

Lancaster County Historical Society
Oral History Project

Interviewee: Mrs. Elizabeth Caruthers

Interviewer:

Date Recorded: Memories from 1917 - 1930.

Transcriber: Kaitlyn Cody

Date Transcribed: October 23, 2004

All these people had horse drawn wagons, of course, and we children would always run after the ice wagon and beg for pieces of ice and they were always very kind they'd always give us a piece of ice to suck on and I still think that kind of ice tasted a lot better than ice we have in our refrigerators today. Another vehicle that would go up and down Duke Street was a hearse and I can remember gray hearses that were open I think, so you could see the casket inside and they were drawn by horses. And when they started using automobiles for funerals my grandmother said she never wanted be buried from an automobile that it lacked dignity. We lived in the block of Duke Street between Lemon and James and a great many of the houses there now were there when I was a child. On the corner, for example, was the corner drug store and that is still a drug store that is now Longenecker's and, uh, coming down the street there is one very large house and that was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Kendig and it was only when I was older that I learned that Mr. Kendig of whom I was very fond was head of a counterfeit racket here in Lancaster and this counterfeit racket was one of the largest operations that ever took place in the United States. It was written up in the Reader's Digest and Mr. Kendig had been in jail and so forth but uh my mother never told me that so I thought he was very nice and his wife would save the funny papers for me so I would stop and see them regularly and read their funny papers. As a matter of fact, I don't think people are nearly as neighborly as they used to be because I customarily went up and down Duke Street visiting nearly all the people. I used to stop and see the Todd's who lived next door to us and Mr. Todd had Todd's Shoe Store on Queen Street. It was bought out by Warren's. They had no children so I was always welcome there and spent a great deal of time with Mrs. Todd. Then on down the street further was the large home of the Heiney's who owned the Brunswick and I frankly don't remember any of them, I only went in their house because they had a big collie dog named Prince. Oh, next door to me was, uh, someone who is now a friend of mine named Harriet Brisk she is two years younger than I am so of course I ignored her she was too small for me to be bothered with.

After I had been on Duke Street for awhile the Slaymaker's moved into their enormous mansion across the street and it was customary in those days to call on people and since they had some children my mother immediately dispatched me over to the Slaymaker's to welcome the children and it so happened that they weren't home so apparently I gave Mrs. Slaymaker a complete description of the whole neighborhood. I don't remember doing it but um, Mrs. Slaymaker had a good sense of humor and told my mother later on that I described one of the neighbors to her as an old grouch and this happened to be her cousin. The Slaymaker's, incidently, owned the Slaymaker Lock Company and are the grandparents of the author of *Captive's Mansion*. Speaking of difference when I was a

child we were taught great respect for older people and I was not allowed to say hello to an older person. I had to say howdy do or good morning.

When I was small, Lancaster, Lancaster streets were nearly all cobble stoned and they weren't smooth cobblestones they were very poorly laid and the streets all were extremely bumpy. All though Duke Street was brick it was also very bumpy so when Mayor Musser was elected he started paving the streets. I don't know much about politics but I assume this was too much for the city to pay for entirely so each property owner was assessed a certain amount to have the portion of the street in front of his house paved and when it came to our block of Duke Street, one of the owners of one of the mansions there whose name I haven't mentioned decided that she was not about to spend the money to have her section of the street paved and she thought they would simply skip that block of Duke Street. But uh, Lancaster fooled her because they paved every street in that block except the amount in front of her house, so it looked very funny, this one little section of brick and everything else nice new cement. Incidentally when the paving was completed, there was always a time lapse before automobiles were allowed to use the cement and so the block was closed off and opened to us kids for skating. We had 24 hours of wonderful skating up and down the middle of the street.

