

FRAN GAZLAY – AUGUST 22, 1988

This is August the 22, 1988, Northville, Michigan. I am Francis Gazlay, living at 221 S. Rogers, where this is being recorded. My wife, Biz, and I came here in 1949 looking for a home, hoping to live in a small town because we both had lived in Detroit most of our lives, and I had moved six times in the City of Detroit and wanted to settle in one place.

My earliest recollection of Northville was with my mother (who) had a cousin here in the 1920's. So the first I really came here was in 1923 or 24 on the Interurban. Also, later on we were driven here by my mother's uncle in his big car that he called a 'machine', in the middle 1920's, and we would go out Waterford Road to Waterford, which of course doesn't exist now in 1988, and we went to Cass Benton Park so I had been here long before we decided to move here.

I am a charter member of the Northville Historic Society. I have worked in the Mill Race Village since 1972. The first President of the Northville Historical Society was Ruth Chase, whose husband had been my Civics teacher in Detroit at Cooley High School.

As I look back in the 1950's when we first moved here, some of the things that now impress me about this place are the following:

- I remember that there were lots of gas stations in town. There was a Firestone Station on south Main Street which is not the Early American Shop, formerly Moonkin Toys. There was a Gulf station where the Glow-Car Auto Wash is. There was a Texaco station at Hutton and Main, right by the park and where the bank is. On north Center Street, in the east side, there was one. Now, it's the Northville Pizza Station. There was a Gulf station at the City Hall, a Union 76 Station across the street. South Rogers at Fairbrook was Robinsky's (sp?) Gas Station and one had just closed several doors south of us here on south Rogers in what is now a white house. Also, there's one at Seven Mile and Beck Road. Most of these stations had underground pits for very few of them had lifts in the 1950's.
- The car dealers here when we first came were the Kaiser/Frazer Dealer, which is behind the car wash on South Main; the Packer, Mercedes, and Studebaker Dealer where the Ruby Office Supply is now; and the Chrysler-Plymouth Dealer across from the City Hall, now is a Body Shop; a Dodge, and that was Miller's place on Hutton, where the Heritage Bank is; and a Chevrolet dealer across from where Mags is now; and then the Ford dealer was where Mags is today. For car repairs, next to the Cider Mill and one had just closed in the old Blacksmith Shop in town.
- There were quite a few restaurants in town too. There was the Old Mill, which is now McKinnon's. And there was Peanuts, which was by the old City Hall. The old City Hall had been torn down before I got here. There was Nick the Greek's, which is now McKinnon's Bar. There was White's Café, which is now the IV Seasons. Here was Black's White House, which is the parking lot of the Church on North Center and Dunlap. There was Cloverdale, originally a building in the 20's which was the old Edison office; and there was a Coney Island which was put in after the old Opera House was torn down.

- The Shoe Repair, Joe Revirtizer (sp?) who came here in 1922 and he was quite proud of the fact that up until 1946 he knew where every pair of shoes in town was and when it would be back for repair. But he said after World War II, he no longer had control of the shoe condition in town. Joe Revirtizer now lives up in Allen Terrace.
- The Hardware Stores, there was one on the northwest corner of the Four Corners and which is now an office building, then the second store north of that was a hardware store and on the north side of Main Street which is presently Black's, was Gamble's Hardware Store.

I was impressed when I first came here because at Hutton and Main Street, which is now the Plagens Building and also was a Krogers Store and A & P; when we came was a farm implement building. The coal and ice dealer that I recall seeing was where the Doughnut Shop is now, its Ely's on North Center. They had coal and ice. Milk delivery, you could've gotten from Don Miller on First Street, Johnson – Alec Johnson over on Linden and Dubuar, Blacks up on Hill Street, and Guernsey which was on Center and Cady.

For a small town, I thought it had a lot of greenhouses. It was Mr. Dixson's over at Johnson and Yerkes over in Bealtown. Jones Floral – Mary Jones had the one on Linden and Dubuar, and I didn't know the name of the one which was on Hutton and Rayson, but it lasted for quite a few years.

