

ORAL HISTORY OF IRVIN & ETHEL WARE

May 11, 1989 – Interviewer – Marian Zayti

MZ: Mr. Ware, would you like to tell us a little about your family history in Northville?

IRV: My dad's mother came to Northville in the year of 1912. My mother's maiden name was Spaulding and come from Caro, Michigan. My dad's name was Walter Ware and he came from Gageton, Michigan. They moved in here and first lived on First St. at the old Castille house. That's where I was born. Then my dad bought a lot over on Novi St. and built two or three houses there. Jim Spagnuolo, my dad, and Henry Tusent worked for years when they were building the D.U.R. railroad. Then my dad got a job working for Huff's Hardware. He worked there for a year or two and my dad and my mother got homesick and she went back to Caro. My dad went back and then Huff said, "If you come back, I'll give you more money." They came back and they stayed then all those years. Dad was in the hardware business from 1924 to '29. Then he built that new place down on E. Main St. in 1929.

MZ: Were all the children in the family born in Northville?

IRV: Yeah. I got a brother, Herbert. I got an older sister Gerry, and a younger sister, Maxine. My brother and I both graduated from Northville High School. My dad traded a house and lot on Novi St. with his half-brother, Tom Ware, for a farm up by North Adams by Hillsdale. That was during the Depression and that was tough. Dad let the stuff slide and he moved on the farm while my sister, Gerry, and my younger sister, Maxine, graduated from North Adams School in '35 (or) something like that. Dad had two or three jobs. The Ford Agency was one.

MZ: On Main Street?

IRV: Yeah. Frank Lewis from Salem, a colored fella, was there for years. They had a great big boiler room. My dad used to go over there at night and fill that boiler up with coal and he'd go in the morning and pull the crinklers out, even when he was working for Huff's.

MZ: When did your dad build the new building?

IRV: Nineteen, twenty-nine. There used to be a pool room there and they had rooms above. He bought that old place and he tore it down.

MZ: The building has the family name on it and the date.

IRV: Yeah. I can remember when they tore that old building down. My brother and I and Wayne Thompson and Scotty Schrakin and a bunch of us used to sit in the back and dad would give us a file. We'd knock the mortar off those bricks and they reused all those bricks. We sat there for many days and knocked that mortar off. Right next door was Alexander Flats and right in back they had Alexander Flats Tube.

MZ: That would be on the west side of your father's store?

IRV: Yeah. Right. Grube had a hamburg joint the same place. Bill Riley, had a place there and he used to bootleg in there. I knew him. I used to wait on him a lot. He'd buy malt and he'd buy bottle caps and he'd buy a capper. One day, Ether's brother Bud and I (said), "Let's see if we can get a beer there someday. So we went over there in the afternoon and knock on the door and Bill Riley says "What do you guys (want)?" (We said), "Could we have a beer?" He didn't know what to do because I used to wait on him, you see. He says, "Go in there." We come in and that place was nice and clean. The outside looked like a dump.

MZ: Where was that located?

IRV: Alexander Flats. In that building, there. There was a real estate in front of it. Alexander Real Estate. We go in there and they had pretzels and cheese on the table. We sat there and ate everything on the table and had one bottle of beer.

MZ: How old were you and Bud, then?

IRV: I was about sixteen or seventeen, and Bud was twelve or thirteen. We left the place and Bud says, "That's pretty good." About a month later, he says, "Let's try to get another beer." We go there and he wouldn't let us in.

MZ: You were too expensive, eating all those pretzels.

IRV: Dad had the hardware store from 1924 to '29 on the corner where the old Record office is now. Across the street used to be the Ambler Hotel. Between the Ambler Hotel and (where) Ed Perrin had a taxicab, right between there, they had public restrooms. That was nice. On the north side, facing the hardware store, they made two or three businesses. A fellow by the name of McClintock had a jewelry store there. They had one daughter. McClintock had a jewelry store there. They had one daughter. The father and mother contacted T.B. They ended up in Maybury Sanatorium. The daughter went and lived at Humphreys' for years.

MZ: I remember the Humphrey family.

IRV: Blake had that jewelry store during the Depression. Et graduated in '34. I graduated in '33. I went in and bought her a watch for graduation. Seventeen dollars! Her folks didn't like it very well and the watch didn't run very good and I took that watch back and old man Blake, he says, "I'll allow you seventeen dollars if you buy another watch." I picked out an Elgin watch. (It) cost me \$34, and she's still got that watch today.

ETHEL: (It) runs, too!

IRV: Charlie Freydl's dad's father, Bruno Freydl, had a cleaning (store). I can still see old Bruno. He had a great big table (he) used to do all the sewing (on). I can still see Bruno sitting there on the table, cross legs, and he had his glasses down here and he'd be sewing. Old Bruno, I always liked him.

MZ: Yes. He was a good tailor and did really good work.

