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April 6, 1990

This oral history was recorded on March 2, 1990 with William Fretz, at his home in Newberry, Michigan. Wishing to preserve the history of the area, he discussed a wide range of subjects expanding from the history of The Newberry News, a family business, to the future of Luce County.

I was encouraged to pursue other areas of interest, such as, the background of Mackinac Island Lake and Deer Park. Luce County provides endless possibilities for a student of history and I plan to take up this challenge in the near future.

Nancy De Verna

Oral History

HS 381

April 7, 1990

Nancy De Verna

Newberry, Michigan

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Minutes

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001 Potato farms

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004 Hospitals - Newberry Clinic, quarantine

003 Development of Newberry News - grandfather's struggles - 1931 circulation - Nancy De Verna

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This interview is Table of Contents, retired publisher and owner of the Newberry News, located in Newberry, Michigan.

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De Vetter: Oh, he bought it in '90.

This interview is with William Fretz, retired publisher and owner of the Newberry News, located in Newberry, Michigan. The interview takes place in his home on March 2, 1990 and the interviewer is Nancy De Verna, history student at Northern Michigan University.

De Verna: Maybe you can give me a little information on your family background.

Fretz: Newberry, of course, was started in 1882, it was the first settlement around here. I think my grandfather came here at that time and worked for a couple of years, I don't know where. He actually came from Maydock, Ontario and we don't know much about anything that transpired before that because Germans were very closed mouthed about their ancestry and where they came from and what they ever did. We just - like hitting a blank wall, you didn't know what. . . . He migrated to Newberry via Grand Rapids and he came up here, I think he came up here as a type setter for the Newberry News. That was one of his first jobs when he came. Of course, the Newberry News was started. . . . their first issue was June 10, 1886. Then, of course, the Newberry News continued on. He bought it in 1899 and ran it until 1949.

De Verna: Oh, he bought it in '99.

Fretz: 1899. For all that time he worked at the Newberry News. There were competing newspapers back in the late 1800's. The Newberry Independent, The Newberry Democrat, and they were more or less politically motivated. Newberry News wasn't really, it wasn't politically motivated.

De Verna: It was just more of a local informative type.

Fretz: It's was more of a . . . it's a, of course, they fought back and forth in those days. It was kind of funny, reading the files because there would be something one paper said about the other one. Little snide, off hand remarks. . . . but the Newberry News was the only one that really survived all through the years. Of course, my grandfather bought it in 1899 and it ran fairly smooth until 1949. When he died, my dad took it over.

De Verna: And by that time the other newspapers were no longer.

Fretz: There were no competing newspapers to start up after the turn of the century. Not that they didn't want to or anything but it just wasn't that economical.

De Verna: Was the population large enough to warrant more than one newspaper in the area?

Fretz: Well, in those days, I've heard my dad say that anybody with a shirt tail full of type could start a newspaper, you know, a political idea and that more or less was that it was. Of course, after that there was more equipment to be bought. The newspaper business evolved mechanically,

so it wasn't all hand typed.

De Verna: Now the original paper, that was located somewhere different, wasn't it? . . . than where it is now?

Fretz: Yeah, I'm not really sure where it was, it was somewhere down. . . . I think it was right next to the Masonic Temple.

Then it located over on East John Street and then about 1914, I think my grandfather bought that lot it's on now and that was the original Methodist Church in Newberry.

If you look closely, the waines-coating is still there.

. . .you pull it away you see all the old heat vents and ducts and stuff like that. But that's just the main part of the building. Then there was a part added, of course,

that serves. . . . the building itself served variously, after the Methodist got out of it. . . . I can't remember the year they got out but it was 1890 or something like

that. It became a store and (pause) a few other functions.

The building that was attached to the north was a blacksmith shop for a long time. In later years it became a paint shop. In the 50's up until. . . . we kicked Fountain Brothers out it was an office.

De Verna: Now about the time that your dad bought it in '49, the little bit that I've read about the area, that seemed to be a fairly prosperous time, or was it not?

Fretz: '49 and through '50 and all through the 50's were fairly prosperous times for the Newberry News and for the town actually.

De Verna: Was there, after the war and that, was there a big population growth type thing? Did people come back?

Fretz: No, I don't think Newberry has really ever experienced a big population growth. It's always been fairly constant. Before World War II, we relied heavily, of course, on the State Hospital, but we relied heavily on the Iron Company. They employed at one time about 600 people down there. A big employer. But they were in and out, there were strikes and that method of processing iron ore was going out and the Iron Company lasted through World War II. They kept going through the war years. After that it went out of business.

