

Interview tape of Mrs. Ida Thornberry on the early Ford days in the Garden Village area of the city of Kingsford, Michigan made by Inez Peterson as a requirement of HS 495, Sequence 9065, Oral History Workshop held by Dr. Russell Magnaghi of Northern Michigan University on December 1, 1979.

Bibliography

The pamphlet file of the Dickinson County Library

A History of the Village of Kingsford compiled by Miss Hazel G. Convis from materials furnished from a scrapbook kept by Miss Jennie Foley, Secretary to Mr. Edward G. Kingsford.

Various anonymous histories of the City of Kingsford

Interviews with residents of the Garden Village area

HS 495

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ORAL HISTORY STATEMENT


I, the undersigned, have reviewed the manuscript of my recollections resulting from the interview of me by Inez Peterson on March 25, 1980, and I agree that the recording reports my recollections as I want them recorded.

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I have read the statement above which recites the way in which this recording was made, and I hereby affirm that the recording is a correct copy of my recollections as I want them recorded.

Date: March 25, 1980

Signed


Ida Thornberry

205 Sagola Avenue
Kingsford, Michigan 49801

MRS. IDA THORNBERRY

Interviewed by Inez Peterson

Early years in the Garden Village area, Ford Plant

Ida Thornberry

Inez Peterson: I'm speaking with Ida Thornberry about the early Ford days and the Garden Village area of Kingsford Michigan. The interviewer is Inez Peterson. March 25, 1980. Mrs. Thornberry, when did you come to this area?

I.T.: Came to Iron Mountain in 1924, and we moved up to Garden Village in Kingsford in April of 1925.

I.P.: Why did you come here?

I.T.: So my husband could work at the Ford plant

I.P.: And how did you hear about the Ford plant?

I.T.: My husband had lived many years in Antigo and he knew that the plant was coming in here.

I.P.: Were there people that you knew here already?

I.T.: No.

I.P.: Did any of your relatives come later?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: Who came?

I.T.: My brother, my brother in law, his wife, two nephews of my husband's, and friends.

I.P.: What was your brother's name?

I.T.: Orville ^{Burn?} Byrne.

I.P.: And your nephews?

I.T.: Orville Adams and Arnold Thornberry. My brother in law was Bill Adams.

I.P.: And they all came here to work at the Ford Plant.

I.T.: That's right.

I.P.: When you first came here, where did you live?

I.T.: I lived in Iron Mountain one year and then I moved out to Garden Village, 205, which was then Spencer St., and we lived in a small building on the back of the lot, which is now still standing and houses my grandson's 1941 Hudson car, along with blueberry pickers and many other things that were used in them days.

I.P.: You mean it's a sort of a catch all now, besides holding the '41 Hudson.

I.T.: That's right.

I.P.: When you first came to Iron Mountain, you said you lived in the Iron Mountain area. Did you live in a home there or a boarding house, or what kind of housing did you have there?

I.T.: I lived in the downstairs apartment of one t' the end of D Street.

I.P.: Was the rent high then?

I.T.: No, it wasn't too high, but it was kind of hard to find a place to live.

I.P.: It was hard to get places to live in those days.

I.T.: Because many people were coming in here to work.

I.P.: Did your husband get a job at the Ford plant right away?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: How did he get to work in those days?

I.T.: He walked.

I.P.: You said you came to the Garden Village^{area} in 1925. I understand that Garden Village was platted by the Iron Mountain Realty Co. in 1921. What was it like in Garden Village when you moved here in 1925?

I.T.: It was

I.T.: It was a very busy place. Many homes were going up. Some of em small on the back of the lots. Anytime during the night you could hear people sawing and pounding. There was three shifts at the plant, and they'd come home from work on the shifts and work on their houses awhile so they could move into them.

I.P.: How did they see to do this work? Was there electricity then?

I.T.: Yes, we had electricity. We had electricity in our little house on the back of the lot.

I.P.: When you came, were there many houses built already?

I.T.: There was many being built.

I.P.: Were there any original farmhouses left?

I.T.: I understand that there was three, but I don't know which ones.

