

Oral History of Audrey Joki

Edited by Sally Henrikson March, 1995

Q: OK, we've got Audrey Joki today, and I think we will talk a little bit about how you came to Northville. When did you come and what brought you to Northville?

AJ: My husband and I both came in 1931 as patients at Eastlawn Sanitarium. We both had TB and we were there until 1940, when he died. And in the meantime, I stayed on and had gone to work at the Post Office in 1937. After he died, I moved out, and another couple and I had a house together on Walnut Street until I don't know.

Q: You mentioned that you were a patient at Eastlawn. Had you been in the Detroit area? Is that when you discovered you had TB?

AJ: Yes we lived in Detroit.

Q: I see. How was it that you came to Eastlawn? Was Maybury built at that time?

AJ: Yes, I think so, I guess I don't know. Dr. Wickham, who owned Eastlawn, was the doctor that we went to. He had an office in the Fisher Building, and that is how we happened to go to him then to Eastlawn.

Q: Well, tell me a little but about Eastlawn because I remember being up there, like how many patients were there? And were a lot of them hit with TB or tell me a little bit about that.

AJ: It was all TB. I don't actually know how many patients. There must have been close to a hundred, I think.

Q: What was the treatment in those days?

AJ: Well, pneumotherapy, and a sunning, and a rest of course. There were quite a few off-site cottages some of the men stayed in, and there was a--did you ever see Eastlawn before it was torn down?

Q: Yes, but I didn't remember any cottages.

AJ: Yes, well they were out at the back and to the West, and then there was a porch on the North side on the lower level for the men. And the women, they were mainly on the second level. I was on an outside porch at first, and then my husband persuaded the doctor to let us have a cottage together. So, we were at the back in the second cottage. But I had it -- they had discovered it on me first, but he was much worse than I. So I was cured, but I stayed on and did part time work. There were so many during the Depression, and Dr. Wickham gave everybody that asked him a job. He hired more Northville people and a ...

Q: What kind of a job did you do?

AJ: I did sewing, sanitarium mending. I had an electric sewing machine, and I had it brought in. So, I had that in the cottage.

Q: Could they wear their own clothes, street clothes, or would they wear gowns?

AJ: We wore ... they mainly had on pajamas. I did a lot of sewing for some of the patients. I made their pajamas, and I made a lot of uniforms for the nurses. I made button holes!
(Laughter) But then, of course, he died in '40, and I met this other couple. She was in; she also worked at Maybury, or Eastlawn. And her husband had been a patient too. We rented a house together on Walnut Street. We lived there a year. I had a cousin in Midland who was a builder, and he came down and built a new house for me on Center Street.

Q: What would be the cross street?

AJ: It was right there beside Ely's. I later sold it to the Ely's. So I lived there until well, well, when the grocery store built where Arbor Drugs is now. When they moved in there and brought the property right up to me, it wasn't very pleasant. So I came over here and bought this house and been here ever since.

Q: Well, you've seen Northville grow then through the years, haven't you?

AJ: Yes, I have, and especially being in the Post Office and seeing new subdivision come in and new people.

Q: What was your job in the Post Office?

AJ: I was a clerk. I did everything; every job there was in the Post Office except peddle mail.

Q: Well, tell me about some of the things you do, that you did do.

AJ: In the Post Office? (Uh huh) I sorted incoming mail. I dispatched outgoing mail. I took care of, at that time they had post savings, and I took care of that. I was a window clerk. That's about everything there is to do. Sort incoming mail and sort outgoing mail. I worked there for thirty years.

Q: That's a long time. Tell me a little bit about your early life. You have on your paper that you were born in Hope. Was that a ... what kind of size community was that, a farm or ...?

AJ: It was a farming community, and a ...

Q: How did you find your way down to the Detroit area?

AJ: Well, I had cousins living in Detroit, and they wanted me down right after I got through school at Hope. Then I came to Detroit and stayed with them. I worked at Burroughs Adding Machine on Second Boulevard for eight years, I think it was, up until I came to Northville as a patient.

Q: You've continued your sewing, haven't you, through the years?

AJ: Oh yes. I've sewed all my life. And I've sewn a lot more after I retired. I did practically everybody in town.

Q: Would you do alterations, or was it from scratch?

AJ: Both.

