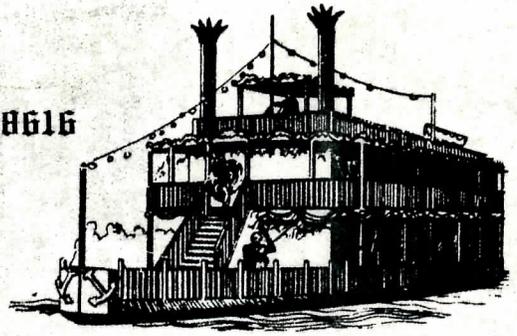


C.11
Chesaning Public Library

227 East Broad Street Chesaning, Michigan 48616
Phone 845-3211



I have been asked to participate in the Chesaning Public Library Oral History Project. I have agreed to a tape recording between a Library representative and myself. I take this opportunity to assure you that these recordings are the property of the Library and its historical collection, for use as the Library sees fit, and I agree that no monetary consideration need be paid me.

Florence E. Bitterman

Witness:

Helene Frank

*Florence Cowman Bitterman
(née Johnson Martin)*

I was born on October 28, 1899.

What was your maiden name?

I was born Florence Johnson but I was adopted at an early age, and that would make my ^{maiden} name Martin. Grandfather Damon came to Chesaning from New York State in 1855. He was 12 years old. The family settled in the forest near the Peet Road. After the Civil War grandfather married Mary Waldron, and they lived on a farm opposite his father's. He farmed, and he also taught school at the old Ward School, which was on the corner of Peet Road and Friendscho Road. Three daughters were born to them. Two of them died, one day apart, during a diphtheria epidemic in 1877. Bertha, my mother, survived and married and moved to the Village. My two brothers, Dan and Richard and I came along, four years apart. My earliest recollection of the Village itself, is having been taken by my brothers in a perambulator down to the old wooden bridge to see the river. We lived on the east side of the river. In later years the river was still a source of entertainment. There was boating in the summer, ice skating in the winter, and watching the ice being cut in huge blocks and stored in sawdust for the summer. We also took our sleds to Nason's hill for long rides down the hill and over the frozen river. Another fun thing was catching on bobs. This was walking to the bridge with a group and asking for a ride with the drivers we knew on sleighs which were carrying sugar beets to cars on the railroad tracks, then asking for a ride back downtown on another bob. Our parents considered this a no-no, but it was such fun we sometimes decided it was worth the punishment we got, also the chills. We wore all the warm clothing available, including black tights and wool socks over our ^{high} shoes, before squeezing into our lined rubbers. In the summer we wore white stockings with our pretty dresses on Sunday, and the rest of the time we liked to go barefoot. But life was not all fun and games. We had to wade through deep snow going to school - no City Department ^{clearing} of Streets for us at that time. There was also the wood box to be replenished with split, dry wood for the kitchen range, and there was homework to do, and a pail of water to fill, and an hour of practice at the piano. When we were older, a group of girls occasionally walked to a spot near the cemetery known as Shako. There we waded in the river and ate a picnic lunch. Across the river was a spot called Ponto. Both places had been meeting ^{grounds} places for Indians in the earlier years. Ponto and Shako were both said to have been rulers over their own group of Indians. It was necessary there to be on the alert for the only poisonous snake in Michigan, the Massasauga Rattler. We never saw one, but about 1920 one sprang at me when I was placing flowers on mother's grave in Wildwood Cemetery. When I was still very young there was a

park, complete with a bear pen and a race track. This park occupied the spot that is now called Showboat Park. It was owned by Albert Cantwell and was open to the public. Many people owned rowboats and canoes that were tied up there, and the river was a busy waterway on Sundays. We didn't have TV's or fast cars or deep freezers and other present-day conveniences, but in many ways they were the good old days.

Mrs. Bitterman, how old were you when you were adopted?

My mother died when I was a little more than three years old, and my brothers and I went to live with our grandparents, and two years ^{later} our father died, and grandmother and Mrs. Martin were good friends and she suggested that since they had no family of their own that she would like to have them consider adopting ^{me} us, which they did. It's strange, but the Martins were married and they were in Saginaw on their honeymoon when they met my own father, who told them that his wife, our mother, had just died in the hospital there.

And they turned out to be your family.

That's right.

Where did your brothers go?

My two brothers went on living with my grandmother and grandfather until they were out of school, and my older brother stayed on with them but my ^(the) younger brother was able to get a teaching certificate which he used for a couple of years, then he was able to go up to Mt. Pleasant to college and got his teaching degree. He later got his Masters at University of Michigan. Well you're very fortunate, because you have two families.

Yes I am.