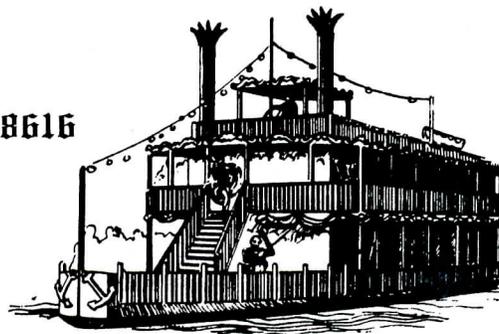


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Chesaning Public Library

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.

Thomas Dickinson

1976

Witness:

Allen G. Frank

Will you tell us your name?

Frances Dickinson.

And how old are you?

Ninety two.

Well, are you going to tell us about your life, your early life?

Yes. I was born in Wexford County, and started to school, my two sisters and I, on September 1, 1889 in a log schoolhouse with wooden benches for seats and wooden tables for our books, and used a tin pail and dipper.

Our school only went to the sixth grade, and if you passed that you could go to Sherman School which was five miles away. In all the years, of the 25 children, I never knew of one of them who went to town school but me, and I worked for my board. I only got in a half a year, ^{as} when I was stricken with a fever at Christmas time and I wouldn't go back after that.

I didn't want to get behind my class. I stayed home helping mother till I was thirteen years old, then I went to board with Mrs. Bradford in town.

Her husband owned the meat market. They had a big 2-story house with a basement and five heating stoves in the winter, one upstairs, two down in the living room, one in the basement and one in what they called the slope. So it seemed to me I didn't have time to do much else only just carry wood and ~~and~~ carry out ashes; and clean the lamps - we had several lamps to wash and ~~trim~~ land fill every morning. I learned to cook and sew and keep house ^{there}. Every fall Jenny Boullion, a dressmaker, would come and stay three months and sew for Mrs. Bradford, their daughter, and some of the ladies in town, and she taught me to cut out dresses and cut out patterns for dresses. You couldn't buy patterns then. So in the afternoon I always helped her sew and press, and it's been a big help to me all these years what I learned in that five ~~years~~ ~~while~~ I was there.

I stayed there till I was married to Frank Dickinson in 1903. He was an engineer at the broom handle factory, and he worked 7 days a week, 12 hours a day for \$10.75 a week, but we managed. We bought an acre of land with a 3 room house and a good well on it and we lived there five years. Then the timber was gone for broom handles so we had to go elsewhere. So we sold the house and loaded our furniture up on an Ann Arbor freight car and went to Owosso to live where Dick got a job as an engineer in a car shop, but it was the same old thing, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week, but he got \$25.00 a week there. They didn't pay by check. Every 2 weeks he got an envelope with two \$20.00 gold pieces in it and one \$10.00 bill. I used to try to save one of those twenties every payday, but it didn't always work out, nor did the job last always. He was there 6 years. Then the car shops moved to Durand and he went to work for the Triangle Truck Company in Owosso, building truck motors. That only lasted

a year, and they moved to Lansing. So Dick saw an ad in the paper where Mr. Cantwell wanted a mechanic who could run a lathe and repair cars. So we moved to Chesaning. And the roads in those ^{em} days! No pavement, and it had rained and rained. We went there the 15th of May, and the roads were just mud. It took twelve hours to get our goods from Owosso to Chesaning with a team of horses. I don't know many times we got stuck. Well I lived in two different houses. Houses were scarce in Chesaning at that time for rent, and not too good. So I lived in two different ones, and in the spring I moved over by Mabell Babion's, across from her by the Opera House. There was one drawback for me from Owosso, that we didn't have any lights after midnight and we didn't have any water. I had to carry water from where Neuman's store is now up to where Mabell Babion lives, all uphill in the sand - there wasn't even a walk. But we had awfully good times. There were so many things going on at the Opera House, roller skating and nice parties. They had parties where they'd have an *orchestra* from Flint and one from Owosso in the old Opera House and such nice dances and parties. I joined the Stars and Macabees and all those. The Macabees used to put on a home talent show every year, and that was ^a the biggest drawing card. To make money we'd take it St. Charles and to Brant. Mr. Cantwell owned the Opera House and the store where Bert & Joe are and the biggest house in Chesaning and his machine shop in the park. They always had things to do if he wasn't busy in the garage or things there was always something somewhere he had to do, so he had to work 7 days a week there. I don't remember how much he got any more, probably twenty five. Oh hum, well I guess that's about all of it then.

Well you got yourself to Chesaning all right. Tell us when you started taking teachers to board, or when did you start serving meals. You served meals quite a while, didn't you?

Oh, fifty years.

How did you get started in that?

Well, I never mentioned Beatrice, or having a youngster here in any way, but I started having teachers when Beatrice started going to college. I didn't do much the first few years I was in Chesaning. I always sewed and helped with the garage, but I started taking ⁱⁿ teachers to board and room in 1922. I lived in what is now the Rest Home and I don't know I come to start. They just came and asked me ^{is it} to board them, Doris Davis and, they were boarding at Mrs. Richmond's and they got starved down there and they wanted to come up to my house.

Well of course there weren't any restaurants to speak of then.

No, not even a bakery.

