sorority. After two years, I chose to marry another brother's friend, Levi Medbury Eaton, October 11, 1919. The wedding was in my parents' home in Toledo.

We returned from our honeymoon to live in the Eatons' home in Northville. It was the cobblestone farm home on Rogers Street of the 57 acre fruit farm that Levi Frank Eaton had bought for his son to develop and provide a home for the family. My husband had completed his studies in horticulture at the University of Wisconsin. Some fruit trees had been planted on the farm previously.

Father Eaton had his photo-engraving business in Detroit and produced the Sunday rotogravure section of the Detroit Free Press. He found it convenient to commute except in winter when he and Mother Eaton stayed in Detroit, leaving the house to us.

After a few years of disappointment and loss as a fruit farm, an offer to buy the property for subdivision by a group of Northville men was accepted. Two acres of the original plot of fifty-seven acres were retained, including the house and extending to the proposed next street west, Eaton Drive. I believe Hugh Babbitt, Milo Johnson and C.C. Yerkes were in the group of buyers.

When the farm was purchased, the owner's house was supplied with water from the natural springs. After the sale, the spring water was for the village and had to be paid for. It was a lovely spring which flowed under 7 Mile Road through the Leo Lawrence property. Watercress grew in it and made a delicious salad. When the property was developed for subdivision, Eaton Drive was divided to extend both sides of the spring to Seven Mile Road, and a fence constructed to protect it. The Northville Garden Club beautified a point at the entrance to the park, placing some evergreens and a stone sign. It was a lovely little park.

Our first house was built on the southwest corner of the two acre plot retained at the sale. Now 375 Eaton Drive, its timbers were taken from the old barn on the farm. The shingles were from the new roof recently placed on that old barn. The carpenter was Charles Crase and special masons were hired for the cobblestone work on chimney and porch pillars. Stones from the fields were used in the grout wall and porch pillars. Cobblestones were plentiful all about. Our

first home was finished in time for me to bring our first baby, Alice, there; she was born in Toledo, August 26, 1920.

When we had twin boys, Frank and Louis, born July 4, 1923, we knew we must have more room, and when they were two years old, we hired Thomas Moss, the architect who planned the Harper home on Orchard Drive. Alex Johnson was our contractor-carpenter, and Turnbull provided electric wiring and fixtures. The house, at 365 Eaton Drive, is a hillside house with three levels including a full basement.

Mother Eaton was left a widow when Father Eaton died of a heart attack New Years Day, 1921. She rented the cobblestone house to the McLoughlins for a few years and finally sold it to Harry Rackham and his wife, who had two daughters. Dr. and Mrs. Russell Atchison bought the house from them.

Sherrill Ambler bought the lot next to the cobblestone house; Richard Ambler was one of the twins' playmates. Hugh Babbit built his house on the corner of Rogers and Thayer, and Louis Babbit was another playmate. Bob Boyden lived in a house near ours and played with them then and later when they moved to Cady Street.

One summer there was a gas leak in neighbor Milne's house and the manhole in the street was left open overnight with a lit lantern as warning. The boys were attracted to it; Frank warned the others to stand back while he lowered the lantern into the manhole to investigate. The gas exploded and burned his hand and face badly, particularly his hand. I took Frank to our family physician, Dr. Sparling, who treated him immediately, and he has only very minor scars on his hand as a memento.

My husband commuted to Detroit for years, working for The Merchants Despatch, Inc., owned by the New York Central Railroad, 1922-1945. In the depths of the Depression, 1931, he was promoted to the office of manager in Rochester, New York. This meant a raise in salary but also meant moving our family. The Receiver who had been appointed for the Northville Savings Bank and Lapham Savings Bank rented our house. When he was ready to leave, after a year, we were ready to return. My husband became manager of the Detroit office. This meant more commuting until 1946 when he and Carl Bryan formed a partnership in a real estate office, a very congenial and pleasant situation. Starting in the former office of Dr. Burgess, it developed to a new two-story building for offices which George Clark acquired when he bought the Northville Realty Company, 1964. When Lee retired from the railroad and was able to walk home for lunch, he said he felt he was on vacation.