One of the most dramatic incident which probably happened since we've been here was the landing of a National Guard Military Jet in May of 1959, when it landed on First Street behind the Rowe (?) girls, they were always called the Rowe girls, and they were in their 90's of course. And it landed and dug a hole, quite deep in the back yard. Like fifteen feet. Two children were hurt, and the Federal Government paid to have them taken care of, and they were returned to their original condition after being hurt by the kerosene or whatever the fuel was from the engine of the jet. It created quite a lot of excitement around here because that very afternoon, and the next day, sightseers came from all over, and it had been on television. The kids locally sold sandwiches and lemonade at card table up and down the street for the hundreds and hundreds of people who came.

In the early 50's we had a policeman by the name of Joe Denton. He was the Chief, of course. He was a veteran of the Boer War and everyone knew that. He managed to tell everyone quite thoroughly. He developed and organized the Junior Police. Where all the boys that wanted to be a junior policeman could wear a badge that said Northville Junior Police on it.

Town activities in the 1950's were – there was a lot of skating done on the Mill Pond. The Kiwanis gave trophies to people who won the various events. Some local organization put trout in the creek in the spring – that had to be stopped when people came from too many other communities, and they almost picked the trout out of the water as soon as they were thrown in. There was a 21 year banquet for new citizens up until 1967, so that when you got to be 21, they had a village banquet and you were given a certificate that you were officially a citizen of Northville and of the United States, so you could vote.

In the 1950's was just the beginning of the race track, and it was all out-of-doors and was on grandstands from the old county fairground. Most of it was with local employees, and it was only in the summer months. So that as soon as this was over in the first week of August, the town died. Everybody left and went on vacation.

Where the City Hall is now, there was a much smaller – there was an old residence. The Lapham residence was the City Hall, and the hill was much bigger, more of it. There was a lot of sledding on that hill. The Post Office at that time was on North Center on the west side, and it became part of Schrader's.

Another reason why there is some more than ordinary interest, I suppose, in Northville, is that one of the doctors in the 1980's, who has long since passed on, was quoted in a newspaper as admitting the fact that he had, in essence, run an abortion center here, and he spoke of performing abortions in the various places he did in town. He also said that his office on east Main Street on the south side – during prohibition he and his friends were able to distill a good deal of the hard stuff for people by doing it in the basement and it came out of the chimney, and people didn't know the difference. Of course, everyone locally did, and you could smell it for a long way's away. He also, the same doctor, is quoted in the newspaper as having said that he was a good deal of assistance to people in the 'Purple Gang' who got in trouble and needed bullets taken out of their body. We don't know how much of that is fact and how much is fiction, but we know that he was quite proud of the fact.

In the early 1970's, Jack Hoffman, who was the editor of the local paper, and I went to what we always called "The Bucket of Blood", which was really Little Joe's Bar. Today, it's Getze's on the corner. The bar was sort of like a living room of a house with pictures around and it had a player piano, and it had antimacassars (?) on all the furniture. It was very much like home.

The space next to the Northville Drug Store, which is now sort of a park and where they have a bandstand, I remember that in 1958 they had a merry-go-round and ferris wheel for about a week, sort of a carnival, which was amazing and wonderful to have right in the middle of town.

In the early 1970's. behind our own house, I was surprised to find a gentleman was growing corn and not really being too apprehensive because it was a neighbor and not nosey. I left it alone until we came home from vacation and found out that the corn had been torn down because there had been a raid on it because inside of the corn field on a regular city lot was quite a stand of marijuana. Apparently he had made a good deal of money. Never did know if he went to jail or had to pay a fine.

In 1950, Northville was very much a Saturday night town. The farmers came to town, wore bib overalls, and wondered up and down the streets talking to each other; but by 1955, 1956, that had stopped. The corner where the old Opera House had been had become the Farmers' Market because after the Opera House had been torn down in 1949 or early 1950, they leveled it off and filled it in, and for a long time, it was the Farmers' Market until a hotdog stand was built there.

