

## **Lela Pelley**

Int: Your biography said you were born in Commerce Township. Is that correct?

LP: Yes.

Int: Do you know--where was it in Commerce?

LP: I couldn't tell you the road--whether it was Old Plank Road or not. It was in a log house, I know.

Int: No kidding. Really? Did you have brothers and sisters?

LP: I had two sisters and one brother.

Int: One brother. Did your parents come to Michigan from another state?

LP: No they were natives of Michigan.

Int: Had they lived in Commerce long before you were born?

LP: My father was born in Novi Township my mother was born in Clyde.

Int: Do you know where your father was born in Novi Township?

LP: No, I couldn't tell you.

Int: And then you move to Northville when you were small when you're a child?

LP: About four years old.

Int: Do you remember where your parents moved to? Which house?

LP: Yes, it's torn down now. It was on Cady Street it isn't there anymore.

Int: How long had you lived in that house?

LP: I don't know. My brother was born in that house and from there we moved, well, at that time they called it Plymouth Avenue and that is S. Main St., Northville Road now.

Int: And then you moved from Cady?

LP: Yes, that's right.

Int: What did your father do?

LP: He was just a common laborer. He came here, he had worked on a farm for most of his life and he came here and went to work at the Dubuar Factory. That's where Ford's factory is.

Int: What was made at the Dubuar factory?

LP: Pulleys. That was the main thing I know of.

Int: Was your mother a homemaker?

LP: Yes.

Int: And then you moved to the house on Plymouth Avenue. How long did you live there?

LP: I don't know for sure we lived there for two or three years from there we moved up on Roger, North Roger, in a home that was owned by Brock's and Brock had groceries or a general store here in Northville on Main Street.

Int: How long was that there?

LP: I wouldn't know.

Int: That was when you were a child?

LP: Yes.

Int: Is the house you lived on North Rogers still there?

LP: Yes, I don't know who owns it now but the last people that I know owned it was Mattesons but they're both gone now I don't know who owns it now. But the house is still there.

Int: You went to school in Northville then, I take it. Which school did you start out in?

LP: I started out and then the folks moved to the Cattermole Farm on Seven Mile and I started there. Then I went the country school. I don't know what road it was...first road this side of the railroad tracks but I don't know the name of it. Mrs. Roy Larkin was my first teacher.

Int: You remember your first teacher?

LP: They lived just a little ways from us and she was an older member of Northville. I have a picture here if you're interested.

Int: What is this picture of?

LP: N. Center St.

Int: Do you know the people in the photo? Who are they, may I ask?

LP: Well, this one driving the team was Charlie Souls and this was Jigger Austin and those two are the men that owned-- well this is one of the men--who owned Dubuar Factory and the other is his son and the other is my dad.

Int: That's your father in the back?

LP: Yes, and this is what used to be the old opera house and this is the post office and this is the F. S. Neal building and Zoe Little had a hat shop in there and Oldenburg had a grocery store in there. I don't remember what else was in there besides the grocery store and Zoe Little's house.

Int: And she had a hat shop?

LP: She had a hat shop and...

Int: And the brick building, that was the post office. We would love to get a copy of this.

LP: Mrs. Hixsen has a copy.

Int: She has a copy?

LP: I called her and asked her if she wanted a copy.

Int: It's a wonderful picture. The Opera House is great.

LP: I ran across it with some of my dad's things and I was going to throw it away but my nephew decided he wanted it so I gave it to him. Now they had gone out and got this log to work in the factory.

Int: Over at the Dubuar...

*(Side 1 ends abruptly)*

Lela Pelley Part 2

Int: Back to the country school a little bit, was that a one room schoolhouse with several grades?

LP: Yes, I don't remember how many grades.

Int: Did you go there for a few grades?

LP: I don't think I went there for more than two years.

Int: And then where did you go after that?

LP: We came back to Northville.

Int: Was there school here in town that you went to?

LP: Yes. Of course, both buildings have burned down since then. When I came back I was in the third grade so I would say that I went two years there probably.

Int: This was an elementary school in town?

LP: Yes

Int: And then you went to high school, I see from your notes. Did you graduate from Northville High School?

LP: Yes

Int: And then you had gone to night school. DBI--is that Detroit?

LP: Business Institute. There was one in Pontiac. I drove back and forth to Pontiac

Int: You are a member of the Methodist Church. Was your family members?

LP: No, I was the only member.

Int: Did you meet your husband here?

LP: No, he was from Plymouth.

Int: When did you get married?

LP: Sixth of May, 1933.

Int: Where did you get married?

LP: A church in Saline.

Int: May I ask, what did your husband do?

LP: He was a grower for greenhouse in Plymouth (on Plymouth and Haggerty) for George Fisher. He raised tomatoes mostly.

