

Interview with Rosemary Laffrey Hunt,
Keego Harbor resident, age 92
July 23, 2009
Notes by Susan Williams

Provided by Ms. Hunt:

Copy of photo - 1940 view of Cass Lake Road showing Doc Harper's Bar (later the Cloverleaf, currently Batchelor 1) and junk/antique shop "Trading Post," run by Sol Crohn, who was also on the Board of Education.

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Photo of shoreline of Cass Lake (probably at the end of Portman Street)

Photo of Rosemary Hunt at about 5 yrs old sitting on round brick garden located at end of Cass Lake Road.

Photo of Strong's Pavilion

1919-1920 - picture of 3 girls on bridge leading from Dollar Lake to Cass Lake - Rosemary Laffrey Hunt (center age 4) with sisters Elinor and Francis

Rosemary attended Roosevelt School from 1st grade to 10th grade and then went to the Pontiac School. She remembers Orchard Lake Road as all gravel.

She lived with her family at the corner of Willow Beach and Cass Lake Ave. in a stucco house (not a cottage) containing 3 bedrooms and a furnace. Her father worked as a construction superintendent in Detroit and drove every day to work. They often joked that he had to carry a tire pump and patches for the tires every time he traveled to work (probably using Woodward Ave. to Detroit). The homes in her neighborhood were mostly cottages rented by factory workers from Pontiac. By the late 20's, many Jewish families were renting the cottages and Rosemary remembers the roads being so packed with people that "you couldn't even get down the street." She said that they had to lock the doors of the house because people would walk into their home and begin talking to them, mostly offering to rent their home. She remembers a long dock running out into Cass Lake and going for boat rides.

Her family lost their home in 1931 due to her father losing his job in the Depression. He did not work for 4 years. She and her friends walked all over Keego and enjoyed going into the Dor'L Dress Shop, run by Lila Ross and Doris Jones, where they had nice things for ladies including lingerie, and also shopping for food at the A & P grocery store. A special treat was eating at Vincent's Restaurant, run by Frank and Eleanor Vincent.

1930's - Keego was known as a resort town. From age 14 to 17, Rosemary worked at Strong's Pavilion a large, 2 stories while building on Dollar Lake. It had a boat dock and boat repair service on the main floor and the top floor was used as a dance floor. Later, the building became all dance hall (later a roller rink)

Rosemary sold tickets to the box seats for people who came to watch the "Walkathon" put on by a company that sponsored this event. The cost was 25 cents to get in but women got in free before 9 p.m. There were also bleacher seats. Couples would enter the contest and would move around the dance floor to the canned music. The rule was that they had to keep moving so they could dance, walk, and run, even run around the floor. A local radio station broadcast from the event. The company even fed the participants. This particular Walkathon lasted 3 months. One couple would be left standing. Sometimes the participants would do skits or perform for the audience who tossed coins to the performers. This money would be kept in the safe and Mr. Strong would give it to them at the end of the event. ("Remember, no one was working so this was really something." The promoter's name was Lacey Kerner. He put on these walkathons all over the state. He then moved the walkathon to Lansing after leaving Keego. A newsletter was printed every week that contained all the tid-bits of gossip about the walkathon dancers.

The Strong's Pavilion dance hall was open Easter Monday thru Labor Day. Her friends, Harold Sherman and Mel McFall worked there for Mr. Strong doing odd jobs, and were given passes that allowed them to get other people in. Some of the band members, all young men, who played there lived across the street from Rosemary.

Members of the "Purple Gang" rented homes around Keego Harbor and Rosemary said they "didn't try to hide it, at all. " They rented the home that Rosemary's family had lost in the Depression and brought out their families to enjoy the lake life in the summer. She met many of these children and had a long friendship with Beatrice Eisensmith, beginning when Rosemary was 10 years old.

Rosemary graduated in 1934 and went to beauty school in Port Huron. She worked at Ollies' Barber Shop on Cass Lake Road and at Helen Kastner's shop. In 1937, she worked at Healoil's Beauty Salon in Pontiac, located above the Osmun's store next to the O.C. Court Courthouse.

Rosemary has a card table produced by the Blue Star Mothers (those having a child in the War). When the Blue Star Mothers disband, the tables were either given or bought by the Keego Cass Women's Club. The tables had a directory of Keego Harbor businesses printed around the sides of the table.

Rosemary remembers Mary Serbinoff, (only child of the Serbinoff's who came from Macedonia.) Tommy's bar was owned by Mary's uncle Tommy Serbinoff.

The Mapleys owned a little cabin near the end of what is now Ward's point. Rosemary remembered going there when she was a girl scout.

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