I.P.: What kind of ground was it?

I.T.: It was sort of, well, blueberry patch.

I.P.: Was it quite level, or did they have to do a lot of leveling?

I.T.: No, it was level from here to the river.

I.P.: And there were a few houses that were original farm houses probably. Were there any other structures?

I.T.: Yes, there was one barn, and I have been told that there was a dairy barn where the Garden Village School now stands. That belonged to Spencers, from which Spencer St. was named.

I.P.: You said it used to be Spencer St. What street is it now?

I.T.: It's Sagola.

I.P.: Sagola Avenue now.

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: You said you lived in a temporary structure on the back of the lot that you turned into a garage. How long did you live there?

I.T.: From April until December.

I.P.: And by then you had built your house?

I.T.: Yes. Our house was built that summer. The basement was dug with horses.

I.P.: Did you hire someone to build a house?

I.T.: We hired some of the work done, and my husband did some of it. Then carpenters would go from house to house and work on one a few hours and go to another one and work a few hours, to hold all the jobs that they could.

I.P.: They didn't want to lose any, huh? Were there any kind of improvements? What kind of roads did you have, and so on?

I.T.: Oh, we had dirt roads, no sidewalks.

I.P.: Were the people driving cars then?

I.T.: Yes, but everybody didn't have a car.

I.P.: Did they still use horses?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: And that's where the barns came in. Did you have children when you came here?

I.T.: One.

I.P.: How old was the child?

I.T.: One.

I.P.: One year old? And then you had children after you came here?

I.T.: Yes, I had a daughter born in the little building on the back of the lot. Dr. O'Neil was the doctor. I didn't go to the hospital. Them days you didn't go to the hospital every time you had a baby.

I.P.: Was there a hospital here?

I.T.: There was the old hospital in Iron Mountain. Ford also had a hospital for the employees.

I.P.: They had their own hospital? Where was that? Do you remember?

I.T.: It was on Woodward Ave., I think. Dr. Alexander came here to be one of the four doctors.

I.P.: Do you remember where it was on Woodward Avenue?

I.T.: Not exactly, no.

I.P.: I suppose it's torn down now.

I.T.: I don't think so.

I.P.: Did you have any other children? Where were the others born?

I.T.: In the home where I now live.

I.P.: In the house. So you didn't go to the hospital for any of them then?

I.T.: No.

I.P.: Did you have a doctor both times?

I.T.: Yes. I also had a nurse or a midwife, whatever you want to call her.

I.P.: They both came? Did you have help after you had the children?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: How long did you have help? Did they come and stay, or

just come for the day?

I.T.: Well, in them days, you stayed in the bed about 9 or 10 days after you had a baby. My sister in law lived near and she helped me.

I.P.: What was her name?

I.T.: Vergie Byrne.

I.P.: Then when your children got a little older and could go to school, what was the school situation?

I.T.: Before my children were old enough to go to school, there was a temporary school on the school ground which is now Garden Village. The school set close to the house that was built by a Mr. Bryer. Then the Garden Village School was built and my son, the oldest one, started to school there, at the Garden Village school.

I.P.: The temporary school that you mentioned, how did it work out?

I.T.: It worked out good, because that's the only one there was. You went there or you didn't go.

Break in tape.

I.P.: You were talking about the temporary barrack school that was built in the Garden Village Schoolyard. How did the children go to school there?

I.T.: They went in shifts. They had a morning shift and an afternoon shift. Some classes had 60 in a class.

I.P.: Lots of students to a teacher. They were on shifts and their parents were on shifts.

I.T.: And the men working at the plant were on shifts, so if you had two or three men in the family working shifts at the plant,

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and you had 4 or 5 children going to school, going in shifts, you had a busy home life.

I.P.: I understand that the school district went from 221 students to 1600 students in four years. Did they build other schools then too.

I.T.: Yes, they finished the Garden Village School and built the Lincoln School.

I.P.: Where was that?

I.T.: Up in East Kingsford. But the children from here went up there to the sixth grade. And then they had a school on Woodward Ave., and then they had two schools in Briding, where the Christian Science Church is now, that was a school.

