

HARRIET GIBSON ORAL HISTORY - 1988

Interviewer: Warna Roberts (?)

Q. Okay, Will you tell me your name, where you live, and we'll start from there?

I'm Harriet Gibson and I live on Six Mile Road where I've lived for the past 69 years. It's been a pleasure.

Q. You live on Six Mile near where?

Near Sheldon. Just west of Sheldon, right at the present time there is only one house within a mile west of us. We don't have any neighbors.

Q. You live on a farm?

Well, it was a farm, it was a 160 acre farm, but my dad had to sell it twenty years ago, and he retained two acres with the house on it and some of the buildings, and when he passed away, why he left it to my sister and myself and that's where we live today. And it's an old farmhouse. My grandfather bought it in 1882 and it's still in pretty good condition. But, as you know how old houses go, there are lots of things that could be done to it. But it takes time.

Q. You were telling me earlier that it is really a Centennial Farm.

Well, it could be, but we never made application for it. But of course it isn't a farm now, it's only two acres. But my dad always told us that the house was built in 1835, I believe. (Q. Really!) It's an old house, but it's been kept up pretty good; very few changes have been made on it.

Q. Now how long have you lived in Northville?

Well, I've lived in Northville 69 years, all in the same address.

Q. 69 years, and you were how old then?

I think I was three. My older sister and myself were born in Owosso, and my father worked as a civil engineer with the Ann Arbor Railroad. My uncle and my grandfather were still working the farm, and, at the time, as my dad always said, they were making more money milking cows than he was working on the railroad. So he packed up his family and moved back to the farm, and that's where we've been every since.

Q. What is your earliest recollection of Northville, Harriet?

Well, that's awfully hard to say, I guess I wasn't paying that much attention to things that were going on. But I remember the buildings that were on West Main Street just west of Center Street and the crow's nest, which was at the intersection of Center Street and Main Street.

Q. What's the crow's nest, that's the first time I've heard of it?

Well, I have a picture of it, but I guess that it was a grand stand where the band played, because it was up in the air.

Q. Oh, that's the one that was up in the air, elevated?

Elevated.

Q. I've never heard it called the crow's nest. I've been told about that structure, but I didn't...

I do remember the streetcar coming up Main Street, at least I think I do, it came as far as the intersection; that was the end of the line. And when they wanted to go back, they had to go back down Main Street, turn onto Griswold, and then back out onto Main Street. I guess it went on to Plymouth and Wayne. I know I remember my dad saying in going to school, he took the Interurban to Wayne and then another one from Wayne to Ann Arbor. I guess those are the earliest things I remember about Northville.

Q. Now what about school? What's some of the earliest you remember about school?

Well, I went to Waterford Country School which is located where Meads Mill Middle School is now and I went there through the seventh grade.

Q. Did you walk to school?

Most of the time, once in a while my mother would take us in her old Model T Ford, I remember riding in that. And Six Mile Road was a lot different, it didn't curve around, it came down over the railroad tracks and up a big hill. And after seventh grade, we went to eighth grade and on through high school in Northville. Our family went to Northville, but all the other kids in school went to Plymouth and I don't know why that was, unless it was because my dad graduated from Northville High and he wanted his kids to graduate from Northville High.

Q. How did you get to Northville High...that was a distance?

It was a mile and a half and we were always taken, either my dad took us or my mother took us. I don't ever remember ever walking to school but quite often we walked home afterwards up Sheldon Road. After graduating from Northville High, and our class graduated from the theatre that year.

Q. Why was that?

I don't know if it was because they didn't have enough room or what, but I really don't know why.

Q. What year?

1935.

Q. Was the theatre in the same place as it is now?

Yes, it was the same theatre.

Q. Same building?

Yes, same building. And then I stayed home for a year. I guess I was helping my mother with the family. There were three other kids after my older sister and I were born on the farm, and so I helped her out. In 1936 I started school at Michigan State, and I majored in home economics and graduated in 1940. And then I specialized in dietetics. After that I went to Philadelphia and was intern for a year in a hospital in Philadelphia. Then I came back and went to work at Maybury. I was going to be there for two years.

