



Greater West Bloomfield Historical Society

Transcription of Oral Interview cassette tape with
Winfred Hamlin

Transcribed by GWBHS member Sure Williams – June, 2010

Interviewer: Jim Laarman, GWBHS member

L: Visiting Mr. and Mrs. Hamlin in their beautiful house on Garland Street in Keego Harbor (corrected to Sylvan Lake by transcriber, Sue Williams). Mr. Hamlin, spent time on many different farms and has agreed to tell us about them.

Interview Date is Jan. 19, 1988

NOTE Tape Quality: sometime muffled voices, tape ends $\frac{3}{4}$ through on side 2.

L = Jim Laarman

WH = Win Hamlin, age 90

MW = Mrs. Hamlin, age 86

L: You were born not on a farm, but where?

WH: North side of Orchard Lake. Then we moved to Pontiac when I was 5, then moved back to the Island.

L: That's when you started to remember? Was your job to work on the island?

WH: Dad was caretaker; he raised vegetables for the people in the cottages - nine families. In the winter, we were there alone. '

L: Was there livestock on the island?

WH: At that time there was one cow and team of horses.

L: When was this?

WH seems confused.

L: How old are you now?

WH: 90

L: So you were born in '98; went to the island for the first time in 1903.

WH: Then Dad got extra cows so we had two cows and two horses.

L: How long were you on island?

WH: 4 years; then moved away, then back again for 3 more years. Dad got a job as a motorman for the DUR so we moved to North Farmington near Franklin where the InterUrban ran the full length of Orchard Lake Road . . .

L: Was Farmington Road running a stagecoach at this time?

WH: Not as far as I know. (confused about roads) North Farmington was where they had a general store, most groceries. It was the same distance to Franklin. Either way. We caught a ride with the folks from the Cooley Farm. They had big herd of cattle.

L: Did they raise grain in the island?

WH: Oh no, not quite enough for our needs. We planted field corn, so we had corn, partly for the hogs and chickens. Planted it on the low part of the island, from the middle front woods back that we always put into corn. We had stalks . . .

L: When you used it for ensilage (silage, preserved green fodder, preserved in a silo) or fodder. Stalks – all had to be hand cut?

WH: Dad cut it by knife. It was like a scythe, it was a straight blade, heavier than a regular scythe. We had to buy grain to feed all animals. We used our own garbage for the pigs. They were shut in in the winter in the chicken house.

L: That's not on the map.

WH: It was out towards the woods. We'd put the stock out and then we'd have to go look for them.

L: Did you use cowbells?

WH: We'd let them loose, and put the bells on them.

L: In the evening, that would ring all over the island. Music of Orchard Lake?!

WH: We didn't use regular cow bells, that would have irritated the people in the cottages. We used sleigh bells. There was a fence around east about 2/3 down the island. That's where we . . . hay.

L: Any alfalfa?

WH: No . . . Regular mixed grasses, clover and June grass . . .harvested by mower with the horses. The mower stayed on the island. Plow, of course, walking plow. Single turnover. You could set it how deep you wanted. Set the axle up or down. Second time I was able run it. Dad raised a veg garden. My job was to ride horseback while he was cultivating. Kids hated that because you were riding all day long. Got pretty hot some days

L: What kind of soil on island?

WH: It was a mix of clay. Garden was mixture of black dirt.

L: Any wild game like rabbits?

WH: Winter you'd see rabbit tracks.

L: Hunt on the island?

WH: Just for ourselves. In the winter, they'd come across (does not say what kind of animals) there were some Beautiful walnut trees. Dad cut them down.

L: Did you raise raspberries?

WH: Not really. We had the fence . . . Cattle were all colors and kinds. The jersey had the richest milk but didn't give quite as much. We furnished the cottages with milk and eggs. Had close to 100 chickens.

L: So you could hear roosters crowing in the mornings?