I.P.: Do you remember any of the early teachers or superintendents?

I.T.: Mrs. Novac was the principal at the Garden Village School. I don't know if she was the first one or not. And Superintendent Sweeny was the superintendent of Briding Township. And then they built Kingsford High School.

I.P.: What was the shopping situation. Where did you go to buy your groceries and things that you needed?

I.T.: At Ford Store. It was located where Hosking ^{Tire} ~~Tar~~ Shop now stands.

I.P.: Did you have to buy at the Ford Store if you worked for Ford?

I.T.: No. There was a store at the corner of Chestnut and Briding. A grocery store. You could buy anyplace that you wanted to.

I.P.: Then did Ford pay you in money and not in script?

I.T.: No, he paid in money.

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I.P.: What kind of a store did you shop at when you went to the Ford Store?

I.T.: Groceries.

I.P.: It was just groceries? Did the clerk get your groceries?

I.T.: Yes, they had clerks then. You told em what you wanted and they took em off the shelf. They didn't have adding machines. They had a lady cashier, and she added up your grocery list with a pencil. She could do it real fast.

I.P.: Were groceries quite reasonable in the area in those days?

I,T,: Oh, yes. Much different than they are now.

I.P.: Was there quite a variety?

I.T.: Oh, yes, it was a good store. It had everything.

I.P.: Are any of the original stores still running the way they were in those days?

I.T.: Abe Cohodas.

I.P.: And what kind of things did Abe Cohodas sell?

I.T.: Well, at that time, they had groceries and they sold everything.

I.P.: What do you mean by everything?

I.T.: Clothing, I don't know if they had furniture or not.

I.P.: And what do they sell now?

I.T.: Carpets, clothing, furniture.

I.P.: So that's the only original store building still running. You came here as a family and lived together. Where would the unmarried people have stayed in the first days of Ford.

I.T.: There was hotels and boarding houses. There was one on Burch St. called the Jakey Motel. It's still standing. I think it has been made into apartments.

I.P.: Can you remember any of the others?

I.T.: No, I don't believe I can.

I.P.: Were the hotels boarding houses, or did the people that stayed there have to go somewhere else to eat?

I.T.: They were boarding houses.

I.P.: Do you have any idea what they would have had to pay to stay at a place like that?

I.T.: No, I don't remember, but I know that my brother in law stayed there, and he said the food run heavy to bread.

I.P.: Lots of bread. What kinds of recreation or social doings were available in those days?

I.T.: Well, where the Garden Village schoolgrounds is now, there was a skating rink, and there was a hockey rink down about where Nelson's Paint Store is. And there was a skating rink over in the Briding area. There was square dancing over at the East Kingsford community hall. And early in the spring when the snow was just beginning to go, the boys gathered under the street light and and went to the Menominee River and went in swimming.

I.P.: While the ice was still there?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: Were there any theaters in the area?

I.T.: Yes, there was the Capital Theater in Briding.

I.P.: And do you remembered what kind of things they showed? Were there movies, or stage plays?

I.T.: Movies.

I.P.: Were they talking movies?

I.T.: I can't remember. The Capital Theater was later the American Martyr's Church.

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I.P.: It was a church for a while?

I.T.: Before they built the ^{New} American Martyr's Church

I.P.: So it was a Catholic church for a while, then, after it was a theater. Were there parks that you could use?

I.T.: Crystal Lake was used a lot at that time. They'd have their 4th of July celebrations there, and they'd catch the greasy pig, and climb the greasy pole, and have their log rolling. That's where they did their baptizing for the ones that were immersed.

I.P.: What else did they do on the forth of July? Can you remember? Did they have fireworks?

I.T.: Yes, they had fireworks. They used to have them on Miller Hill, same as they do now.

I.P.: Were there any other parks in the area?

I.T.: Later, Lake Antoine was opened as a park. And the Ford Dam park and then there's a small park over in Ford Addition, where they played tennis.

I.P.: Did that land come from Ford, do you know?

I.T.: I think so.