De Verna: Now, they had a pretty good production of railroad ties and that sort of thing about that period didn't they? Or was that earlier?

Fretz: Well, it connected with the Iron Company. There was a sawmill down there. There were a lot of sawmills around Newberry. Horner Flooring Company which now is up. . . . I think it's in Ishpeming. They still make hardwood basketball courts. That used to be located in Newberry. For several reasons, and I'm not sure what was wrong with it. . . .it had to do with the power situation in Newberry. I think at the time, Horner Lumber Company was providing power for the village, if you can imagine that. (laugh) The village was buying it from them. Whether they weren't getting enough for it, or they couldn't agree on it. . .

Horner just closed the mill down. . . .

De Verna: They were providing the energy?

Fretz: They were providing the energy. It didn't take much in those days. They could do it all on a pretty small generator.

De Verna: Was that located. . . .I'm trying to think, what's across from where the Water & Light is now? Is that where the flooring factory is?

Fretz: That's where it used to be then it became after that, Atlas Plywood. It was Atlas Plywood right before the late 40's early 50's and they got into tough times too. Atlas Plywood employed a lot of people. I can't tell you exactly how many. . . .plus it became too expensive to process plywood here. They were importing from Japan, if you can imagine. They'd ship the logs to Japan and then process it and ship it back cheaper than we could manufacture it. So it wasn't long before they went out and after that it never did amount to too much. Before it burned it was Newberry Wood Products, or something like that. Kind of a dimension, a wood producer manufacturer. . . .dimension lumber for furniture, I think. Barrette's sawmill was around for quite a while. They burned down several times. It seems like everytime. . . .

De Verna: Now where was that? I had read about that.

Fretz: It's the mill right over here that used to be. . . .
. . . After Barrette's had it, it used to be L.P. (Louisiana Pacific) now it's Connors.

De Verna: So that's been there.

Fretz: That's been there for quite a while. Through the years we've depended heavily on the woods industry, saw mills, logging.

De Verna: Did Newberry experience a big logging boom? Like there was in the northern part of the lower, and further west or southwest?

Fretz: Really, I'm not sure about that. They talk about the white pine days. The white pine was cut off in a comparatively short period. Of course, once it was gone, so were the mills. There used to be a big mill out by Muskellonge Lake. The park used to be a great big mill out there.

De Verna: And they used to be a fairly big community because I was reading that they had a school up there.

Fretz: They. . . it's an interesting bit of history. Somebody should research someday too because some developers came in and tried to. . . and they layed it all out and sold shares. I've still got some stock certificates in the basement. They called it Schnar Company, or something like that and they were absolutely worthless. As soon as they were exposed. . . well, what could you do, the money was gone.

De Verna: But that mill you were talking about. There is something up there that is still standing. Is that what that was? There was an abandoned building up there, southwest of Deer Park. Is that possibly where the mill was or was it right along the lake?

Fretz: I'm not sure of the exact location of the mill. I kinda think it was located next to that canal that you see up there. There was an attempt one time to drain Muskellonge Lake into Lake Superior. And the reason was to get the logs at the bottom of Muskellonge Lake apparently. The ones that had been sunk, waterlogged and sunk. Apparently there was a fortune in logs down there. It was, I'm not even sure what the company was. They attempted to drain Muskellonge Lake and they got so far and they were stopped by the state government. It would have, if they had succeeded, it probably would have been disastrous. Muskellonge Lake is a funny lake, it has a self sealing bottom on it. If you dig a canal like that and the water will start to seep away like mad and all of a sudden it will stop, it'll seal itself. The level of Muskellonge Lake is many, many feet above that of Lake Superior. You wonder why it doesn't drain in there anyway. And there's only one little inlet and that's on the south side of the lake. As far as I know, there are no springs at all and it's just a fairly shallow lake.

So that community built up around there, then.

Fretz: There wasn't much of a community ever up there. Just the mill and that was a long, long time ago. I can't even remember the dates on that.

De Verna: What about the development of Dollarville? Now, what I was reading, that was larger than Newberry.

Fretz: Dollarville was centered pretty much around Dollarville mill. At one time Dollarville was bigger than Newberry. When that mill started Dollarville gained too.

De Verna: You hear a lot about the celery farms. . . .is that kind of out of proportion or was that something that was there for quite some time?