Int: While you were growing up in Northville, do you remember anything like any significant events or anything earth-shattering? Fires or anything like that?

LP: Well, I remember when the opera house burned. That was New Year's Eve and I think that was in (I can't be positive) 1912 or 1913. I remember train wreck just east of the—no, it would be south—of the depot down here. The depot burned. And when we lived there on Plymouth Avenue, I can remember I was about five, I can remember one of the highlights of living down there was always when the circus was in town and they unloaded there at the depot. They would line up their animals and walk over to the fairground (which is the race horse place now).

Int: The Downs.

LP: Yes, I remember that and another thing I remember: there used to be a pushcart fellow that would come along and he had the pushcart that was built up. He would have pots and pans hanging on the top of it and he sold shoelaces and little items, thread, buttons, and pots and pans

(small ones). Another thing I remember from there was living close to the depot there were several people selling different things and there was a man who would come around. He would have tied all over him plaster of Paris animals and dolls. I remember that. That was the only place I really remember him being.

Int: Down by the depot?

LP: Well, where the clinic is now, we were in the house next to it. It would've been south of that new clinic.

Int: So you were real close to it.

LP: We were real close to the depot back then. I remember the first two cars that were ever in Northville.

Int: When was that? Do you remember?

LP: Well, it was when we lived down there. One of them belonged to Dr. Tom Henry. There were two doctors by the name of Henry. One was Dan and one was Tom and Tom Henry had one of the first cars and Hank M----- had the other first car there.

Int: That must've been quite a sight in Northville.

LP: It was something! I remember those and when we lived on Cady Street there is a fellow by the name of P---- Jackson and he grew ginseng for sale there on Cady Street.

Int: Was he a neighbor of yours?

LP: Yes. He was an old badge. Those are things I remember from when I was real young.

Int: You mentioned the Opera House fire. Do you remember going to the Opera House or seeing anything there?

LP: The only thing I saw there was that the eighth grade graduation class had their commencement there.

Int: I understand that at one point it was a great place for entertainers, vaudeville.

LP: I don't remember going. The only thing I remember going was the eighth-grade graduating class.

Int: Was there any other kind of movie theater or anything you can remember about the downtown on Main Street?

LP: I remember when the theater was built but I couldn't tell the year. Shirley Thompson built it and he lived up on the corner of Rogers and Main. The Northeast corner and he built a house there.

Int: You also mention that you had worked in a restaurant and grocery store. What restaurant? Was it a local restaurant here in town?

LP: It was the Ambler House.

Int: I'm sorry, I'm not familiar with that.

LP: It was a hotel and dining room and it was on the corner of Main and Center where they are building that new complex.

Int: Was that the old hotel? The one that burned at one point or am I thinking of something else?

LP: No, I don't think it burned.

Int: What did you do at the restaurant?

LP: I waited on tables in the dining room the first year I was out of high school and I worked in the grocery store for E. H. Partridge and for Bill Elliott.

Int: Was that a local grocer?

LP: Yes, it was and Bill Elliott had a bakery in town. Then I worked for E. M. B.--Ed Bogart.

Int: You also mentioned that you worked for 30 years for the years for the Wayne County Training School. What did you do there?

LP: Most of the time I was there I was a house mother.

Int: Can you tell me a little bit about the Training School?

LP: It was for mentally handicapped children and they had to have an IQ of at least seventy to be admitted there. They had the smaller children who went to school. It had a school. Of course, most of those buildings have burned now.

Int: They are in bad shape.

LP: They had a day program for mentally retarded children and most of them came from Wayne County, Most of them from Detroit.

Int: As a house mother, what did you do?

LP: I had four other employees under me and I supervised the children at their meals, taught them to set tables and to wait on—(there were six children to a table) one out of the six we taught

to serve the others. We taught them hygiene. I was responsible for their health, seeing that they went to the clinic if they needed any treatment or anything. I was responsible for their recreation out of school hours along with the other employees that worked under me.

Int: It must have been quite a place, it looks like, at one time.

LP: It was opened in 1926.

Int: Did you start working there when it opened?

LP: No, I didn't start there until 1937.

Int: Do you have any idea how many children were enrolled there at the training school?

LP: Usually the entire enrollment was kept up to 650. Once in a while we would get a few more.

Int: How many children were you responsible for?

LP: 50 - 52 in a cottage.

Int: Did you actually live there?

LP: No, I didn't... when I first started to work out here you had to live on the grounds and every so often you were scheduled for 24-hour duty. That meant if a child ran away or a girl ran away and they sent a man out to find her or to look for her a woman had to go with him. I went to Detroit a lot of times, down to the Clay school, and picked up children that were being admitted through the courts. I usually had a driver. A woman had to go if we were picking up a girl. If they were picking up a boy, a woman didn't have to go but if they were picking up a girl a woman had to go.