Q. Tell me about Maybury now. You went to work at Maybury San?

Maybury Sanatorium, which is located north of Northville on Seven Mile Road, between Seven and Eight Mile Road.

Q. That is where the Maybury State Park is?

Where Maybury State Park is now. I don't know, about 900 acres, I think.

Q. You went to work there as the dietician?

As a dietician. Mrs. McKenna was the head dietician and I think she, or as people used to say who worked there first, they came with the first load of bricks; I think she started working there in 1925.

Q. Now tell us what the Sanatorium was like, because many people nowadays don't realize that they were isolated, and they lived there. Tell us what the situation was like.

Now, I don't know too much about that part of it because I was concerned with the dietary end of it, and I didn't get out and mingle with the other people too much.

Q. They were housed there.

They were housed there; the patients were housed there, under medical care of the doctors that were specialized in the care and treatment of tuberculosis. They were there until they were discharged. It depended, I don't know how long each one was there, it was different for each one, it depended on how long they got along with their doctors, I suppose.

Q. Do you have any recollection on what the average stay was for someone with TB?

No, you'd have to ask one of the doctors. I don't know anything about that.

Q. Now, I know that for the purpose of the record, they had children there, right?

They had children.

Q. Young children?

They were housed separately. I think the first patients moved in in 1921. I think they started building the place about 1917 or in that area. The first patients moved in in 1921, and there weren't the buildings there that there were later on; they kept adding buildings. By the time all the buildings were occupied, they had 844 patients.

Q. 844? That included, children, men and women? And they had schools.

Yes, they had school for the children, and they had school for some of the patients if that is what they wanted. They had a library that was fully equipped, and, of course, the library went to the patients, the patients didn't come to the library. They had a little store in the buildings and somebody took little items around each day or whatever was ordered. They sold candies and personal things that the patients might need.

Q. Where did the teachers come from? Do you remember? Were they the Detroit schools?

I remember that it was the Detroit school system.

Q. It was called; I mean it was operated by the city of Detroit.

Yes, it was.

Q. What about entertainment for the patients, because they were confined. Was there anything like that?

Well, they had occupational therapy that was quite extensive. They had a special section where there were two, three occupational therapists, and they had patients that would come to their area, or they would go to the patients' area depending on how they were getting along or how they were being treated. Well, they had entertainment. I can remember they had a couple of times, that they had a barbershop quartet and their organization come and entertain the patients. They had different areas, depending on how they were coming along with their treatment. There was one area where they didn't have to stay in their rooms all the time. They had free access to the area.

Q. Now many of the doctors and nurses lived on the grounds as well, didn't they?

They did. They had a building they called the doctors' home and they had a building that they called the inn where the people who worked in the lab or worked in the office lived. They had one for, I don't want to call them the common workers, but the workers who worked in the kitchens or who worked on the floors, they had an area where they lived.

Eventually they had individual houses built on Beck Road where different doctors lived with their families.

Q. They belonged to the city as well?

Yes.

Q. I remember a Dr. Howard. He lived on Eight Mile. Is that building gone?

Yes, that's been, that house has been moved over onto, further over on Beck Road. Someone bought it and refurbished it.

Q. Dr. Howard was in charge?

Yes, he was the superintendent.

Q. So there were 800 and some patients. Do you have any idea how many employees they had? Approximately.

Well, no. I wouldn't want to even say. They're listed in this publication.

Q. Okay. Let's just take one moment. I thought perhaps we could find it in the book, but obviously it's not listed. We did run across something there that you may want to mention on the tape. I think that was on page 35. Do you want to talk about it?

Well it was on wheels???? We had an ambulance that operated between Maybury and Detroit, because quite often some of the patients had to be transported into Detroit. Some of the patients originally started from Herman Kiefer Hospital and from there they were transported to Maybury. Then they had food service, which was taken to the patients, food was prepared in the kitchens and taken on the floors and served hot from food conveyers. They had wheelchairs that rolled patients to treatment clinics and brought books to patients through the librarian.

Q. It still must have been a lonely experience for many of them.

Well, it was and a lot of them didn't have family who came to see them because I suppose people were afraid.