Fretz: No, Jim Lone who lives here now - I believe it was his grandfather - a man by the name of Van Tyle ran the celery garden and he had a man working for him by the name of Harry L. Harris. He kind of innovated the idea of banking up the ground around celery and that made it white and crisp. Not like the green celery you get in the store today. It was really quite crisp. So he became famous for that and the muck down there was quite suitable.

De Verna: So they raised their seeds, or started the seeds down there?

Fretz: Where ever they started them but they had these big celery fields down there and they shipped it all over and Newberry was quite famous. It was called Newberry Celery. All the family hotels down in Grand Rapids and all the big hotels specified celery from Newberry. . . .cause it was good. Jim Lone could tell you more about why it doesn't pay to grow celery here any more. I really don't know. I've asked him a few times, myself, why he doesn't go into that, grow celery like he used to. He says it's just not

economical and I don't know the reason. Somebody claimed that the pollution from the Iron Company. . . .(pause) and it was good celery. Newberry was known as, you know the basketball team, back in 1922 or something like that, they won a state championship. They were known back then as the celery city boys. Back then it wasn't the indians. I don't know when or where the indian came from. It was just there when I went to school. I went to school in the 30's.

De Verna: It seems like the community's always been pretty supportive of the schools.

Fretz: Very much so and I don't know exactly the reason for that. My dad was one of the. . . . was a school board member 27 years, back in the formative years of that school Men like Bill Johnson, Frank. . . .They kind of ran things with an iron hand. I think they always emphasized academics.

De Verna: Maybe because it was a smaller community.

Fretz: Many times. . . .I won't cite examples but in a lot of these communities, the school revolves around basketball programs. . . .how successful the basketball team is but that hasn't seemed to happen in Newberry. Not that we didn't have successful athletic teams but it was always the school first and I just think it was the attitude of the people. They supported the people who were on the board, just kept

re-electing them. There's one thing about Newberry. I think dad told me as you became less dependent on the woods industry and more dependent on the state hospital, I think you have that higher level of education, the people who live here. The people that work at the state hospital. . . .at least in the later years had that. . . .

De Verna: A lot of the employees at the state hospital, are they local people or did they get a lot of people coming in? Most of them were. . . .

Fretz: Of course, later on the ratio of doctors increased an awful lot. Medical people, psychiatrists, sociologists, psychologists. I think in the early years there wasn't too much mental health going on. It was pretty much a warehousing kind of deal. Once you got up there you just didn't get out. There were, I'm not all that versed in mental health, but there was not that much of an attempt to cure people. As compared to today. . . .you know you aren't the only one. . . .and it's good, you can't knock that but the institution was downsized. It's still better for the people, the people who have to be there. It's a hospital.

De Verna: So then it got to the point that that was the main economic. . . .

Fretz: Oh, yes. I think right from day one it was really what kept Newberry here. You know the woods situation was up and down, it fluctuated with the economic market. The state hospital was always here. In its spite of attack

that the early days of the state hospital, you know, the 20's and 30's, those people were not paid all that much. The level of. . . .in fact I hate to even say it, but back in the 20's the average attendant up there was referred to as a peaeater.

De Verna: But then I was reading later on where they had a. . . .well, they had the nursing a. . . .that one building up there where they trained the nurses. So then they started doing that because, what I was reading, they would list the people who had graduated and that sort of thing.

Fretz: Oh, yes. . . .I think that started in the late 50's or early 60's.

De Verna: That was quite late, then.

Fretz: Oh, yeah (pause) it was strictly a human warehouse. Especially during the war years, the World War II years, the late 40's early 50's, then they started out taking medicine. Gradually it got to the point where we are now.

De Verna: You read a lot about the dances theyheld and the orchestra and all this and that. Now who. . . . I guess I'm kind of confused, who were the members of the orchestra? Were those the employees?

Fretz: Mainly, yeah. A name that comes to mind is Jack Bates. I'm not sure what Jack Bates' position was up there but he was a pretty good musician. He had a state hospital band and that was employees.

De Verna: So it was almost a social thing for the employees. And they had their own farms.

Fretz: Their own farms and the patients worked out there (pause) doing bull work until somebody decided that that wasn't constitutional and they disbanded the farm. They raised a lot of their own food out there. They had big potato farms, potato fields.

De Verna: Was this big potato country at one time? I know they have. . . .

Fretz: It still is.

De Verna: They have potato farms now.