I.P.: Ford donated the land for the park in Ford Addition? Ford Addition was a housing project that Ford built for his workers?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: What kind of houses did he have there?

I.T.: The same houses are still standing.

I.P.: And they're still in use. They must have been quite sturdy then.

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I.T.: Oh, yes.

I.P.: Built to last. You mentioned a park at the Ford Dam. What do you remember about that park?

I.T.: I remember it was a beautiful place. You could go out there and they had a lot of flowers, a rock garden, and it was right by Cowboy Lake. You could go in swimming. It was a beautiful drive. If you had company, that was one of the places you always took em, to Ford Park. The name "Ford", was spelled out in flowers. It was very beautiful. People would go there, and look all around, and fish in the Menominee River. The river

I.P.: ~~The~~ river is there, and the Cowboy Lake. You mentioned the 4th of July. How did you celebrate other holidays?

I.T.: Well, sometimes we'd have an Easter party and hide Easter eggs, for the children and they'd have a good time.

I.P.: Would you do that at home or would that be part of a bigger social gathering.

I.T.: No, it was mostly at home, but maybe the neighbor's children or some would come in. Then at Christmas time, you didn't go and buy your Christmas tree. You went out in the woods and cut it, and brought it home and decorated it.

I.P.: Did you buy the decorations?

I.T.: Well, you bought some and you made some, depending on how much money you wanted to spend.

I.P.: Was money quite plentiful?

I.T.: It was, while the Ford plant was working.

I.P.: What kind of decorations did you make for the tree?

I.T.: Oh, strung popcorn and chains, paper chains, things like that. Always one thing that went with Christmas was home made candy. We always had plenty of that.

I.P.: What kind of candy did you make?

I.T.: All kinds. Sea foam, penoche, fudge, suckers. Suckers was a great thing that we used to make and take to school for candy sales. 'Cause they lasted a long time, and they went better than anything else.

I.P.: What kind of suckers were they?

I.T.: Home made suckers.

I.P.: What flavors?

I.T.: I just can't remember. They were dark. Chocolate?

I.P.: What did you do on Halloween?

I.T.: Oh, everybody went trick or treating, the children. And there was no danger then of getting a razor blade or anything in the treats.

I.P.: Just for fun.

I.T.: Yes, it was safe. They got apples and popcorn balls, things like that that you probably wouldn't give now, and wouldn't let your children eat if they did get them.

I.P.: Well, those were the treats. Did they play any tricks?

I.T.:, Oh, yes. We didn't have sewers at that time. We had outdoor toilets and on of the things that they did was to turn your toilet over. So my husband moved the toilet forward a little and he left it so they would fall in the hole if they came to turn the toilet over. But they knew that he had done something and they didn't turn it over that time. But they did turn it over once and break an apple tree. They would take things like trailers and anything they could get hold of and take em up in a tree, and tie em up there. Then you'd have to go and get them down.

I.P.: Were there any church groups that would give you recreation?

I.T.: The Presbyterian Church had Sunday school in the Garden Village School. They had programs there, different kind of programs.

I.P.: What other kind of things were there?

I.T.: Circle meetings in the different homes, and they always had their Christmas programs. What is the P.T.O. now, was the P.T.A. at that time, and they met once a month in the schools and they had a full house. They had a good program, and they had lunch that they served for 10¢.

I.P.: That's reasonable, isn't it.

I.T.: Sometimes they'd have pie.

I.P.: So those were the kinds of social things that you had then. I understand that Kingsford was incorporated into a village in 1923. Were any of your neighbors involved with village government?

I.T.: Yes, Ludwig Evanson was president. Harry Condis was treasurer and assessor for 18 years. In later years, Bruno Mali was mayor.

I.P.: Now let's talk about what started it all, the Ford Plant. Do you know how Ford happened to come here instead of going somewhere else?

I.T.: Mr. Kingsford lived here, and he had him to come. This was one place where they had level land. Where they could build their plants. Also it was close to transportation where they could ship out their parts for their cars.

I.P.: Do you know who owned the land?