Q: What are some of the interesting things you've done or gotten into with your sewing? Anything out of the ordinary?

AJ: Well, I've met a lot of nice people who are still my friends, because I haven't done any sewing the last three or four years. But ...

Q: Did you ever make any wedding gowns?

AJ: Yes, I did. I did some sewing at Eastlawn too. I made a wedding dress for one of the girls who worked there, and I altered a wedding gown not too many years ago. It was the mother's wedding gown and I altered it for the daughter, and that was for Bruce and Rita Turnbull's daughter when she got married. I sewed her lots of things, nice people ... was a gardener, a carpenter, and a seamstress, and a photographer.

Q: Tell me a little bit about the Northville Camera Club.

AJ: Well, it was organized in 1954, and we had quite a group at one time. I think we had, oh, forty members. The first meeting was upstairs over the hardware store. And then we met in the Scout Building one year too, and then in the Northville Library basement. Then we met in the Wayne County Training School. From there, when that was closed up, we met at the MAGS building, both upstairs and downstairs too. Then after that, Catholic Church, oh, we had a separate building, I don't know the name, right there. Membership kept dwindling; it got down to about a dozen. Then we started meeting in our homes. We have, I think there's ten of us. I didn't go to the last two meetings, wasn't up to it. But the Whitmyers, Gibsons and the ... I have trouble with names ... Kathryn Giltner, Armstrong. The Whitmyers have been the backbone of the camera club for some time.

Q: Was there one special thing that you liked to take photographs of?

AJ: Oh everything, everything!

Q: Your flowers? Did you grow vegetables?

AJ: No – we went on tours. Well, I've taken... I haven't counted them up, Through the Lens Tours, camera tours all over the world. Some of the girls, Kathryn Giltner and I went together on several tours. Beatrice Ware and I went to Scandinavia for, I think it was 49 days, we spent in Scandinavia. Then I went on other tours to Europe, Australia, Fiji, Hawaii, and practically ... and I think I've been in every state of the Union.

Q: Do you like to travel?

AJ: Yes, I did a lot of traveling before I retired and since I retired.

Q: Are most of your photos, are they... do you have albums or are they all slides?

AJ: Slides, I think. I've shown a lot of slides. I've got one... that looks like a cyclone struck some people.

Q: Well, it's a wonderful hobby.

AJ: Well, I haven't done too much the last two or three years. I like to garden, but I can't do that anymore.

Q: Was your specialty vegetables or flowers?

AJ: Both.

Q: Both. I see you're a member of the Northville Historical Society.

AJ: Yes, I haven't done very much. I did do a job for them a few years ago. They didn't have a picture of one of the presidents – I don't remember which one. It was in this book, and I made a copy of it and gave it to them to use. Don't they have all of them at the Historical – pictures of all the presidents?

Q: That was wonderful. You mean the school, I can't remember, I bet it's in the school, that's nice.

AJ: I think it was McKinley.

Q: You blew it up and framed it?

AJ: No, I just made it. I made the print and gave it to them. Let them do what they wanted with it.

Q: You had your own dark room?

AJ: No, I didn't do any of my own processing. But most of these pictures that are on the wall here are ones that I have taken and framed. I've given prints as gifts, too.

Q: I see. Were there some favorite stores in Northville or favorite things that you remember years ago in Northville that stand out in your memory?

AJ: Well, there have been a lot of changes in Northville. There used to be a gift shop on Center Street across from the old Post Office. And there have been many, many changes in Northville streets.

Q: Were there some things though from years ago that you remember especially fondly?

AJ: All the new subdivisions that came in and we had to expand our sorting system to take care of the new subs. Lots of these people came in and picked up their mail in General Delivery until the subdivisions had roads.

Q: I remember the Post Office on North Center Street, was that where you worked?

AJ: Yes.

Q: All those years? I mean up until the time ...

AJ: That's where I started. And then the new one was built where it is now, and it's since been enlarged.

Q: Did you ever go to the Northville Fair?

AJ: Yes, I always went to the Fair and lot of the other things and the horse races. Half of the Post Office worked at the race track nights. Mr. VanAtta was a timer for the horses. He was very much interested in races. Mr. VanAtta was the Postmaster when I first started there and then E.J. Stark, I think he's the assistant Postmaster, and then Savetty (?), who had the liquor store, was Postmaster for many years, and then after him was Steimel, and when I retired, Steimel was the Postmaster. When I first started there, they used to have two deliveries a day – two of them in town, not the mail rooms.