Fretz: I can remember (laugh) during the second world war, I was still in school. . . .it. . . .and some of the stuff was just starting to become mechanized, potato picking, you know, and I think the local farmers didn't have that much machinery. . . .and of course it was the patriotic thing to get the kids out of school in the fall to go out and pick those potatoes (chuckle).

De Verna:and harvest those potatoes (laugh).

Fretz: Except to us it was a big lark, you know, we were getting out of school for a day. . . .loll around the fields, half of the time we were throwing the potatoes at each other. . . .They seemed to survive. We did, we enjoyed it.

De Verna: I was reading that there was a potato famine at one time, was that. . . .any idea when that took place?

I'm not quite. . . .I just read a little blurb on it. Had you heard of such a thing?

Fretz: That one escapes me, I don't ever recall. . . .

De Verna: I read a little blurb on it and there wasn't any more information.

Fretz: It must have been during World War I (pause) possibly. That was kind of a tough time. . . .when I was a kid. The flu hit pretty hard.

De Verna: Now that was the Spanish flu that. . . .

Fretz: Yeah, I had a uncle, of course he wasn't. . . .I think a lot of your casualties or there were. . . .

De Verna: What about things like diptheria and was there a lot of problems with polio and that sort of thing?

Fretz: The polio epidemic hit Newberry really, really hard, I'm not sure of the year. I think it was either 1939 or 1940. They didn't open school in the fall, it was so bad. Scars of that are still around. . . .are around yet that are from polio.

De Verna: At that time then what kind of facilities did they have for the hospital? Now, Helen Newberry Joy isn't that terribly old. What did they have prior to that?

Fretz: At that time I think they were in the old annex. That used to be the hospital. If it was then, I'm not even sure they even had a hospital back during the polio epidemic (pause). I'm kind of generalizing because I remember when

I was a little boy seeing the John Street school as it was when it was a school. I can remember because I started a grass fire down there one time and got in a heap of trouble. It wasn't long after that it was remodeled and became the Newberry Clinic. But I think that might have been in the 50's. During the polio epidemic we didn't have much in the way of facilities at all. They rushed people to Marquette just as soon as they got polio, as soon as it was diagnosed they'd run them to Marquette and I can remember iron lungs around here, it's really terrible. We used to own a cottage out on Big Manistique Lake, there were four in my family, three sisters, myself and my dad and mother - kept us out there, trying to keep us away from it.

De Verna: So there was a quarantine, there must have been.

Fretz: Oh, the whole town was quarantined. But they kept us out there, not because we were quarantined - but they didn't want us to come in contact with any other people.

It was probably the worst thing you could have got in retrospect. But we survived. Somebody said we ate a lot of peanut butter, I don't know. (laugh)

De Verna: The peanut butter did it (laugh).

Fretz: But we survived. Now I had a cousin who suffered later affects but that was a later epidemic. . . maybe ten years later. You still hadn't had the Salk vaccine or nothing like that yet. (pause) Boy those were really

tough times. Everybody just panic stricken.

De Verna: So businesses and everything closed down I would assume?

Fretz: I don't recall the businesses closing too much, that (laugh) would take almost a bomb to stop some businesses. The schools didn't. . . anybody that got polio, immediately the whole family was quarantined, just about. Things were shut down pretty well there's no question about that.

De Verna: You had mentioned that during World War I things were pretty rough. How was that so?

Fretz: I don't know that personally because I wasn't born until 1931 but what I read and what my dad tells me. Just about every able bodied man was gone. It was tough to get labor. My grandfather really had to struggle to keep the paper running.

De Verna: How did they distribute the paper in those early days? Or how big or an area did it serve?

Fretz: Newberry News always just mainly covered the Luce County area. Right now they. . . I think about 900 to 1,000 papers in circulation goes out in this immediate area. But if we circulated, we used to have paper boys too in the. . . you know. They were kind of miniature entrepreneur, you might say, they'd come in and buy the papers (pause). I'd cost a penny apiece and go out and sell them for two cents. Big deal. That was big money for some of those kids.

De Verna: What was that, high school age students or younger students?

Fretz: Mainly younger, I'd say junior high, a few high school kids(pause). But (pause) mainly it was a big pain in the nick (chuckle). You know those kids. As time progressed, for kids, that kind of money just didn't appeal to them (pause) and couldn't make any money unless you had a paper route for the Evening News, too. . . .and it might have been easier to get if you were all that interested in it. One of the best paper boys we ever had was Peanuts Blakely, I don't know if you know the name or not.

De Verna: Oh, I've heard the name, yes.