Int: So then you actually just lived in Northville?

LP: I lived in Northville. My father died in 1942 and then I made an application to live at home, to live with my mother here because she was afraid to live alone at night. That must've been granted in 1943 and from that time on until the time I retired I lived off the grounds.

Int: Was this the house you lived in?

LP: Yes.

Int: When did the Training School close?

LP: They started phasing it out, I think, it was '67 or '68.

Int: So you pretty much were there to the end.

LP: I retired shortly before they started phasing it out.

Int: Had there been quite an enrollment decrease over the years?

LP: No, but the state phased out the Training School and they phased out (not right then but two or three years later)—they started phasing out the school at Lapeer. Gradually they were phasing them out and they put some of them in group homes and that's when they started group homes, more or less.

Int: So you retired in '67?

LP: '66.

Int: Are you involved in any activities? You mentioned that you are with the women's group at the Methodist Church. Is that the Methodist Church here in town?

LP: Yes.

Int: Have you been a member for quite some time?

LP: I started going to Sunday school when I was about seven years old. Lucy Filkins was one of our neighbors on Dunlap Street and she used to pick me up and take me, so I've been going to Sunday school there ever since I was about seven years old.

Int: Where was the church at that time?

LP: It was up here on Dunlap.

Int: Where the Open Door Church is now?

LP: Yes.

Int: You mentioned remembering the first two automobiles in Northville. Do you remember any other transportation? The Interurban?

LP: Oh yes--the streetcars! I don't remember just what year, but they were still running when I graduated from high school because some of the children that came from Farmington Township and toward Plymouth, they came into school on the streetcars. Down where the factory is (the Ford factory), we used call that the Y. The ones that came in from Plymouth, the streetcar would go around there and back uptown and the ones from Farmington would go on the track from Plymouth and back up town.

Int: That's interesting. Did you ride the streetcar quite a bit?

LP: I used to go to Plymouth on it quite a bit when we played basketball. The teams went on the streetcar when we played Plymouth and Wayne and towns like that. In Farmington we used the streetcar for transportation when I was in school. Then my older sister lived in Pontiac, so I went from here to Pontiac on the streetcar.

Int: It was a nice quick easy way to get there. You've seen a lot of changes in Northville. You have been here a long time.

LP: I've seen a lot of them.

Int: What do you think of the town?

LP: I don't get around as much as I used to but years ago I used to know practically everybody in town and now I don't know hardly anyone anymore. There are so many changes. I lost contact with a lot of them when I worked at the training school because I was out there for at least eight hours a day (sometimes twelve). Somebody wouldn't come in and I would have to work my shift and theirs, too, sometimes. When I came home I had yard work to do so I didn't get around is much as I did. I lost contact through the church that way a lot because I worked on Sundays. Every child had to go to church on Sunday at the training school. That was a must for them.

Int: Was there a chapel out there?

LP: Oh yes, there was a big auditorium they used for Sunday. They had Jewish service, they had Lutheran service, had Protestant service, they had Catholic service, and they all had to go to one of the services they had a big gymnasium and a swimming pool.

Int: It must been quite a facility in its time.

LP: Oh, it was.

Int: You must have enjoyed your work.

LP: I did before they started phasing it out. Miss Ainsworth died and they started taking emotionally disturbed children and they mixed them in with the mentally handicapped, which are two different things entirely. It was harder then because you don't treat a mentally handicapped the same as the disturbed, so it got to be harder in lots of ways and it wears you down.

Int: I can imagine it can take its toll.

LP: It did.

Int: Do you remember anything about what was going on in town during the First World War or the Second World War? Anything distinguishable? What it was like then?

LP: Of course everything was rationed and mother always baked her own bread and in order to get a 25 pound sack of flour you had to buy so many pounds of rice, you bought so many cans of [...], things of that nature to make bread. My grandmother lived with us. I learned to knit during the First World War. Grandma was knitting socks and sweaters. Of course, I was just a kid, so I knit washcloths. There was a big Red Cross program during World War I and the day armistice

was declared my father had to go to Plymouth to enlist. While he was over there the War was over.

Int: That was lucky times, wasn't it?

LP: I remember when he came home and on the spur of the moment they had a big parade in town and the streetcars were running then, too. Aside from that, I don't remember too much about any activity. There were War bonds, of course, and they had a program going on in school. We took dimes and quarters and put them toward a War bond. They had that program, but aside from that I don't remember too much. I was involved in school a lot.

Int: Mrs. Pelley, what was your father's name?

LP: William. William Roberts.

Int: And your mother was...

LP: Jenny.

Int: Was your father's family from Novi Township?