Q. It was a distance to travel.

Right.

Q. Which is why you had quarters out there and in those days, it was a distance to come.

And most of the people who worked at Maybury, at least when I worked there and then before, lived around the Northville area and then they started coming from Detroit. By the time Maybury closed in 1969 there were a lot of people from Detroit.

Q. What about the interaction between the sanatorium and the town of Northville? Obviously the mail came in from Northville (It did). Where was the shopping done, for instance, the food shopping, and things like that that was done in bulk? Was that done through city purchasing?

Yes, done by city purchasing, none of it done through Northville; it all came from Detroit.

Q. So there wasn't necessarily, obviously they couldn't leave to go to church, or to the movies, or anything like that?

No, but they had their own chaplains. There was Father Kelly (Fabian), I remember Father Kelly, and Reverend Quitmeyer (Henry); they were there for anytime the patients needed them and they did have services on Sundays for those patients who were able to leave their rooms and go to a central area.

Q. Did they have an actual little chapel set up?

They did have a little chapel set up.

Q. Did they, for instance, show movies?

I don't remember that they showed movies. They may have, but I don't remember that they did.

Q. As a dietician, you probably worked days and had your weekends off, didn't you?

No, when I first started I didn't have weekends off because I had to take whatever was available. It was hard to take days off during the week, but after Mrs. McKenna retired, why, I was elevated to Head Dietician for a few years until Maybury closed.

Q. I was thinking that if you were not around on weekends, that is when most of the entertainment would have been.

That's right, and that's when most people came to visit too, was on weekends when they had time off to see their families.

Q. Wasn't it a law that patients had to go into the hospital if they were diagnosed as being tubercular they had no choice?

I think so, but I wouldn't want to say. I don't know too much about that. I never had any fear of contracting TB because when we went there to work, we were always told what was expected of us and how to take care of yourself so you wouldn't be exposed, overly exposed.

Q. Do you know of anyone, for instance that you knew, that ever contracted TB, from a patient?

No, not while I was there. I know that there were some people working there who had been previously patients. One of the women who worked in the front office had been a TB patient, and one of the occupational therapists had been a patient.

Q. It was a fairly life threatening disease back then, wasn't it?
It was.

Q. Now when did... I'm sure there's much more we can talk about. Can you think of other things about Maybury Sanatorium that might be of interest to people as you thumb through the book? You can take time to thumb through the book if you want to.

Well, I'm not too familiar with the treatment.

Q. I don't think that's anything that people would be interested in.

It was a nice place to come. It was out in the country, out in the woods and it was real pretty around the area. I think that was one reason people didn't mind too much being confined there, but it was a confining situation.

Q. I imagine there was quite a bit of camaraderie with the employees.

There was.

Q. Because you, yourselves, were sort of isolated from the general public, working out there the way you did.

Yes, it was. In the Maybury Manual, there are some interesting articles in here, particularly, a tour of the sanatorium by Dr. Steininger (Wilbur). At the time he wrote this he was a patient. He takes you on a trip through the grounds and describes the buildings. In one place here, he says, "Our winding road has brought us now to the central cluster of buildings, the hub of sanatorium activities." I always heard the story that, Mr. Maybury, when they were building the area, had a team of horses that he walked behind, and he just let them lead the way and that's why the roads are so winding.

Q. Why is it named Maybury?

Because William Maybury's part in funding the building, I guess.

Q. Who was William Maybury?

I'd have to look in here.

Q. Go ahead.

"The site was selected by the board membership which consisted of several doctors, and one of them was William Maybury."

Q. Oh he was a doctor then?

It doesn't say he was a doctor. He was "well-to-do and unoccupied, he diverted much time and great energy to the project. It was first called the Detroit Municipal Tuberculosis Sanatorium and later Spring Hills Sanatorium, the institution acquired its present title in 1927 in recognition of services rendered" by Dr. Maybury, I mean Mr. Maybury, not doctor. That's why it was called Maybury Sanatorium.

Q. That's very interesting.

As I understand it, he contracted TB and was a patient there.