We also had an interesting thing that was, it seemed to me, odd for a small town is that a chap by the name of Art Carlson, who was a pillar of the community and was very strong in the Boy Scout movement and especially with the Cub Scouts, ran a massage parlor down on the corner of

Wing and Fairbrook. Now, this was no local problem until by the 1970's various towns were having ordinances against massage parlors, and there was a great deal of concern because he was a member of the community and had been for years and had this massage parlor, and his wife was finally on the City Commission, and she had to be reassured that this was no slander against her husband, who continued to be in the massage parlor business.

When we first came here, the Depositor's State Bank, which is now Manufacturer's Bank, was a very folksy place, and it just had a few bars between you and where the money was. However, it was very tall inside of the building, the center room, and up along the balcony, which would be about the second floor. There were two doors and periodically some man would walk out of one door, along the balcony, and into the next room. And you always had the feeling that he was their only source of security. He never did wear a uniform, but I always thought that, you had the feeling that this man could come out of the door, walk the balcony, and go back in the other door any time, or watch you down below.

The D. & C. Store's owner, Jerry Woodworth, lived up on Thayer and locally we still have a D. & C. store (closed September, 1988).

In 1952, both of the drug stores took their soda fountains out the very same week, so we have a feeling of some collusion there. That there was too much competition with Guernsey and with whatever other stores were in the full time ice cream business.

In 1950, the Carrington Insurance Agency sold license plates so you didn't have to go very far for that.

The Northville Record was printed in the building on the corner. The northwest corner of Main and Center. There was a large window along the Main Street side, and you could look in and see the newspaper being printed there, all the machinery clicking and clacking and so forth.

There were five barber shops, five beauty parlors, and Jack's Barber Shop on north Center Street on the east side could give you a hot shower for 25 cents. I couldn't understand this until I realized that the people who owned horses and worked down in the horse barns had no warm water, so they would come up and get a hair cut and then take a shower for 25 cents.

The last circus I remember in town was in 1962, and it was sponsored by the Jaycees. It was a Cole Brothers Circus.

In the early 1950's Paul's Sweet Shop, where he sold candy and made it (which is now a hair salon) and Paul later made pizzas there. Of course a major store was Brader's Department Store. A lot of groceries in town, you have to realize today that you didn't have to get in your car and go to the grocery store. Along Main Street and up Center there were the A. & P. on east Main, the Center street store which is down where the Eagles is now on south Center Street, the EMB which is now Genitti's, Kroger on the 215 East Main Street, with a north side store on east Baseline that's called Mrs. Huff's. Then there was Spagy's, C.F. Smith Store was one half of what is Genitti's today; there was a Packer's outlet on the north side of Main street; then there was Carl's Market, a meat market, on the north Center street on the east side.

There were 11 doctors in town; 3 osteopaths, 2 optometrists, 1 massager and 1 chiropractor. On Linden street there was a sawmill, and a Mr. Sharksberg (?) and his father made potato crates and ladders there.

The bars in town were McDonalds, which became Little Joe's on east Main; Ramsey's on north Center which is now Fox Photo; the Northville Bar which was called the Winners' Circle; and the Northville Hotel on south Main.

The one Veterinarian was Dr. Cavell (sp?) on Griswold Street.

The jewelry stores were Blake's (all on Main Street) Blake's, Johnson's and Tewksberry's.

One music teacher had a reputation for instructing in many instruments. Mr. Chenute (sp?) had such a large clientele that he would rent the Methodist Church for his recitals, and in the spring-time, it took two days and half of the evening for all Mr. Chenutes' to go through it, so you can imagine the agony of the parents or the other participants who had to sit for almost two days just to watch their fellow friends recite.