IRV: Next to the hardware store there was a Luke Old Beer Garden.

MZ: Yes, a wooden building.

IRV: Yeah. Then where the bank is now, there used to be a hotel. Merritt Hotel.

MZ: On the corner.

IRV: They had a dining room. They used to have the tables all set, family style. Dad used to go there. When he played ball from Holly, they'd come here and they'd change their clothes down there. The old Merritt House. Then they tore that down. Al Zimmer had a automobile place there, then they had a gas station there on the corner.

MZ: Al Zimmer's place then became Miller's Garage in later years.

IRV: Yeah, that's right. Then Miss Merritt had that Collett House on Main Street.

MZ: Across the street.

IRV: Yeah. (A) hardware store next to what used to be where Marian Larson lived above, and below, they had a feed store and this place was right next to it.

MZ: I think Mrs. Green used to run the restaurant in there in that Merritt Hotel.

IRV: I don't remember that, but we used to go in there and eat. They had a beautiful big table and they had a white table cloth. It used to be quite a place.

MZ: That was dining out for a little town of Northville.

IRV: One time Litzenbergers had a blacksmith right there.

MZ: At Hutton and Main, that's right.

IRV: Then on the corner was people by the name of Henry.

MZ: Not Dr. Henry, was it?

IRV: I think there's some relation there. They had a boy, Bud Henry.

MZ: Tell us about that club that was up over the Gamble Store.

IRV: I didn't know too much about (it), but it was above the Gamble Store and the Young Republicans had it. We used to play over at John Walker's Pool (Hall). The boys would say, "Let's go up to the Republican Gardens and play hearts." We'd go up there and they'd get to playing hearts. I can remember Pusy West. They'd lay for him and you line up and you'd have to bend over and you go up there with your hand and you swat him.

MZ: For losing?

IRV: Yeah. We used to go up there and play cards a lot.

MZ: And there was a dance floor up there, also?

IRV: Could've been, 'cause they had a big room.

MZ: You don't recall that it was called the Young Men's Club?

IRV: I don't remember that.

MZ: It was the Republican? Well, of course 90% of Northville was Republican, wasn't it?

IRV: Yeah.

MZ: Your dad had the hardware store during the Depression. Do you remember anything about the script paper money that was issued?

IRV: Dad used to get a lot of script. Most of the script was (from) people that worked for the City of Detroit. My wife's dad worked for the House of Christian. He used to get paid script.

ETHEL: There was a grocery store that accepted it. Bogart.

MZ: It wasn't worth very much, as I understand it.

IRV: Ethel's mother had a brother (who) worked for the City of Detroit and he used to come out here and give her money and he'd take the script back and they'd get rid of it down there.

MZ: So many people today have never heard of script. They say, "What do you mean, paper money?" My father, as did two of his brothers, worked for the Wayne County Training School. My father got paid half in script and half in money. You used the script. I think Butch Baldwin would take it for rent money in those days. You got by by who would take it and who wouldn't.

IRV: This town used to have a lot of stores. You had a meat market, Butch Baldwin, Hill's Meat Market, and Sam Pickard. They had three or four car agencies, Rathburns, Marrs, or Bunns and they had a Studebaker, Petz. Richardson had a Packard. They had three or four hardware stores, three or four grocery stores, half-a-dozen or so gas stations.

MZ: In a way we had more businesses in Northville than we do today. Can you tell us anything about the Ambler Pond and where it was located?

IRV: Ambler Pond was just north of the cemetery, right next to Langfield Chemical Laboratory. Hughes had a slaughterhouse on there, too. There was pretty good rumors that one time, a fellow in town took some dynamite and blew it up and didn't do a good job and went back later on and

did it another time. That's when the Ambler Pond disappeared. They never built it back. Years after that, the kids around that neighborhood used to play over there.

MZ: I remember climbing up that dam and sitting on the top of it.

IRV: Hughes Meat Market had a slaughterhouse by the Pond, on the south side. They used to slaughter cattle up there and goats, sheep, or anything. They talk about swimming down there. Art Hill was quite a character.

MZ: Good-looking man.

MZ: Remember Peggy Blake and some of those girls? They went skinny-dipping, one day. On Fairbrook there used to be some people by the name of Sheppards. There was Violet Sheppard, Louie Sheppard, and another boy. Their dad had a garage here. Art Hill and a couple of Sheppard boys seen those girls down there and stole their clothes.

MZ: Do you remember any of the stories about the Halloween pranks?