Northville was a good place for raising children. The teachers knew the families, church activities were important, and doors were locked only when leaving town for vacation or when the county fair was in operation. Boys enjoyed roaming fields and swimming in the gravel pit, in summer, and hockey on the mill pond in winter. Skiing and tobogganing on the hills west of

Orchard Drive was a treat. Our daughter and her chum, Marjorie Chase (who lived on Clement Road and Main Street) loved to explore Bloom's Woods, and wrote a monthly "Nature News" for interested people, for several years. Marjorie's mother built a stone playhouse which was enjoyed for a long time; it even had a fireplace, porch and basement.

With Ann Arbor close by, it was convenient for our boys to get their college education there, Louis preparing for dentistry and Frank for business administration and engineering. They both became Naval cadets during the war, and Frank served in the South Pacific. Because of his dental requirements, Louis's active duty was postponed until after the war.

During the war, Lee served a first-aid emergency participant (in case of attack) and I worked for over a year in the Ford Phoenix plant, assembling dashboards. The plant was limited to women workers, especially single women. This was my only paid employment after marriage, and was easier than a lot of my volunteer work.

Lee enjoyed living in Northville, serving as a Presbyterian Church elder, Northville councilman, Rotarian, and Exchange Club member. We were both active in the church, serving as elders, Sunday School superintendents, and Lee was treasurer for many years. We were active in helping rebuild the church.

I was a member of the Northville Women's Club, serving as secretary and program chairman. I was a member of the Book Club started by Louise Bryan, and including Ada Bloom, Josephine Hahn, Elizabeth Lapham, Elizabeth Rambeau, Virginia Plunkett, Cletis Austin and Mrs. Russell Clark. We met once a month to have a book reviewed by a member after luncheon in one of our homes. I also belonged to the Northville Garden Club and the Northville University of Michigan Alumni Association; the later didn't last long.

While I was a Northville State Hospital Auxiliary member, we operated a gift shop in the lobby. At the time of the Detroit riots, many of the hospital employees were Negroes who lived in Detroit and were afraid to come to work. There was a plea for Auxiliary members to come to relieve the situation, and I went one morning to help serve patients who were blind or unable to feed themselves. I had a Negro blind patient to help. She objected to using a paper plate and cup. I tried to explain the difficulty of dishwashing machines without attendants, to no avail. To serve in such a situation calls for great patience and consideration, or a terrible need for money to live, I did not return.

About once a month I would go to Detroit to shop. At first there was the Detroit Inter-Urban to connect with a Detroit street-car at Five Points. Then there was a train from Plymouth to Detroit. Later there was a bus from Northville to Detroit, and sometimes we could drive. Our Northville Woman's Club was associated with the Federation of Woman's Clubs and we attended their meetings periodically, reporting to our own Club later.

Later we did our special shopping at Northland where Hudson's had a new store. The last time I went to Detroit to shop was in a special bus which would take us directly to Hudson's entrance and pick us up at the same door for return. This had been arranged by our Woman's Club for safety reasons, as Detroit had acquired a bad reputation for crime.

Our first little bungalow had been sold to Joe and Virginia Plunkett when Northville Realty was begun. Our life in Northville was pleasant, but our family had gone. We felt we had too much land, too much house, too much work, and it was no longer fun when we had to hire everything done. So Lee offered to sell it to Bruce and Rita Turnbull who had long wanted to buy it because their family was growing and needed more room. We moved to a community in southern Ohio, operation by the Presbyterian Church, where we could buy a small house. There were five hundred retirees there and we enjoyed eleven years until Lee needed more nursing care than available.

We moved to the Brethren's Home, near Dayton, where we were comfortable and my husband could be in the nursing area of the same building in which we had a small apartment. After four years, he died, of emphysema, May 13, 1985. I chose to move to San Antonio to be near our daughter, Alice (Mrs. Roger W. Sackett 3806 Highcliff, San Antonio, Texas 78218). I am now living in a retirement home, Morningside Meadows, operated by the Presbyterian, Methodist and Episcopal ministries, where I have an apartment. I am happy here, since I arrived in February, 1986.