Q. Did he?

I guess he died there. I don't know too much about that.

Q. Now that was operated under the Detroit City Health Department.

Yes, in connection with Herman Kiefer Hospital because a lot of patients came from Herman Kiefer.

Q. Herman Kiefer had an isolation area, too, didn't they? You don't know what determined whether they'd come to Maybury or stay there?

When it was first planned, the institution was to house 300 adults and 100 children. The infirmary was occupied in December of 1921 and shortly after that came Wards A, B, C, and D. In quick succession came the completion of the powerhouse, the children's unit, and the inn. The inn was for the office workers and teachers, if they stayed there; some of the teachers didn't stay there; they went back and forth.

Q. Okay. When did Maybury close?

Maybury closed in 1969.

Q. 1969. As a result of what, do you remember?

At that time, a lot of tuberculosis sanatoriums had been closed, and I suppose it was because of the medications and treatments that had been used recently. They didn't have to be confined.

Q. At one time I knew the name of the drug, Streptomycin, was it, or something like that. At one time I remembered that.

It could have been.

Q. There was one particular miracle drug that practically eliminated TB. I think now, don't they treat them on an outpatient basis? They don't have to be confined. And, of course, what was then Maybury Sanatorium is now Maybury State Park.

Which is a beautiful park...I've been over there several times and it is a beautiful park. Have you been there?

Q. No, I haven't. A lot of my neighbors take their children there, but I still haven't been.

It says, "This was written by the superintendent of Maybury at the time". This was about 1941, I believe. This is what he said. "The ideal of the sanatorium is to do all it can to help restore health. It aims to give good nursing and bedside care, to house the patient comfortably in healthful surroundings, to supply him with palatable and attractive foods, to offer occupation diversions when he is ready for them. And finally, to establish and maintain such relationships with the individual patients as will make the sanatorium stay a cooperative journey toward health restoration. This is a picture of Maybury as we strive to have it." And it was a nice place to work. People were congenial, got along.

Q. You were still working there when it closed, of course?

Yes.

Q. Did you retire after that?

No. In order to work until I was of retirement age, I had to go into Detroit and work at Detroit General Hospital for three years, which was a totally different atmosphere.

Q. Was that Detroit Receiving?

Yes, it used to be called Detroit Receiving and then Detroit General.

Q. Was it where the old Receiving Hospital was then or where it is now?

No, they were building the new one. By the time I retired, they were building the new one. That was in the medical center.

Q. Yes, I think so, where it is now.

I can't think of anything in Northville. Unless something would happen to come up that would bring back some particular activity of some kind. I can't think of anything.

Q. Being out on the farm like that, let's just talk about what your life was like then and then you may think of something. Did you come into town for a lot of activities like the movies and shopping?

Well, of course, we always came into town, either Northville or Plymouth, to shop. Yes, we came into the movies, when they had them for .25 on the Saturday afternoon matinee. We walked into town to go to the movies. I think it was the same building that's there now.

Q. The Marquis Theatre?

Yes, where the Marquis Theatre is.

Q. What was it called then?

I guess it was just the Northville Theatre. They used to have an opera house in Northville that stood on the southeast corner of Center; you know I can't remember the name of that street where Casterline's funeral home is.

Q. Dunlap?

Dunlap!! I wanted to say Griswold, but that wasn't it. On the southeast corner of Center and Dunlap and it's too bad that it wasn't saved. I guess that one time Henry Ford wanted to buy it and move it to Greenfield Village but the people who owned it at the time refused to sell it. Because it housed other things. The theatre was on the second floor. I was never in it, but just before they tore it down, someone went in and took some pictures and it looked like it would be quite interesting.

Q. By opera house, what sort of things went on there? You said you were never in it.

It was stage shows, it wasn't movies.

Q. Like in the theatre, plays and whatnot? What opera played there, do you know?

I can't think of the name of the group that my dad referred to. I can't tell you anymore than that.