Of course not only the streets of Lancaster were bad, but the roads were bad too. Automobiles were quite new so whenever we would take a ride we always had to stop someplace and pay toll and uh then, at that, the road was probably nothing but dirt. I remember one Sunday driving along and uh it must have rained and the further we went the stickier the road got until finally we were completely stuck in the mud. I have no recollection of how we got out.

Another time cars being what they were, uh we were coming down a hill and suddenly we heard a clanging beside us and the whole left rear rim had come off and this went rolling down past us I don't know how it got off without the tire but uh but it did. Also when you were riding it was quite a thing and I remember my uncle had something called a linen duster that was sort of a coat that he wore whenever he drove the car.

Of course there were no supermarkets in those days and nobody had any freezers to store food so children were sent to the store quite often. It always seemed to me when I was ready to play that uh my mother said no you must go to the store. So there were a number of stores on Queen Street, not too far. At the corner of Queen and Walnut was the Northern Market and underneath there was [Met Fet's] Seafood Place. I think that was there until quite recently and you could have a whole seafood dinner down there in the cellar if you wanted to. We always got all our oysters there. Next to that was Flickenderpher's Grocery Store and that's been a grocery store under different hands ever since I think. At that time it had a roof out over the front which you don't see too often anymore. It was very nice if it was raining you could stand under that. In those days to get molasses you would take your own quart jar and the molasses came out of a barrel. The clerk would uh turn a little spigot and uh fill up your jar. If you wanted a bag of cookies uh the boxes of cookies were displayed in such a way that the clerk could very easily lift up the lid and sometimes they'd use a scoop, but quite often they simply used their hands. You could get any number of, of different kinds of cookies mixed up any

way you wanted the things weren't all packaged the way they are today. Also uh, I remember my grandmother sending me with a special vessel known as a lard kettle and that, of course, was to get lard in.

In those days I think people were allowed to do their thing as you say now and not bothered quite so much. There were various people who weren't quite right and one that was known as Patten Leather Charlie. And he went around looking for patten leather shoes and if he saw someone with patten leather shoes on he would jump and down and laugh. He didn't hurt anybody, that was all he did.

My uncle used to tell about a man who came around and tore pages of calendars and a great many business had those big calendars that had one page for each day and if by accident somebody else would tear off the page, when this man came in he would just be furious.

I believe the memories you just told us about, Mrs. Cruthers, were from the years 1917 to 1930. I've enjoyed listening to them very much. Thank you.

It would be interesting to have some personal information about you.

Interviewer: What is your full name?

Mrs. Cruthers: Mrs. Elizabeth [] Cruthers

Interviewer: Have you always lived in Lancaster County?

Mrs. Cruthers: All my life except for four years away at college and 5 years in Michigan and Baltimore.

Interviewer: Would you care to give us your age now?

Mrs. Cruthers: 61

Interviewer: You will be recalling as you tape your memories of growing up as a child and young girl on Duke and Queen Streets. Of which years were these memories covered?

Mrs. Cruthers: About 1917 - 1930.

Strangely enough I can still remember the first world war. I remember tanks going up Duke Street. Just before I, uh, came to give this interview I checked that memory thinking perhaps I had only dreamt it. But I found that was true. The tank had just been invented and therefore, they probably used them to attract recruits. My grandmother worked for the Red Cross. I remember her wearing a Red Cross armband and she knit gloves that had no fingers which interested me very much. She explained that you couldn't have fingers in the gloves because the soldiers wouldn't be able to manage their

guns properly.

Another memory of the first world war was the fact that ice cream cones cost \$.06. After that they went down to \$.05.

We lived in the 400 block of Duke Street in a double house in the middle of the block. As a small child I was accustomed to visit the people in our block and I think I could tell you about practically everybody in the block but that might be a bit boring so I will confine myself to a few people.