WH: Yes, there was the barnyard up this end we had tool shed by the road down to the lake. We could put our tools away . . .out of sight. In the wintertime we were by ourselves. We'd slide down the hill on the north side of the island, right on down to the lake. That hill is eaten down in now. That's how much the ice is eating away at the land. Used to call it 40 acres at one time. We'd slide down on little sleighs with wooden runners. Once in while Dad made us a bobsled. We couldn't go quite as far on the lake with that. It had metal runners, 3/8 rod and Dad just curved it and flattened it and put in front and back screws. Dad also made boats. Made wooden boats for Campbells.

L: Did you ice skate and ice fish on the lake. ?

WH: Yes, in the by by the church, it was often plastered with people fishing. Even back then. Quite a lot of fish. In the spring, we'd go into the marshes for pike. Used to use shotgun and shoot them. Pretty good luck with that . . . there were two icehouses on the island. Second time I was there, Dad bought an ice plow. We used to fill all the people around the lake: Wards, up in the grove. Cuthbertsons place, very west end of the lake. Ward owned it, and he was working with Wards, so there was lots of acreage.

L: Anyone else try to buy up all around the lake?

WH: Ward tried to buy all around, but he never made it. Didn't get Pelletiers on North side of the lake - we lived there and Langdon's lived there at one time. (wife is now talking with Mr. Hamlin) Peach orchard was on north side, between Cass Lake and Orchard Lakes. Then they built a place on what used to be Edgewater on Lone Pine. People would pick load of peaches and wait for the DUR to take to Detroit. At picking time, you'd pick a bushel and get paid. Wards did all that . . .Frank Hallett (Spelling??)lived by the peach farm, on a big hill. Alfred Langdon was Uncle to Win Hamlin.

Shares picture of their home . . .

Mrs. Hamlin: (talking about another house). . It was a nice house; about 80 years ago we lived there. Around 1905. Bay window. There were shutters on the windows. The first night we were there, we got up and closed the shutters and we closed them at night all the time so no one could look in. (Mrs. Hamlin's chair was moved to closer to the microphone)

WH: About that school . . . I got a job making wood parts at Burdette – they made door frames out of wood. Got paid by the piece, made framework, glued all that together. Worked with the glue you'd have to warm up the glue when you got in. Sometimes we'd throw the harded pieces all around at each other (laughs) . . . Didn't stay there very long. I had pneumonia before that and the Dr. told me to get back on the farm or you'd get consumption. . . . Dr. Chapman in Pontiac. He had a special team of horses; he'd make his rounds . . .

(Discussion on team of horses when working at Flanders) . . . we'd soak the wheels in the lake. The wheels would shrink from the iron hoop and it would dry out, separating from the rim. Let the wheels soak and horses drink at the same time. Water the wagon and the horses. My team, nice looking team at Flanders. Year before I got there, one of the horses got killed right there at that hill. When Flanders was building there, they'd go down to the streetcar. They'd get a whole lot of people to work, people from Pontiac. Coming down that hill, the neck yoke came loose and took off the end of his tongue, jammed his tongue and stabbed the horse. Bled to death. That was before I got there . . . Flanders owned the horses. They had 6 teams, with 4 extras. You had to feed your own horses, hay.

L: Where was this barn?

WH: Barn was up on the main road, up around by Leggets (Hiller road going north and south), where the silos are. Up the hill, there was a crossroads and that's where the boarding house was. And the barn was near there . . . then they had a cow barn, near up by the road. They kept cattle.

L: And cows gave milk for sale?

WH: They had a special driving team that was faster to take the milk to market . . .

L: Where did they (teamsters) all eat?

We all ate together in the dining room, in the big square house. Center of the room.

L: Did the barn have silos? (muffled voices) How did they stick the corn into the silo?

WH: All they had for the stall was to stick the head of the cow into a slot . . .

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SIDE 2

WH: mid conversation . . .In the wintertime, we had apples there.

MH: It was a big barn

WH: it was a huge barn. It was on Commerce Road across from Green Lake Road, about a mile from Scotch School.

MH: What was her name? I think it was Charlotte. Her cousin used to have a goat and had a cart made for the goat. I used to like to go home with her and go out with him and go outside by the barn with the goat and cart.

L: There weren't too many goats around were there?

WH: No. That barn was built there. They invited everybody in the township for a dance.