Q. What do you remember about the fair?

Oh yes, the county fairs were situated where the Northville Downs is now. Of course, that was a big deal in the fall. Everybody had to go to the fair. My grandmother didn't live too far from there, so we'd go to her house and park the car and walk over to the fair. She'd go with us, but she wanted to sit in the grandstands and watch the horses run around the track. They had a track there at the time in the same area as it is now. They had all the trappings of the county fairs. They had horses and cows, and they had cows from Maybury San. They used to have their own farm and they had cows, pigs, and horses. And also, the Detroit House of Correction had their own cows, horses, pigs and chickens.

Q. Let's backtrack for just a moment. You said they had their own farm. Did the patients work on the farm?

No, the patients did not work on the farm, but the inmates from the House of Correction worked on the farm. So Maybury had their own milk supply. They had their own area where they pasteurized the milk and bottled it.

Q. They did? Now, the House of Correction. For purpose of the record, tell us where that was located because that's no longer there.

The building is still there, but it's no longer called the House of Correction. That's situated on the south side of Five Mile Road just west of Beck. Of course, across the street from there, on the north side, it used to be the women's division of the House of Correction.

Q. Both of those were operated by the city of Detroit. That was for prisoners from the city, wasn't it?

They had a farm too, which was a lot more extensive than the one over at Maybury. They used to, the women canned the vegetables and lots of those vegetables were sent over to Maybury to use for the patients.

Q. That interesting. I don't think anyone would ever remember that part. As I recall, didn't they have apples?

Oh, yes, they had apple orchards, and we got apples from them, too, for the patients. They did, they had an extensive farm, the Detroit House of Corrections. I remember that they used to have a beautiful garden on Five Mile Road, and they had prisoners who took care of that. Prisoners don't do anything any more I guess. They don't have a farm there. I think that was good therapy for them. Well, you said about my life on the farm. We kids, there were five of us in the family, and we helped. I remember driving the horses on the hay loaders, and when we were putting hay up in the barn, we'd have to drive the horses or a tractor. After we got rid of the horses, we had tractors. We used to have, when they cut the hay, they'd rake it up in rows and then they'd have the hay loader that they pulled along behind the wagon, and the hay went up the hay loader onto the wagon and somebody was there to tamp it down. Later on as things got a little more sophisticated, my dad got a bailer so that he could bail the hay instead of putting it up loose. That was a hot job up in the hay mound. We used to go up on the hay mound and play, I remember that. Nobody ever got a broken bone either or got stuck with a pitchfork.

Q. You said there were five in your family?

There were four girls and one boy.

Q. What were their names and where are they and are they still living?

Katherine was the oldest and she and her husband live near Traverse City.

Q. Do they have children?

They have two children and five grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Q. What are their last names?

Thompson, and then there was myself, who never married. Then John, he married Betty Carlson who is from Northville, in fact graduated in the same class. They now live in Florida and they have two children. Their daughter lives in England and she has two

girls. Their son now lives in Arizona, Phoenix, Arizona. I hope they like hot weather, because this past week it was up to 116. Then there was my sister, Myra, who never married. She is the one I live with on Six Mile Road and then there is Marjorie. She's the youngest and she married Edsel Rutenbar who was in her class in Northville. They live in Westchester, Pennsylvania. They have four children and five grandchildren. We don't have any relatives in this area anymore at all, and it's kinda lonesome.

Q. Did your sister Myra work? What kind of work did she do?

She graduated from Michigan State in the 40's but she never did go on with her work. She stayed home to help my mother. In later years she was a big help because my mother became quite ill, and Myra had the responsibility of taking care of the house and feeding my mother and my dad. She did a real nice job...better than I could have done. Dad lived to be ninety, and he was active, mentally and physically, too, until almost to the last.

Q. Did he still farm?

No, he had to give up farming because it got to be too much for him, and my brother had helped him farm, but when he moved away there was nobody to help him so he had to sell the farm, and retained the two acres.

Q. Now, what happened to the original farm?

It was sold to a Mr. Haggerty, but Mr. Haggerty died, and I don't have any idea now.

Q. It has not been developed yet?

No, it has not been developed, but I would imagine it would be someday in the near future. These things happen like real fast.

Q. Okay, what about the division between the town of Northville and the township as you were growing up? Was there a difference?