In the early 1950's, we had a interesting event in that a woman came to town and was very well dressed, and she came in a chauffeured automobile – a large automobile--and set up residence and told a lot of the local people that she was going to come into a large inheritance. She stayed for considerable length of time and during that time she spread the good work around and got some help from some local people, and then she disappeared very quickly – with, of course, their money. There were many local embarrassed people who said nothing. She was later apprehended by the Federal Government and was jailed. We never heard if the people got their money back or not.

The difference I notice in the Post Office today is that there are very few local people working in the Post Office. There was a time, well I have a problem 'cause Chuck Freydl has the house at 221 North Rogers and we live at 221 South Rogers and we have never had trouble with the mail until we got out-of-town delivery and now we have to be very careful to say whether we live on North Rogers or South Rogers. Prior to that time we've even gotten mail just delivered to Gazlay in Northville and it arrived. However, that can't be done any longer.

In the 1950's, the Recreation Department was run by Wilson Funk and by Ken Connely. We had no swimming pool in town and no lake nearby, so they used the school bus and transported the kids out to Whitmore Lake to Grooms Beach.

In 1950, Chief Denton had no radio for his 'cruiser' so he would just drive around town. In the very middle of town at Center and Main hanging from a wire was a red light, and whenever the clerk at City Hall would have a call for the police, why Chief Denton was driving along all day passing the four corners, if the red light was on, then he would go down to City Hall. I notice that light was not taken out until about the end of the 1970's. It hadn't been used in probably 25 years, and nobody even thought to take it down. It was just hanging there.

One of the fondest stories about Chief Denton was the fact that Miss Pollock, who ran the kindergarten in the new 1930 Elementary School on Main Street, would have a show-and-tell or story-telling time by the students on Monday mornings. One Monday morning, one of the

students in the kindergarten mentioned that they had had a new Maytag washer on their back porch, and for some reason or other, it disappeared over the weekend; and this was an unhappy family event. However, in the same class later during the story telling, a little chap got up and said it was so nice that over the weekend his father and uncle brought home a new Maytag washer and put it on their back porch. Well, Miss Pollock, being the diplomat she was, mentioned this to Chief Denton and the Maytag washer was returned to its original back porch.

The High School here in town on Main Street in 1957 was very small for the large population. At that time the girls were wearing many petticoats, and the crowding was so bad that they had to have certain stairways going up and certain down because the traffic was so heavy with all the clothes, they couldn't go both ways. Suffice to say that by 1960, they were all involved in getting a new high school. Fact is that in that school, it was so crowded that they had to have four students put their jackets in the locker, and the fifth one had to hang it on the door that was open.

The Federal Fish Hatchery on Seven Mile or Fairbrook had not been used for many years, so about 1966 several fire departments nearby and the Northville Fire Department burned down the main structure. It made a lot of confusion, made a lot of interest and drew a lot of people there.

A sound that we don't get anymore because we get so many more sounds that we've ever had before – when it was very quiet here, at night we could hear dynamite in the gravel pits out Seven Mile. There were many gravel pits out there, and they loosened the gravel up during the night by dynamiting, so you always knew when they were in operation out there.

Saturday and Sunday we had a great deal of traffic through town – people hauling their boats to Whitmore Lake from--generally from Detroit. The road then did not include what we call a Seven Mile cutoff now when you go from about Seven Mile and South Main across to where McDonald's Ford is and then on over to Cass Benton Park and over to Seven Mile. They had to go through town along Main street and to the west and then to Rogers and then south. So all the traffic went straight through town. The fact is that in those days there was very little transient traffic – most of the traffic had to do with local people. But starting in the early 1960's, and in the 70's, we'd get a great deal of transient traffic of people you have never seen anywhere, just racing through to go some place else.

There was a Northville Coach Lines, which had its main garage where Northville Charley's is now. That was the old Coach Line Barns, as they called them in those days. The coach ran in the 40s, 50's and 60's and maybe early 70's. I can't remember that. But Henry Biddle (?) had been the driver right after World War II, and he went from the Barns out to Maybury by way of Main street to Rogers to Seven Mile – went out there, and then I could pick it up on the way back passing our house and going to Detroit and that would put me at school, and then come back and Henry would drop me off right in front of the house. That went on for a lot of years. Saturday and Sunday, there was a lot of traffic on that bus of people going out to Maybury Sanitarium.