Fretz: He got some really, he'd go down, he'd grab a couple of hundred papers and he'd go down to the Murphy House. Sold those to guys down there, by the time Peanuts got on the scene they were pretty well three sheets to the wind. You know and they'd say ahhh - - give me five, give me ten or so. He'd shove him a dollar bill. Peanuts made a lot more money. Then it got so that (pause) he would subcontract. Believe it or not, that was the kind of trouble we had with this kind of operation. But Peanuts would go in and get the papers and he'd pay the other kid. Sell them.

De Verna: And still come out with a profit.

Fretz: But that got to be a big pain in the neck, that.

We didn't want to do that so we distributed them mainly through the stores, through the mail - about half and half.

De Verna: What's the population of Newberry - the make up of the community was mixed with, you said your family was from Germany and there were a lot of Swedish and Finnish?

Fretz: Yes, my dad used to say that Newberry was divided into three parts. There was Finn town, Swede town and uptown. It's obvious the names apply. Swede town was always in the west, the northwestern corner of town and Finn town was east side, uptown was Newberry Avenue. My dad was always - although he was more English-German descent, he always associated with the Swedes.

De Verna: I guess I'm kind of interested because the people that came over, well, it was almost after the white pine era, as you had mentioned. It was kind of like the tail end of everything wasn't it? When Newberry was established?

Fretz: Yes - Newberry came on the scene, really after the white pine era.

De Verna: So what was the draw? Was there a lot of advertising over there to come to Newberry?

Fretz: You mean the old country?

De Verna: Yes, as opposed to going to the Houghton area for mining.

Fretz: I think the Lake County area has always been big on tourism. It's been a big thing equally so with the state

Fretz: Oh, I think it was a general influx of those people. I don't think any of them knew about Newberry, Michigan, U.S.A. when they were living in Sweden or Finland.

De Verna: It's just where they ended up.

Fretz: Let's go to the new world where we can make money. Of course, a lot of them brought their own social ideas and kinda stuck to themselves. The Finns stuck to themselves, the Swedes stuck to themselves. The whole upper penninsula and Wisconsin and Minnesota are all a lot of Finns and Swedes.

DeVerna: What about the advertising of, oh - what have I heard? Cloverland and you can raise three crops of hay in one season. Was that later on? That must have been at a later date from when all of that advertising was going on.

Fretz: Well, I heard most about that in the 30's. Luce County never amounted to much as a farming community - except the way it is right now and that's mostly in the southern part. You don't find any farms north of the Tahquamenon River. All the farms are out toward Engadine (pause). I suppose for that part there were farms that did prosper.

De Verna: Now it seems like the area is more involved in tourism and a lot of people have been coming up for years and years. Has it always been a big draw then for people from downstate?

Fretz: I think the Luce County area has always been big on tourism. It's been a big thing equally so with the state

hospital. Tourism probable, over the years, has been probably the biggest economic factor in Luce County. Because deer hunters were coming up here - you know they were coming up here by droves in the fall. But it was kind of a seasonal thing. We attract them year around now. That's better. It makes the economy a little more stable.

De Verna: Now, there are a lot of people in the community who have summer homes here and then they'll go somewhere else for the winter. Is that pretty much how you would categorize the make up of the community - as an older population as compared to what it used to be?

Fretz: Yes, as compared to what it used to be. In the early days, of course, Newberry had that pioneering spirit because everybody would be out of work. They didn't make a lot of money but they had a lot of spirit. I think, like myself, I'm only 59 and here I am retired. It's not because I wanted to, it's because the opportunity was there. Many, many other cases, particularly with the state employees, there's 80 and out now. There's a lot of people that retire early. And I bet, in the summertime we are a retirement community. We have an awful lot of people that migrate, particularly to Florida (pause), Alabama. . . .

De Verna: I know when we came up in the 80's - we came up in '80 - and it seemed like there were a lot of people leaving at that time (pause) but it seems as though some of them were coming back later on. I'm not quite sure

what the draw is for the younger people.

Fretz: Probably when you came here the hospital was in the process of downsizing. That was a big thing. That was a big panic. You've went 700 employees down to 350, or something like that. Which is about where it is right now. To lose 300 and some jobs in Luce County area, we've lost something. Some of those people have built homes here, you know. They were in tough straights. Some of them moved down to Texas, that didn't do them any good either cause they fell on hard times down there. But a lot of them came back, some of them you know (pause). Except for an added decrease in the number of people working up in there the first three years. I don't think. . . .we're not totally different than we were in 1980. We have grown. Of course, L. P. has helped.