First of all I would like to say that the uh where Longenecker's now is was a drug store called the Corner Drug Store. It was a typical old fashioned drug store with a counter and a few marble topped tables. And the chairs had wire backs that were twisted into sort of pretzel shape. The drugs were in the back of the store. In the front, of course, they sold sodas, ice cream, etc. This is, uh, now been greatly enlarged and as you know, Longenecker's is there but if you look at the upper floors of the building from the outside you can see where the original front of the store was. As you go down the street, the first large Victorian house with a porch was occupied by the Kendigs.

This next section seems to be repetitive.

Mr. Kendig and another man ran run of the largest counterfeiting rings in the United States. If you want to read about this, it is all written up in the November 1947 Reader's Digest. He served a jail sentence but my mother never told me about this so I thought he was a very nice man. Mrs. Kendig was a lovely person and she saved all her funny papers for me so I would stop in at her house and read the funnies and also to see their two dogs Hans and Henny which were old fashioned dachshunds very, very long and so short you really hardly knew whether they were standing or sitting. Next door to us lived the Todds. Mr. Todd owned a shoe store in Lancaster that was later sold to the Warrens. Neither the Kendigs nor the Todds had any children so I think that was why they were so nice to me.

The next mansion which was north of our house was the home of the Heiney's who owned the Brunswick Hotel. I'm ashamed to say I hardly remember the Heiney's themselves. I used to stop at their house to visit their collie dog, Prince. In those days there were no radios so people were accustomed to sitting on their porches and uh gossiping with the people next door and doing needlework. My grandmother used to talk to people who were walking up and down the street and, of course, there were a great many walking in those days. If she happened to see a strange face we'd hear about that that evening.

One reason I thought this block of Duke Street would be of interest because all the houses are still there today except for two one on each side of the street. The children in those days were taught great respect for their elders. I was not allowed to say hello to older people, I had to say "howdy do" or "good morning". When new families moved into the neighborhood it was the custom to go calling so when the Slaymaker's moved

into their huge Victorian mansion across the street I was immediately dispatched to welcome their children. I remember going over there, ringing their bell and Mrs. Slaymaker came to the door. The children weren't home and she invited me in. The rest of it I don't remember but my mother tells me that I apparently gave her a complete description of all the neighbors in our block. And I described one woman as being very grouchy and this person turned out to be Mrs. Slaymaker's cousin. She must have had a good sense of humor because she told my mother about this and didn't seem to be at all angry about it. This of course is the Slaymaker Family that owned the Lock Company. Their grandson wrote *Captive's Mansion* about uh White Chimneys which of course was their summer home at the time I knew them. The Slaymaker house is one of the houses that was torn down and this is very sad and uh it has been replaced by the Duke Convalescent home.

The traffic on Duke Street then was quite different from today. There were some cars to be sure many that had to be cranked by hand to start. Very important were the large yellow trolleys not the ones that came later. Uh, which majestically rolled down the center of the street. Trolleys in those days went all over the county. You could go to Elizabethtown or Ephrata by trolley. If something got in the road the motormen pressed a bell which made a clanging sound. We used to play trolley by each holding one hand around the wash lines which of course everybody had in those days. We'd follow the wash line and say, "Clang, clang" if someone representing a car got in the way. He'd respond with, "ooga, ooga" since that was the typical auto horn sound. I had one cousin who always wanted to be a fire engine and he'd run around going, "[]" because that was the noise fire engines made in those days instead of using sirens.

Now and then cattle were driven up Duke Street. I was both fascinated and horrified by the brown slobber hanging from their mouths especially since they'd shake their heads and fling it every which way. Some frisky ones would run up on the sidewalks and men with sticks wacked them and kept them under control.

Much business was carried on by horse and wagon. Many milkmen claimed that their horses knew their own routes and would stop at each customer's house by themselves. I must say the ice men were very patient. We always ran after the ice wagons and coaxed for pieces of ice often climbing on the backstep and helping ourselves and that ice was so good. I'm sure it was better than ice you get out of a refrigerator today.