I never thought there was a difference but there probably was.

Q. Do you know, for instance, your earliest recollection of voting? Did you vote in the Northville elections?

I don't remember the elections.

Q. Of local politics, you don't remember?

No, I'm not a politician so I guess I wasn't very much interested.

Q. One other thing which I usually ask people about, what businesses in town do you remember, such as grocery stores, clothing stores and that sort of thing. From your earliest recollection and where were they located?

Well, I remember Ponsford's Dry Goods store which is now run by Ponsford's grandsons, the Laphams. I remember a shoe store that was run by the Stark Brothers; that was on the north side of Main Street. I kind of remember the hotel that was on the corner of Main and Center that burned. I don't remember the year that it burned, but I just barely remember that building, where that big hole in the ground is now, where they're going to put that new complex (MainCentre Building). There was a grocery store on Center Street and I can't remember the name of it. Oh, there's been a lot of changes, but I can't remember the names of people. I can't think of anything else right now.

Q. You mentioned your high school graduating class. We didn't talk about high school at all, which is all right. You said you had your graduation ceremonies in the theatre. Do you remember, for instance, how many graduated from Northville High School?

I think there was between 60 and 65. Another thing I remember graduating at that time, we didn't have caps and gowns. The girls all had to make their own dresses, their graduation dresses. They were given prizes, I don't know who judged the dresses, but I was in first or second, I guess I was the second prize. I still have my dress but it's kind of coming apart at the seams. My sister's class, too, they graduated the year before in '34, they had to make, the girls, their own dresses. They were white with different colored sashes.

Q. What about prom?

Oh, I never went to prom. I went to school in the morning, came home in the afternoon, did whatever I had to do at home and then went back to school the next day. I wasn't involved in anything in the school programs.

Q. When the tape was off we were discussing some of the older residents, and you remember all of them and what they did, didn't you? You remembered Mary Jones was the florist.

I was in her florist shop quite often to buy plants or to buy bouquets for gifts for people.

Q. Where was that located?

I think it was on Dubuar Street as I recall. I know there was a girl in my class. Her name was Frances Cousins. She and her mother lived in a house at the very end of Dubuar Street, which was west of Rodgers Street, right at the end of the street. They used to have goats and I always had goat milk. I guess the house is still back there, but I've never been back there in many, many years. It was a little house, and Frances Cousins was in my class, and I see her once in a while, but just at class reunions.

Q. Is her name still Frances Cousins?

No, it isn't. I think it's Frances Stanken as I recall.

Q. What's her last name?

Stanken, Stanken, I think.

Q. I just wondered if she had been interviewed.

I think she lives in Plymouth.

Q. Well...????

[TAPE SKIPPED]

There was transportation from Maybury to Detroit; they did have bus service from Northville to Maybury. That's how a lot of people got to work, with bus service.

Q. Was it a private bus? Did they pick up passengers and drop them off along the way like a DSR bus?

Well, this one was a bus concern that ran from Northville to Five Points and then out to the San. It was Biddle's Bus Service. People would come out to Five Points on city buses or streetcars, whichever the case was, and then take Biddle's Bus out to Maybury. When I started working at Maybury, I didn't have a car. For four years my folks took me back and forth to work. After four years they started a bus service between Northville and Wayne that went down Sheldon Road to Plymouth to Wayne. It went at a good time, so I took the bus back and forth to work and changed in Northville and got to work that way. After that I got a car.

Q. The transportation you talked about, did you ever take the interurban that went to Detroit?

No, no I never did. I only know what my dad would tell us about the interurban. I know that we had to wait for it to cross Six Mile Road when we were going back and forth to Country School because it went along Northville Road, between Northville and Plymouth and it crossed Six Mile. When we were walking to school, we had to wait for it to go by. But I don't remember riding it.

Q. Well, I want to thank you for your time. It's been very, very interesting and as I told you earlier, when this is edited, I'll be bringing a copy out for your approval and I'll give you a copy of it. So thank you very much, Miss Gibson.

Well, it's been fun. Thank you.

Transcribed in June, 2006, by Patricia Allen