L: Was that where you met Mrs. Hamlin?

MH: No, we had known each other since we were babies.

L: You're four years younger?

MH: Yes.

(idle talk) Note: WH is 90 years old at the time of this interview

MH: garble Mr. Flanders

L: Was there a Mrs. Flanders

WH: Yes, you didn't hear much about her. There was her and a boy, George, about our age. He's the one who had the goat.

MH: Mr. Flanders had been married twice and this was his youngster with her. When you got up to the end of Green Lake, there were cottages around there, so you couldn't bike around the lake. But there was an old lady in a shack, really old, who lived back in the woods there.

L: Anyone else try to buy up lakes? (refers to Ward buying Orchard Lake property and Flanders buying Green Lake property) That didn't happen on Pine Lake.

WH: Well, there was the big hotel on Pine Lake, burned down. That was another ice house we had to fill.

L: Yes, the Interlaken. How long was the Interlaken there?

WH: Don't know. They had a store there on the shore on Pine Lake by the seminary area.

L: I have a postcard picture showing that store in the background.

WH: At one time they used to run a launch from there to the hotel. So you could get off the InterUrban and go to the hotel. Us kids, we were probably 12 years old, we had bikes and I'd get across from the island and, the Bachelor *** confirm spelling - boys and me would bike all day, and we'd get hungry. Miller's Bakery would come out from Pontiac. You could buy a half dozen cinnamon donuts for about 15 cents at that time. We'd end up waiting for Miller's Bakery, instead of buying them at the store.

MH: That store is where I tasted my first ice cream.

L: What else did they sell?

MH: Candy, cookies

L: Who ran the store?

MH: At that time it was Claude Young and his wife. I was old enough to walk there and we had a nickel and I went after the ice cream.

WH: The Michigan Military Academy was there and every Sunday they had a dress parade. They'd send special cars up from Farmington and they'd sit there until after the parade was over and had a special switch to turn the car around and then they'd go back to Farmington and Detroit.

L: I'd like to talk about the farming on the academy grounds. We have no info on their farm. When they sold, they must have kept the farm going, didn't they?

WH: (muffled) . . . The academy had a garden and went into town once a week. They had an actual cavalry and would ride up around Orchard Lake. About 2 doz or 30.n of them. They were quite a mischievous bunch. If we were walking on the road and they'd come along, the captain would holler and they'd do just the opposite. (to scare them??) I think they used to ride three or four abreast.

L: I know Fred Wilkins was the veterinarian there for a while. That' what the records show.

WH: Fred Wilkins used to live right next to the street car track. There was a store there and Batchlors lived there, too.

L: Mrs. Wilkins was a Bachlor, wasn't she?

MH: Yes.

WH: If we went down there, we used to unhook the horses and pay a quarter, put the horses in the barn at Bachlors and take the street cars into town and then come back.

L: Probably a lot of people did that, didn't they?

WH: talks about how people could park their horse there and ride into town again and come back and pick up the horses . . .

L: What about the mail?

MH: Mr. Bachlor was the mailman. The post office was right next door. (by Seminary road)

We had mailboxes there. There was once a day delivery. He had a buggy. But that was before my time.

L: Did he provide any other services, sell stamps, etc.

WH: They sold stamps.

L: What did Bachlor do?

WH: He had a small farm. Pretty old at that time . . .He was getting up there. His wife would get his breakfast and he'd get him going and . . .

MH: She'd almost put him into the buggy, they'd say . . . (laughs)

L: Regular mail route around here?

WH: This was a hard place for a route, with many side streets. (Looking at map or pictures) This is where the streetcar was. Big street cars. I didn't think I'd be living on the same road that I took the street car to go to the factory.

L: (discussion on teams of horses.) Were you a teamster for the Flanders? What did you do for them?

WH: Whatever the boss said to do it, we did it. One hour you'd be cutting hay, next hour something else. I mean we (the teamsters) were a team. We had to go down to the depot every month and haul feed up for all the cattle. Up Orchard Lake. I couldn't lift those bags.

L: How did that feed get there?