De Verna: Do you look for more industry to come into the Newberry area?

Fretz: No, I don't think so. I think Newberry is going to have to depend on what they've got (pause). That's. . . . a woods industry. I really don't expect L.P. to stay here all that long. I expect that'll be within ten years or so, maybe sooner than that, that property will go up for sale. That's been the history of its, but I don't get too excited about it. But of course, I'm not young and looking for a job either. But as the years progressed and

I became a little more of an environmentalist I hate to see all that cutting. Boy, it's. . . .but it's been the lifeblood of the area. That and tourism and if we can hang on to the state hospital for a little while longer. But there's going to have to (pause) they've got to find something to take its place somewhere. I fully expect it'll be gone in fifteen years. It'll take that long. . . .I think.

De Verna: To phase out.

Fretz: I fully expect it (pause) to be downsized out of existence some day. The state will look at it and say, "Hey, why are we doing it for?" In spite of what they claim, I'm sure it will. I've become more convinced of that. They're going to have to do something about bringing more. . . .that's up to the people that run our government. You can never get all of it. You've got to start looking. You're not going to be able to sit on that L.P. payback and their little jobs down there. They're going to have to get out and scratch.

De Verna: It seems as though, as long as I've been up here, the community doesn't really accept ideas of new industry and that sort of thing coming in. Or they're real selective about what they want to come into the area.

Fretz: Of course, they fought the downsizing of the state hospital. They fought that tooth and nail. Even though it was the right thing to do. Everybody in the back of their mind knew that. Mental illness is an illness just like the flu or any other disease - just like that - and

they can better care for those people in a hospital setting. A hospital is where they can go to where they get treatment (pause). So they fought that as they fought the warehousing of mental patients. Of course, there's some around like me (laugh) who don't like to see a lot of woods industries come in either. I guess you've got to take the good with the bad.

De Verna: It seems like they're promoting the tourism more, getting back to the tourism end of it.

Fretz: Well - in all of the studies that they've done, they've come to the conclusion that in the long haul - that Newberry's dependent on the tourist industry and that's going to be their lifeblood here. It's (pause) no matter what - whether you like them coming up here riding on their snowmobiles in your front yard or not - we're going to have to put up with it (pause).

De Verna: I guess what I wanted to ask was another thing about the economics of the area - how the opening of the Mackinac Bridge affected Luce County or was it more so the eastern end that benefited from that structure?

Fretz: I think the upper peninsula as a whole benefited from it. Some say that they'd like to blow it up but (laugh) as a whole I think we're more accessible to people who want to come up here anymore. But the old ferry system down there used to keep a lot of people away. Of course you don't have to wait anymore. I can remember line ups that

late 40's. Right after the war when they started building highways they call Newberry, right off. I can remember when

were like five and six hours long. But economically I'm not sure if it had that much. In fact I think it did on the Mackinaw, St. Ignace area but I don't think we did.

. . . We were off the beaten path, here.

De Verna: It must have made transportation cheaper as far as transportation cheaper as far as transporting our goods out.

Fretz: But we're still a long way from market, of course, to transfer anything out. It's if - you're going to a market it's just as easy to go around by Wisconsin down to Chicago (pause). It may have diverted a little the other way but I really don't. . . . I could be wrong. For the whole U.P. as a whole it's probably good.

De Verna: What about the development of the highway system and that sort of thing. Is that about the time, for example, (M) 28 was (pause) Was it rerouted, parts of it?

Fretz: (M) 28 has been there a long time. I can't tell you how long. Since I was a kid. It's pretty much what it was. But there's not enough traffic on 28 to warrant a four lane highway. That's why they're putting those passing lanes up by Marquette you know. . . . But Newberry was kind of a . . . they rerouted M28 at Robert's Corner. . . . It's kind of cut Newberry off. M-28 used to come right down here in front of the house.

De Verna: Ok, when was that? That period of time?

Fretz: I can't remember but I think it had to be in the late 40's. Right after the war when they started building highways they cut Newberry right off. I can remember when

Country Club Rd. was a gravel road, big hills.

De Verna: That must have been about the time they talked of the cars being bumper to bumper going through town?

I don't know if they were referring to tourist season or what but that really cut off the town.

Fretz: That cut Newberry right off. I can't say that (pause) I guess when you reroute a highway outside of the city it's bound to have its affects. I don't think it was all bad. Certainly, if it benefited the traveler it was good (laugh). You don't have to go down and fight stop signs and traffic.