I.T.: Mr. Mongrine. 160 acre farm. He offered to sell it to Ford for \$100,000, which was a lot of money. Ford offered \$40,000,

but the citizens prevailed upon Mr. Mongrine to sell it for \$70,000. Many pledged to make up the difference. I don't understand just how much Mr. Ford did pay for the land in the end, but he did buy it.

I.P.: Do you remember what they built first?

I.T.: They built the sawmill and the dam, and the body plant and the dry kiln, the chemical plant to use the waste wood and used wood in the early Ford cars and trucks.

I.P.: Did you own a Ford car?

I.T.: No.

I.P.: Did most of the workers?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: Do you think half or more owned a Ford car?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: Did they get a good deal on em?

I.T.: Well, I suppose Ford was paying them the money to buy em and they felt obligated to buy them.

I.P.: Do you know how the working conditions at the Ford Plant were?

I.T.: They were good. They had a cafeteria at one time, something they could bring the men in lunches.

I.P.: How did they pay?

I.T.: Paid good.

I.P.: For the day, do you remember how much they paid?

I.T.: Five dollars a day.

I.P.: Did they have any benefits?

I.T.: Yes they did, because they had pensions and today many widows of the men who worked at the mill are getting pensions, and getting their hospitalization, which is a great help to them.

I.P.: You mentioned that Ford had a hospital. Did the Ford workers go there for nothing or reduced rates, or did they have to pay?

I.T.: I think if they were hurt at the plant, they didn't have to pay.

I.P.: You mentioned shifts. Did they stay on the same shift?

I.T.: No, they usually changed three shifts.

I.P.: When your husband went to work at Ford, what kind of work did he do?

I.T.: He was an inspector.

I.P.: Had he worked for Ford anywhere else?

I.T.: He had worked at Sidnaw as a scaler.

I.P.: Did he ever talk about the conditions at Ford's Sidnaw operation?

I.T.: No, not too much.

I.P.: Was the employment at the Ford plant steady?

I.T.: No, men were laid off and called back and laid off. They didn't know what to expect.

I.P.: It was rather uncertain, then.

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: Did they ever talk about moving the Ford Plant out in the earlier days?

I.T.: Yes, they did, but nothing come of it. Steel began to replace wood and they talked of moving to Escanaba, but they began building the wooden station wagons, and they stayed here.

I.P.: Tell us about the war years at the Ford plant. What did they do during the war years?

I.T.: They made gliders. These gliders were hooked on to air-

planes and transported to the places where they were going to use them.

I.P.: Did you ever see them going out of here?

I.T.: Yes.

I.P.: What else do you remember about the war years?

I.T.: I know that we had block wardens and an air raid whistle at the Ford plant, that would blow, and the wardens would patrol the streets and everyone had to put out their lights. It had to be completely dark. If anyone was caught on the street, they had to go inside.

I.P.: Anything else that happened at Ford during the war?

I.T.: We had a curfew at 9 o'clock. The Ford whistle blew, and when the whistle blew, all of the kids out hurried home. They didn't stay out after curfew.

I.P.: The good old days, huh?

I.T.: And Ford give land for victory gardens, and anyone that wanted to could plant a garden. They could have what they harvested off of it. And there was rationing. Your sugar, your gas, butter, many things were rationed. And in many windows there was a flag with a gold star on it. That meant that a son or a husband or someone from the family had lost their life in the war.

I.P.: Was there anyone from your family that lost their life?

I.T.: Yes, a nephew.

I.P.: A nephew that lived here? What was his name?

I.T.: Derias Byrne.

I.P.: Well, it wasn't too long after the war years that Ford did move out. Do you think that there are any benefits that

remain in the community from when the Ford company was here?

I.T.: Oh, yes. He give the land for the high school, and buildings are used by other companies, and the dam for the electricity, and the park at Cowboy Lake, and the name of the town and the Kingsford football team called flivvers, named for the cars. People still recieve Ford pensions.

I.P.: How would you describe the Garden Village area now.

I.T.: Today there are many beautiful, well kept homes, sewers, sidewalks, tree lined paved streets, and good schools, altogether different than what it was in the war years. In the early years

I.P.: In the early years when they were first building.