There were also rag pickers and knife sharpeners. They yelled so loud and moved so slowly that everyone could be ready by the time they reached the house. I think knife sharpeners also mended pots and pans. In those days you didn't throw away leaky kettles, you had the holes soldered. In any case if the knife sharpeners didn't solder your kettles uh some specialists did that job. Also [huxters] came regularly. We bought corn, strawberries, etc. from a particular person every year.

When I was very small hearses were still elegantly carved coaches. They were gray and had glass sides so you could see the coffin. And were usually drawn by matched horses. Cars were just starting to replace these but my grandmother said she didn't want to be

buried from an auto as it quote, “lacked dignity”.

The streets of Lancaster in those days were terrible. They were mostly cobblestone. If you want to see an example of the cobblestone there is quite a bit of it at the corner of Walnut and Prince Street around the warehouses there. Only those are smooth because they've not been used a lot. These Belgian blocks, I think they were called, were tilted up at all angles and the city government which was referred to as the “Machine” did nothing. When the Coalition Party ousted the Machine, Mayor Frank Musser started fixing the streets. Each property owner paid a percentage of the cost of paving in front of his house. Uh, Duke Street happened to be brick but nevertheless it was rough. And when they came to fixing our block, one woman refused to pay. As she owned a large piece of property, she thought they'd skip our block. But, much to her amazement, they paved anyway. For years, even after 1940 there was a section of brick on our block. As each block was paved, there would be a day when the cement was hard enough for skates, but not for cars so we would have a wonderful time skating all over the street it was roped off and we had a wonderful time. This woman's house, incidentally, was allowed to go to wreck and ruin. People called it the ghost house for a while and it was finally replaced by Berks Optical Company.

Of course, there were no freezers or supermarkets in those days so people bought groceries frequently. It seemed to me that I was always being sent to the store. Usually Flickenderfers which was on Queen Street north of Walnut. It still has a roof extending out over the sidewalk as all grocery stores used to have. Now this store is closed but it was Wiggins last and before that Leamans. As far as I know it has always been a grocery store. Anyway, if you wanted molasses, you brought your own quart jar and it was filled from a barrel. You also took your lard kettle to get lard. Boxes of cookies were displayed in a special rack. Each box with an [] cover I guess today we'd call it cellophane. You could select just exactly what you wanted. Sometimes the clerk used a scoop but often just his hand.

Taking an automobile ride was quite an adventure before 1920. Most of the roads outside of Lancaster, as well as in Lancaster were bad. Besides that you had to pay toll to use them. My uncle would put on a linen duster to drive as one could get pretty dusty. One time I remember getting stuck in the mud. Another time, cars being what they were, we were coming down a hill and suddenly we heard a clanging beside us. And here the whole rear rim had come off and went rolling down past us. This sounds crazy but it really happened. In fact something was expected to happen. Seeing people changing tires by the side of the road was very common.

If I may go back two generations and down the street a bit my great grandparents lived at Walnut and Duke where the Hamilton Apartments are now. My mother used to tell how she would take the dog a walk on a hot summer day. She, incidentally, lived at 236 North Duke Street which was built before the revolution. The dog would jump in her Grandmother Baumgartner's fountain to cool off and then would run right through the house. [] before 1900 now and people had no screens. My mother said she didn't thing they had so many flies. Anyway the doors were kept open for air except in the hottest

part of the day. Her grandmother not only covered the furniture with white linen according to the custom, but she had white linen runners over the rugs so you can imagine how the house looked after a big wet dog had gone through.

There was a field between Lemon and James Street at that time where my great grandparents kept cows. My mother got \$.15 a week for carrying the pails of milk from them and she says she just hated to do it. Incidentally, the little settlement called Baumgardner just southwest of Willow Street was named from my great-grandfather Thomas Baumgardner and his wife Susan Hough was the daughter and granddaughter of John and George Hough whose clocks are in the Historical Society.

Very interesting presentation. Thank you.

LancasterHistory