De Verna: Now, about what period of time, I'm thinking of all the people that traveled through town, is that about the period of time when most of these motels were established? Or was that at a later date, then?

Fretz: This motel over here is no longer in operation. It was started by Joe Beech. . . .Tahquamenon Cabins and they were the first ones and I think they started - oh - probably in the late 40's. There was no such thing as a motel. . . .In fact the hotel was about the only one.

De Verna: The Falls Hotel?

Fretz: The Falls Hotel.

De Verna: Now that (pause) was called something else.

Fretz: The Newberry Hotel.

De Verna: And that was built - I'm trying to think - at the very beginning of the 1900's?

Fretz: I think it came later than that. I think it was around the 1920's. It was built by a man named Duncan Campbell. The Falls Hotel. Of course, there were other hotels in Newberry - Murphy Hotel.

De Verna: Was that by Johnny's?

Fretz: Green Hotel was just east of that. That was the main part of Newberry for a long time, those places.

De Verna: And Handy Street was a main street going through town?

Fretz: I don't recall that.

De Verna: I had read that. That must have been the center of the activity then.

Fretz: But the center of activity was more around John Street and Railroad Street. Not so much Truman Avenue. That didn't come along till later. Newberry was pretty much centered around the railroad tracks though. There were a lot of - in the early years - there was a lot of company housing north of the tracks. They called it the red row. There were some duplexes, there was a series of duplexes between the railroad tracks and right along where Maki's pop shop is now. There was a series of duplexes along there. I mean, I can't remember how many. It seems to me that there were five or six. Two, two family apartments.

Then there is Miller Rd. and beyond that. You can still see some of those houses I've named. Part of the red row. They're all painted red.

De Verna: Because they were company homes. And then there was a saw mill. Was that part of all that or was that an independent?

Fretz: No, the saw mill that was down that way was part of the iron company. They got into distilling wood. One of the by products of making charcoal is wood alcohol. Of course the sawmill fit right in with it (pause). Quite an operation down there for quite a while.

De Verna: There was also - I'm trying to think - they call that one road Slaughterhouse Road. Was that where the saw mill was? Down that way?

Fretz: No, that's east - or west of 123. I never frequented the slaughter house. I don't know much about it.

De Verna: That was in operation. . . .

Fretz: . . . except that I did go down there once. It used to be a great sport to take the .22 down there and shoot rats. Young kids like us. But I don't remember going down there more than once or twice (laugh).

De Verna: For obvious reasons (laugh).

Fretz: It wasn't a real nice place to be. I didn't think (pause) I used to go down that way to the old swimming hole. The boys swimming hole, but. . . there were a lot of girls

down there. The boys, of course, they didn't wear bathing suits either - swam in the buff. A lot of people around here like Carl Gooseberry or some of those people are more familiar with that type of thing down there. When I came along they began worrying about young kids swimming down there. If you went down. . . . But I don't remember too many people ever drowning down there. In fact, I don't know of anybody. It's on the Tahquamenon River, about one-half way between the Dollarville Dam and the bridge out there. It's kind of an isolated spot. It's. . . there was a big high sand bank there. That was all sand banks and down further was high banks. It was just a nice place to lull around on a warm summer day (pause). Course there were all sorts of gangs around Newberry too (laugh).

De Verna: Gangs?

Fretz: Oh, well there was a shack down there and they called themselves the Hawks. . . there was another gang, they were known as the Spider Bay Coast Guards (laugh). It's you know. . . They weren't bands of kids who went around broading anybody. They were just a bunch of kids who got together in a little shack, had a ball.

Fretz: That was their entertainment. That's what you did. But I was never was a member of any of those groups. Like I say, I came along about 10 years too late for that. But fun.

De Verna: How did these guys get around? Did they have vehicles?

Fretz: Walked.

De Verna: They walked?

Fretz: They walked - bicycles. Walking down to high banks was nothing, even in my. . . .We thought nothing of walking down there. Spend half a day and walk back. It really isn't all that far. . . .

De Verna: So did the teenagers at that time - were the jobs plentiful for them or did they just kind of hang out during the summer?

Fretz: I think the jobs they depended on, when I was a boy anyway, were piling wood. Any little, odd jobs you could get. The jobs weren't. . . .Somebody had some dirty job for you (pause) you'd do it (pause). Of course, they all talked a good game about how hard they worked. One worked harder than the other. I spent many of my hours trying to get out of work.