Also a thing I notice different is that in those days there were a lot of old cars and very few new ones. Now-a-days, I notice a lot of new cars and very few old ones.

And that's all I can think of to tell you.

Well, 221 S. Rogers – this residence was built by Henry O. Wade, and he moved in in 1892. We know that from a newspaper article, which a former editor, Jack Hoffman, found for me, a printed statement of the fact that Henry Wade and his wife moved in August 1892. However, when I was re-doing some of the house in an upstairs room which had been a bathroom for a long time, I took one of the window casings apart and found on the back he had signed it, H.O. Wade, Builder, 1888. So, he had been working on the house for a long time. At the time, he lived in a house on, rented a house on the street behind which is First Street. Also, he built a house just south of this one, the one where we are now, for his daughter who became a teacher in the Northville system. The house here at 221 S. Rogers that Henry Wade built, the downstairs is almost all paneled in oak. All the trimming is done in oak, the front hall is all walnut, and all the windows and fixtures and everything match the period. We're fortunate in the fact that no one did any remodeling, and everything is pretty much in its original condition, which is rare for a house that old.

There had been a fireplace in the sitting room, or middle room that nowadays is called a dining room and it had been taken out by the time we got here. And so having found it had been a fireplace, I rebuilt the inside of it, so that I could have my central heating going up beside it, and then I rebuilt it so we would have a fireplace in that room. In fact, downstairs room behind the sitting room or dining room is a room we use now for about anything. We store books and put a television in there, put the piano there. That room was the original bedroom in the house that Henry Wade liked to use because he rented out often times the upstairs to teachers. The second people who lived in the house did not own it, they rented it after Henry Wade died here in 1921. His wife, incidentally, had died about 1910, I think. Upstairs, there are two bedrooms and that was rented out to school teachers here. The ownership of the house went from Henry Wade's family to another family who became related to him in a way – his grandson-in-law's family, that's to say the Holcomb's bought it. And Dr. and Mrs. Holcomb of Novi bought it, and their daughter is Mae Babbitt, wife of Hugh Babbitt who was Henry Wade's grandson. Mae Babbitt today, 1988, lives across the street from us, and she's approximately 94 years old. She lives there in a house which she and her husband built in about 1925 or 1926. Mae Babbitt is the grandmother of our daughter-in-law. Now that makes it a little complicated because in other words our son married Mae's granddaughter, and they, our son and daughter-in-law, live up the street on Grandview. Anything else about the house – I have made some additions. There was a pleasant front porch already on the house, so in 1971, we added a porch to the back of the house, which matches the porch in the front. In 1959, we extended the kitchen and put two more bedrooms and a full bath upstairs. Other than that and building a wine cellar in the basement, I guess that's about all we have done to the house. But we have tried to keep it looking just as it was in 1892. Thank you.

Interviewer: Tell us about Mr. Wade and the fact that he built his own casket.

Oh yes, Mr. Wade had been born, or I should say lived, in Honeyall (?) Falls, New York. He and his brother Ed went into the Civil War together for about 5 months. They both became very sickly, and they fought at the Battle of Antietam, sometimes called Sharpsburg. They were captured at Snicker's Gap, and they went to Richmond Prison. Henry Wade apparently was able to walk so they shipped him home because they figured he could no longer fight; and his brother Ed stayed at Liberty Prison and died there about two weeks after Henry Wade left. Henry Wade went back to New York. Then he came to Northville by 1868 and was a local carpenter. He had

charge of making the wooden sidewalks in town. He made his own casket as Hugh Babbitt told me – he made his own casket which sat right here in the very parlor that we're sitting in now. He was then taken down S. Rogers to the cemetery, and he's ensconced with the other people there, and you'll see H.O. Wade from, I believe, 1838-1922. Thank you.