Q: Well, the mail truck must have come in a couple of times a day. Was it a truck that delivered the mail to Northville?

AJ: In the beginning when I first started working there, outgoing mail went by train. There was a man – Mr. Perrin – that came in and picked up the mail sacks and took them to the train. There was an old – there used to be a depot there where the well is. Then after that, they started with the trucks – trucks brought in all the mail three times a day-- the outgoing mail of the day by truck. They used to go in Plymouth to pick up mail and even Salem mail, and even – at one time when I first started at the Post Office – Novi didn't have a Post Office. And there was a woman postmaster, and I think that... Novi's mail came through our office first, and they would send a man down to pick it up, you know, at our office. Now, it goes by –

Q: Were there little communities around that you remember that would send their mail over besides Salem around Northville?

AJ: No, I don't think so. But I remember when ... Livonia – when Livonia came into being, they took a little bit of Plymouth and a little bit of Northville and made Livonia – border lines for each section. I remember that. There've been a lot of changes on Main Street. There used to be hardware on the corner, the northwest corner of Main. A dime store and there was Shaeffer's Bar on Center Street. There was a good restaurant, LeFever's, on the south side of Main Street, west of Center.

Q: You mentioned something about being a carpenter. Was that when you built your first house? Were you involved with that?

AJ: No, I'm a fixer! I can fix and repair most anything.

Q: How many years have you been in this house?

AJ: Since '63 I think. I built my bookcases in over there. That was empty space under the stairway. I don't know why they boarded it up, so I took the partition out, bought a piece of plywood, and did the carpentry right here on the floor, put the shelves in, painted it.

Q: You had to be an independent lady.

AJ: Right. In the basement – I've got saws and all kinds of carpenter tools. I like to work with wood.

Q: Are there any other things ...

AJ: I'm a collector.

Q: You're a collector, sure ...

AJ: Of antiques.

Q: Were a lot of your pieces from – you found here in Northville?

AJ: Um, I gathered them up from all over, I guess. That chair was my grandfather's. Back in the 1860's, two of my uncles went down the Tittabawassee River to Saginaw. At that time, there were no roads, and Edenville was where everybody went down the river from – and two of my uncles went down the Tittabawassee River on a raft to Saginaw. They bought that chair and a walnut bureau for their parents for Christmas and brought it back up – the bureau and that chair. After my grandfather died, my grandmother came to our house to live, and the chair came with her. And the bureau came with her. So, I inherited the chair.

Q: That's a nice memory.

AJ: I guess that's what got me started, and along the way I've bought a lot of them, when I was still at the house.

Q: That's a handsome chair – all the carving on it.

AJ: This – I looked it up in the furniture book. It was made in Grand Rapids... (TAPE TURNED OFF)... historian, and she gathered up – for years she worked on the family history. And she never put it into any form. I had all the generations from way back but it was never put in any sequence. So that was one of the things I did after I retired. I had to do it all by hand. It started way back, and I put it together with pictures.

Q: Did you – have you worked with other people with genealogy or was this all on your own?

AJ: All on my own. She had it all, but it wasn't in any order, so I copied it. My mother never got any farther from where she was born than across the road.

Q: Oh, really? (Laughter) You've done a nice job – it's very good. Now, this write-up... did that come out of like a local history book or something in Midland County? Well, we might be related here (laughter) if we go back far enough. It's very nice.

AJ: There's the chair!

Q: There's the chair, good! That picture was taken a long time ago, too, from the dress?

AJ: Yes, Mother had a big family; there were five boys and three girls. And I think Grandmother had eleven children. You know, in those days, there was always deaths, babies that didn't live. This is my mother, and then my grandmother. She came to live with us when ...

Q: And that was a picture of your grandfather?

AJ: Uh huh, and that's the chair.

Q: Well, I thank you for your memories and thoughts of Northville and your life here. It's been most interesting.

AJ: Yes, it has. I had a school reunion that we had for many years. We had family reunion every year up at the Harrison, but it kind of petered out because the younger people aren't as interested in family history.