De Verna: Did you work at the newspaper?

Fretz: Yes, I probably started down there when I was twelve, hand feeding presses, printing envelopes, you know. But I wasn't, you know, it wasn't forced labor or anything like that, that I can recall. The only time I remember - I came home at 5 o'clock one morning and I was feeling no pain. I was trying to sneak in and I was trying to get the screen door off. The damned thing was locked. Then of course (laugh) it hit the floor with a kabamb. My dad met me at the door and said, "You just might as well go to work right now." So I went down and worked. I was a tired boy that night. I didn't do that again.

De Verna: (laugh) Once was enough, huh?

Fretz: Anyway, it teached me a lesson. My dad could be pretty intimidating when I was a boy. As I got into high school I probably could have handled that kind of a fight but he was an intimidating person. I wouldn't have dared, I wouldn't have dared. He'd lash you with his tongue. (pause) So where are we now?

De Verna: well - are you ready for a break?

Fretz: Whatever, I've got a cup of coffee out there.

De Verna: Ok, that sounds real good. This is about done.

Fretz: I think one aspect of the history book that you've may not have seen too much of is the strike of 1937. And that was quite a big event in the history of Newberry (pause). That involved the Iron Company. The I.W.W. union was going all through the midwest trying to organize woods workers, a lot of them. There's no question about it, they were not treated all that well - weren't paid that well. Mainly, I think, the people who joined the I.W.W. were people who were more interested in food in their bellies than they were any technological thing. But they were a Communist dominated organization. In 1937, they made their way to Newberry and they were going to organize a number of workers at the Newberry Lumber and Chemical Company. They later. . . . for the Charcoal Company. And the town knew they were coming and

they organized and met them early in the morning. I think it was June 4th or 5th, somewhere around there, in 1937. And they met them in the morning at 7 o'clock. There was a brief scuffle and the people of Newberry ran them right out of town. They ran them down Dollarville Road and out through Teaspoon Creek. From that point things kind of deteriorated. I think a group of hot heads kind of got together and they wrecked what was known as the Finn Hall down there. The Finn Hall was a Finn recreational hall.

De Verna: Where was that at?

Fretz: Well, it's right across the street from the village garage.

De Verna: Oh, ok - ok.

Fretz: It might be torn down now, I'm not sure.

De Verna: There's an empty lot there.

Fretz: Yes, that may have been it. But they went in there and wrecked it. There were pictures of Stalin hanging there, of course, the whole bit. And one man was tarred and feathered. One man died of a heart attack on the way out. And that pretty much was the extent of the violence. There was nobody beat within an inch of his life or anything like that. They ran them out of town. The I.W.W. threatened to come back the next day and make things tough but they didn't. I think it kind of put Newberry on the map. It put us on the map as people who would stand up to this type of outside interference. And in that way it was good. Of

course, I think the following day or the following week, they did the same thing up in Munising. They ran the I.W.W. right out. If they had organized. . . . the people up there. . . . but this is a big event you know. . . . maybe have changed the history of Newberry. It's really something that shouldn't be ignored. It was there. There are a lot of hard feelings around here yet today. I think, although, you know, this is 1990 and that was 1937, that's quite a few years ago. Fifty some years ago. I think maybe most of the feelings are gone but some of the people that lived around here, there are a lot of them who remember it yet. I think the Finnish people got a bad rap out of it. Like I said, a lot of them joined this I.W.W. and they were sympathetic with the movement, not because of any ideological feeling but because there was an economic thing. That's basically - that's the reason for a lot of troubles. The haves against the have nots. If you don't have it, you're going to get it come hell or high water and that's pretty much their. . . .

De Verna: So did that separate the community even more at that point?

Fretz: It kind of isolated certain segments of the Finnish people. I remember my dad saying - and I've heard some of my good friends, who are of Finnish descent, say that generally speaking the Finnish population around Newberry was two distinct groups. One was red Finns and church Finns. The guy I am friends with is - happens to be a church Finn, or his folks were. But he said that those Finns who actually originated over in Finland - they were having problems

in Finland at that time. That was about the time those people migrated to the United States. Of course, they brought their problems with them and their differences. Generally speaking, I think people of Finnish descent are very industrious people. I just know, the people I know are top scholars. I just, I guess you can't make that a general rule (pause) but certainly I think a majority of them are hard working, industrious, intelligent people. I kind of feel it's unfortunate they're tagged with this communist thing, down there. And although it's pretty much disappeared, it still hangs in Luce County.