LP: My father's father died when my father was nine years old and at that time they lived up on Old Plank Road. Now, whether that was Novi Township or not, I don't know. Then my father, his mother gave him away when he was nine years old. She was left with five little youngsters and dad was the oldest. From that time on, Dad worked on a farm for his board and room. I don't know whether he lived in Novi Township at that time or not.

Int: What did his father do? Do you know?

LP: He farmed. Older children had gone to school and they came home with scarlet fever. He contacted scarlet fever. He was getting better but being on a farm, he was running such a high temperature that part of the time he was out of his head. He got away from them one day and went out to the barn to see the cattle and caught cold. He had a relapse from the scarlet fever. That's when he died from scarlet fever.

Int: You've given us so much information. You mentioned a few of the stores and the shops and the buildings in town from the photographs that you have. Are there any other buildings up there that you can recollect or remember?

LP: Yes. [???] There was the C. S. Smith store, which has been gone for years and years. C. S. Smiths and the Brocks had the general store. Mrs. Delaney was Mrs. Brock's mother and she was always in the store. Whenever I went in the store I remember Mrs. Delaney would sit there. She had her hair in curls like a little kid and she would sit there in the store. She never did anything, she just sat there. I remember that there were two shoe stores, one by the Starks. There were two brothers in town. One of them lived on Main Street and one of them lived on Dunlap and they

ran a shoe store. Then there was one, Macauley had a shoe store in town. There was an old laundry up town, that building is gone now. Dr. Burgess had...it would be just south of the Northville drug—there was a house there—and Dr. Burgess, the old gentleman, prescribed his medicine there. After he died, his daughter still lived in the house for years and he had a son that was a doctor down at Parker Hospital (James Burgess) up on the corner of Hutton and Main. There was a hotel, the Park House, and there was a blacksmith shop up there. Where the Wagon Wheel Restaurant is there was a big building that was the residence and then Dr. Sparling had it for an office. On the corner of Church and Main Street, there was a dentist up there. It was a low building and next to the second house that they call that the Gold Cure.

Int: What was that?

LP: A cure for alcoholics. When we lived on Plymouth Avenue across where there's a hotel there now and a bar, there used to be a grocery store. The Kohlers had it. The men who used to come down from the Gold Cure and buy cheese and crackers would go past the house eating this cheese because they couldn't eat cheese when they were on this cure for alcoholism. They'd have their big chunks of cheese, I remember that. As a youngster, Kohlers owned the store, and Mother would send me up there once in a while (or let me go up if I had a penny). Of course I would buy candy and they never had sacks to put it in. They would take a piece of newspaper, a square piece of newspaper, and roll it up. We call them "pokes" to put our candy in (or anything that was from the grocery store there).

Int: Was there a newspaper office uptown?

LP: Yes, it used to be the Northville Record that was there right next to the post office. F. S. Neal owned it, across from where the Starting Gate there used to be, well, Allen's owned it. They had dishes and it was a variety store in there. Of course Schrader had the funeral home and the furniture store. Next to that I think there was the DUR waiting room where people went to wait for the streetcars. In the center of town on Center and Main was an old bandstand. They used to have concerts there every Saturday night. Ryders had a grocery store where the Hole in the Wall is now—Genittis. Next to them used to be a dry goods store. Whites owned it and a couple stores down there was another dry goods store. Ponsfords owned that. What else was uptown? Right now it slips my mind.

Int: Well you remembered so much, it's astounding. Was there a photography studio in town?

\*\*\*tape skips\*\*\*

LP: They had it upstairs over the waiting room and that was a wooden building.

Int: That was on Center Street?

LP: Yes, and from there they went to Plymouth and they had a photography store in Plymouth.

Int: Did you ever have your photograph taken at Balls?

LP: Yes.

Int: Do you still have it?

LP: No, I don't, I don't know whether I have it now. My older sister had hers and my brother's picture taken there for mother's birthday or something. My brother was just two or three years old. My sister made him promise he wouldn't tell where they had been that day. He got mad at her one day and he told mother about it, that he got taken upstairs and had to sit still have their picture taken. I've gotten rid of most of my pictures, different ones of the family wanted them, so I got rid of them. I've had a lot of things that are over 100 years old here but I got rid of a lot of those, too. Different members of the family that I know wanted them, so I don't have those left anymore. Mother had a doll that she got when she was four years old, one of those bisque dolls with the molded hair, and I gave it to a niece. I had a lot of things that belonged to Grandmother because Grandma lived with us. Grandpa died in 1900 and Grandma came down and lived with us around 1913 or '14 until she died.

Int: Is this your father's mother?

LP: My mother's mother, so I had a lot of things that belonged to her but I got rid of most of them now. I thought I would get rid of the things if anybody wanted them because I knew my time was limited, at my age. I've been getting rid of things for the last two or three years.