IRV: I can remember going to school. They had a four-wheeled buggy on the top of the flagpole on that crow's nest. Four or five or half-a-dozen stores on Main St. had an outhouse right in front of the store. We used to caddy up to the Meadowbrook Country Club. We each got \$1.35 for eighteen holes and we got fifteen cents or car fare. The fellows from Plymouth got a quarter and the fellows from Farmington got a quarter. They used to come from Plymouth and they'd get a bunch of guys down in Bealtown. They come up from the Four-Corners, a bunch of guys from Orchard Heights. Then they'd come down from the overhead bridge on the north side. A lot of times there'd be so many kids down there. Right at the foot of the cemetery, it used to be pretty steep. The guys would grease that track. Somebody in that car would know it and they'd ring that bell before the hill. They'd get off and the guy couldn't get going. I've seen the conductors go out there and wipe the track and throw sand and stuff many times.

MZ: That was pretty good pay for fellows to make at Meadowbrook.

IRV: Pretty cheap compared to now. I remember one time we was coming from golf. We worked all day, Sunday. I caddied for some golfer, a guest from Ohio. I caddied all day for him and he give me a ten dollar bill. We was all coming home, walking and playing with our money. Brand new ten dollar bill. There was three of them. I got thirty bucks! That was a lot of money. We'd go out there and caddy, then we'd head for Walled Lake. The amusement park was open every night except Monday.

MZ: Would you walk out there from the golf links to the amusement park?

IRV: No. Some guys had a car. I walked a few times, but that was when I was real small and my dad worked for Huff, and Jim Huff had a cottage over there on the south side of Walled Lake. Many times my dad and mother would push a baby buggy from here to Walled Lake. When we was kids, we used to play up to Curtis Lake. We didn't swim out there. We used to go there towards the gravel pit. We used to go out there and see lots of skeletons of horses. Some

fellow in town had a delivery service, ice and stuff, and he'd get a bad horse that was almost dead. This fellow would go over there and he'd shoot it. There used to be a lot of skeletons over there.

MZ: He didn't sell the meat, though? He'd just leave them out there so he didn't have to bury them?

IRV: Yeah. One time at Halloween some people lived on the corner of Lake St. and Grease St. He had an outhouse and every year, that outhouse was tipped over. One night we were all down there and 21 of us got arrested. Five or six of them was over 21. The first guy gets up in front of the judge. "Was this guy there?" Everybody says, "No." They lied.

MZ: Who was the judge?

IRV: I think it was Wilmington Roberts, or something.

MZ: Who was the policeman that arrested you?

IRV: I think, Safford. Four or five were 21 (years old) and if they (were there) they'd get some time out of it. Everybody says, "No. He wasn't there." Those five guys that were over the age, they weren't there. There was six of us (that) says, "We appeal the case." Charlie Carrington's mother got up there and she's crying, "Your not going to send my boy to jail!" She paid the fine. That's \$10 fine and \$5 cost. Bill Springer, my dad let take some money, He had \$2, my dad (paid) the rest of it. Somebody paid Bob Reed's. (There were) six of us left, so we appealed the case. We had a lawyer by the name of Buyington from Plymouth (who) come over. They took it down to the Detroit court. We all went in there and the lawyer went in to talk to the judge and he come out and the judge threw it out.

ETHEL: But the thing that you left out was that you weren't in on it, because you six guys were standing on the corner watching it.

IRV: Yes, and Wilma Roberts knew us.

MZ: What happened was you younger boys were going to take the blame so the older ones wouldn't go to jail.

IRV: There was an outhouse tipped over on Randolph St. The guy that owned it was Pierce Marsh. He was a cement man. He come up to school on a Monday and we got called into Mr. Amerman's office, five or six of us. He says, "If you guys will go and put that thing back on the foundation, I won't charge you". Sam Lawrence went out. I was one of them and there was three or four of them. Sam Lawrence got his dad's old big Buick. We went down there and hooked a rope on it. We pulled I up the hill and put it back on.

MZ: So it didn't cost you anything that time. That's good.

IRV: At one time, years ago, on Randolph, where Roy Vanatta used to live, they used to have motorcycle hill climbs there. I can remember going up there and you could hear that all over town. It only lasted a couple of years.

MZ: That was a very steep hill up there! Did Vanatta own that? There weren't many houses up there at that time.

IRV: My dad, before he worked at the hardware store for Huff, had a little delivery service. He had one horse. In the wintertime, he had a sled and in the summer, he had a little wagon. He used to deliver groceries for Wheeler's Grocery Store. There's a meat market there. He had a helper. It was one of the Algers that lived on Griswold Street. There was a brother, Russ Alger, Chester Alger, and that. I didn't know him, myself, but he helped my dad. At that time, they had the Interurban on Griswold, Dad told me this. I never could confirm it, but I believe my dad. This kid was running across the (tracks) and got hit by the Interurban and he got killed. This was back in '11 or '13 or '14 or something. And after that, Dad got out of the business.

MZ: Just crossing the Interurban? I guess we remember the good things but they had their accidents back then, too.

IRV: It's been a pleasure bringing a lot of old memories back.

MZ: A great deal of the pleasure has been sitting here talking to you when we had the machine off.

IRV: I sure enjoyed it.

MZ: We certainly appreciate it.