Oh there wasn't even bakery.

Not when we came to Chesaning. So I started taking teachers in 1922 when

Beatrice went away from home, and I had teachers steady for 50 years.

Now when you say you boarded them, does that just mean meals?

I boarded and roomed them both. Most of the time for years till I moved in the house I'm in now.

And then you just boarded a few, didn't you?

I just boarded Norwin and Robert and that was all.

Have you sewn all the ~~time~~ you were married?

Yes.

For other people, I mean.

I wanted to put that in there. When I was in Mesick, I used to sew for 25¢ a day, all day long, and if I didn't get anything quite finished I'd stay and work till it was done, something they had to have.

That's terrible isn't it!

There's something I wanted to put in. When I worked for Mrs. Bradford I got \$1.50 a week and worked from 4:00 in the morning till the work was done at night, \$1.50 a week.

Well you did get one good thing out of that, you did learn how to sew, didn't you?

Oh yes, and at 13 years old I wasn't too much of a cook, and I learned to cook and to can and to do everything, so I figure I got quite an education out of that.

Well she must have been a good housekeeper.

Mrs. Bradford?

No, I didn't see her ^{for} the first three months I was there. She had ulcers in her stomach, bleeding ulcers.

Well who taught you all this then?

The daughter.

Oh, her daughter. Well she must have been a good housekeeper then, because you are such a good housekeeper.

Well Mrs Bradford I suppose was a good housekeeper, but she never saw a well day. You know, when she was able to be up around and I was working, like washing and ironing and working hard, she'd come out in the kitchen and make tea and maybe bake some biscuits and get some jam out and make me stop because I'd be in such a hurry to get done I didn't want to stop to eat, but I had to sit down with her and eat. She was a wonderful woman. She probably thought you had worked long enough.

And in the afternoons, no scrubbing, no cleaning. If I had the floor half done I didn't finish it. You put your apron on and Jenny was there, go in and help Jenny or crochet or I used to do the mending or make aprons and we had to make all our own sheets and pillowcases you know, and you couldn't even buy a towel ready-made in those days.

No you couldn't when I was young either. We made our own towels.

So I did all that, cleaning, sewing.

But that was easier than scrubbing, it was a rest in a way.

Oh yes. I loved to do it, and she was particular. I used to wear those princess aprons with the ruffles over the shoulder and around the neck.

You always had to look nice.

Well that's good. ^{was} You certainly have had an interesting life, haven't you. Yes, I think I got a good start early, because in all the years I knew Mrs. Bradford, as sick as she was she always could make a joke and laugh about things and nothing was ever wrong.

Well that's wonderful.

And when I went there to work, someone told us that you just can't get along with her, she's awful sassy?

Told her about You?

Yes, and I never.... ^{of} I guess I was there a year or more till one hot day, oh it was so hot, and I wanted to finish the ironing before noon. I had my dinner all plamed, and Mrs. Bradford, ~~we were~~ out in the kitchen and she said, "Fran, would you scrub off some of those new potatoes and put them in the oven." She said "Fred ^{Mr. Bradford} just loved new potatoes baked." I said, "What? Bake new potatoes? I never heard of such a thing!" So I scrubbed off a potatoe apiece and put them in the oven. Well Fred came in early see, because he always came from work. She had a son Fred Sprague and a daughter Penny, and I just scrubbed a potatoe apiece for us. Fred came in and he ate all the potatoes, and she laughed. She never got over laughing about how mad I got. That's all I said, "I never heard of such a thing!" but I scrubbed the potatoes. Isn't it funny how those things you'll remember for years and years, my gosh. They were so good to me. Well they must have been a nice family to work for.

You did your work, and she never complained about my work. She never did.

Well you probably did it well. Now, how many years do you think you've been sewing then?

Oh, I've been sewing ever since I was thirteen years old, and I'm 93.

You're 92, almost. You're not going to be 92 till August.

Well August is just a breath away.

Yes, I know, August is just a breath away.

Well, I started some at home.

That's almost 60 years, though isn't of sewing.

Well it's more than that.

And you're still sewing. Well there was one more thing I wanted to ask you and I've forgotten what it was. (Wasn't anything very important I guess). Oh I know. Now you said when you came to Chesaning you helped

in the shop. Now how did you help in the shop?

Oh with the writing letters and the books and things like that.

Secretarial work.

Yes, although now after Dick had the garage I kept books and everything.

My sixth grade education, would you think I ever could do it?

Sure, you learned as you went along. You'll have to tell us when your daughter was born.

Oh she was born in Mesick.

When was that?

Oh she was born in 1904, October.

In other words, she was born before you went to Owosso.

Yes.

Well there was another interesting thing you mentioned. You mentioned that you carried water from where Neuman's Jewelry is, when you came to Chesaning. Was the pump there?

Yes there was a pump on the corner there.

And how many people used that pump?

Oh, some of the stores, and Chapman's Store. Mabell Babion had water. They didn't carry water from there. There wasn't many people living around there you know, just the stores.

Oh, that part of town didn't have very many houses?

Oh no.

Oh I see.

The Martin House was down there, Frank Martin's house, and the old Jackson House, but they all had wells. This was kind of a community pump there on the corner.

Well this has really been very interesting, Mrs. Dick.