WH: Sometimes they would come on a DUR flatcar or the train. There were 6 regular teamsters and a couple of extras. There were always harnesses to fix, stalls to clean, clean and oil harnesses. . . .There wasn't time to play cards . . . There was an ice house and a green house and another little greenhouse up by the house, just for their own stuff. They had a greenhouse man and he used to raise cucumbers and they had to put trellises all along it, you almost bumped your head on those cucumbers.

L: That was his specialty?

WH: Yes, once a week they'd take the DUR and send them into the market in Detroit to the Broadway Market.

L: I remember that store. They had beautiful fruit in the 50's

WH: My grandfather was from England and he brought back the seed from there. At that time, my grandfather was gardening. He'd always tried to give you a cucumber that didn't have seeds; he didn't want you to get the seeds . . .

L: Where did you grandfather live?

WH: All around; with us in the wintertime. He gardened over at the academy in the summers. They didn't do much farming, but they had a big garden. Mother worked there at the academy in the laundry.

L: Do you remember doing laundry on the island?

MH: She didn't wash on the island. They all had maids. As a rule they all (the 9 families on the island) bought their own maids, the same ones as in the wintertime. The maid would do the shopping, too..

L: Did any have pets?

WH: No, very scarce. One family had a dog. We had a dog. (can't recall name) a beagle. (garbled) She (?) Raised a garden on the north side on the slope. Big cyclone cellar east side of house. Front was the flower garden.

L: What about the trees? That maple tree is over 100 years old. The two big pines . . .

WH: Can't recall those . . . they were just trees to me. At the foot of the flower garden is the Smoke Tree. (looking at picture) Whole woods was Basswood, with sprinkling of oak and pine. A big wind fell most of the basswood. My father gathered it up, got it sawn up for lumber at the Farmington sawmill.(not sure of location of sawmill)

L: Well, I have to ask . . . Questions about the house in Walnut Lake. When did you become manager of Albert Kahn's out there and what about that house that fell into the lake . . .?

WH: (seems confused, can't remember) Wife says "you remember that - the one that fell into the lake thru the ice."

L: Who's house was it?

WH: It was the farmer's house. Muirhead, Muirhand*** to be confirmed

L: Could you tell us anything that happened?

MH: You could look down there in the ice, by the Smith's. You could see it when the ice was clear.

WH: It was a farmhouse by the lake and Kahn's lived up on the hill. There was a tennis court and it was along side the tennis court. They wanted to move it down to Inkster. After it (the property) was sold to Kahn, Smith's bought it (the farmhouse) we were going to move it out on the ice.

L: What did they use to move it?

WH: Horses, a team of horses. It was wintertime and they could slide it across by beams and they got it over on the lake, clear down across there. . . stopped to let the horses rest. It was getting dark. The next morning it was gone, it went through the ice.

L: Where were they heading with this house?

MH: Inkster. Down to Smiths. It was toward Detroit, anyways. (looking at map) You could look down in the ice and see the brick chimney.

L: I have a skin diver at school who's interested in going down and look for these bricks.

WH: There's probably more than brick. It was a very plain house.

L: Was it Bigelow brick from the Bigelow Mill?

WH: Could be. Don't know. Where's Bigelow? That was before my time . . .

MH: (Sister) Pearl Callow knows more. Lives on Franklin. She's ill nowlives near the Cooley house.

L: Did you used to play with one of the Bigelow boys? Tell us about the time you started up the shute (?)

WH: You went down there to play and (intelligible) His Dad (Bigelow) was supposed to be the tallest man in Oakland County. He wore a size 16 shoe, big man.

(Seems to be looking at map or out window) That house out there, we used to live there. Big Evergreen Fir on the front of the house is still there. That's all I remember.

L: Looking at map? Where is Lone Pine Road? On the back side of the stone wall? Was the house designed by Kahn?

WH: don't know.

L: What was Albert Kahn like, any recollections?

WH: He was straightforward. He was not a big man. He said something and walked away and expected it to be done. She (Mrs. Kahn) had a garden.

L: You kept her garden?

WH: Yes

TAPE ABRUPTLY ENDS!!