

Interview with Harriet Crumpacker November 22, 1977. Interviewed by Laurie Ann Radke. Tape # 58. Transcribed by Laura Wadsworth.

LR: Interview with Mrs. Crumpacker, November 22, 1977. (indecipherable)

HC: Well, the other day when we were discussing schools, and I don't know how I forgot to mention the most important private school was Barker Hall, who was...it was built as a memorial to his first wife, Mrs. Jenny Barker. And it was a school for both boys and girls and it went from the 1st grade through, oh, I think, to the 8th grade, it...well, I think it's safe to say it was primary and grammar. I don't imagine, as I recall, the families that sent their children there, there probably weren't more than...at least the most would be about 35 or 40 pupils. Then there were several people from out of town that sent their children there, who had friends here that they could live with, see it was not a boarding school. It was for its time, it was considered quite expensive. Now what expensive was then would probably just sound so cheap that you couldn't believe it. But that, really, was one of the nicest private schools, and as I say, I think it should be on record, because of all these smaller schools I gave you weren't nearly as important as Barker Hall.

LR: That was where the Trinity Church is now?

HC: I beg your pardon?

LR: That was where the Trinity Church is now?

HC: Well, the Trinity Church was there on the corner and the rectory was a frame rectory, that big stone one was built later, and then the walk that goes up the middle right as of today, at the end of that was Barker Hall and it was a two story building and on Sunday, it was used for Sunday School for the church, an Episcopal Church. And then that school went out of existence in the early...well in the late 1800s that never was a private school in the 19...1890's. And I would say that school probably was built in '69...1869, maybe before that...maybe 1865.

LR: Do you know when the new Barker Home was built?

HC: Well, I can't tell you, but there's a cornerstone there and on that cornerstone I think it will tell you when the original Barker Hall was built, and sure...I know it does. That cornerstone is right there on 6th Street and it's very easy to see, and I'm sure it gives you the date of the original Barker Hall.

LR: Did they use the original Barker Hall for meetings too besides as a school or as a Sunday School?

HC: You mean the original? No, only church things and then there was an organization called the Needlework Guild, and it was a State wide, I guess it was even national. And they had a chapter or whatever they call it here and they used several of the rooms in the basement which was...in Barker Hall where they had their meetings and kept all their supplies. It was a charitable thing. Then there was this group of ladies who sewed, get together, you know, at Barker Hall and made things for children. Well, they had a regular supply closet and whatever town had this Needlework Guild, and I think it's still in

existence, I think there is that Needlework Guild in the big cities is still in existence. It isn't here. And they had their headquarters there and did a great deal of charity work. But outside of that it was only used for church things, and as I say, that school was out of existence when I was born, so I don't remember, only that my aunt that I told you I was named for was Principal of the school. And as I say, I don't think they had more...if they had 40, they had quite a few.

LR: This is in...in all the grades?

HC: Yes.

LR: Was it unusual to have uh, women as Principals?

HC: In private schools, yes. If you think about it, most of the private schools in the East, the very early ones that are still in existence, they all had women principals. And...well, I don't think men went in for teaching like that. When I was in school, it was not until I went into the 8th grade that we...I had a male teacher. It was....I don't recall ever...only one in town. The superintendent of the school was always a man, but the principals were women. And then, when I was in the 8th grade, I know it was the 8th grade was the first man...male teacher that I ever had. I think most of the men that were in the teaching field were more or less connected with colleges and universities.

LR: What kind of career options did the women have when you were growing up, what were women encouraged to become.

HC: Well, I think most women were encouraged to become nurses and teachers and uh, there weren't many fields open for women. It's in the last, you know, part of the...well in the 19th century and 20. Teaching and nursing were about the only things that...oh, yes, and women could clerk in dry goods stores. And that was...at first, people didn't approve of that, but gradually, why, it became necessary, because women didn't want men to wait on them for certain things.

LR: What about in restaurants? Was it mainly staffed by men, were there women waitresses in the restaurants. or?

HC: Most of them, yes, as far as I know, of course there weren't many restaurants, I told you. Now like at the Bruin Hotel and the Fairview Hotel, and uh, the smaller restaurants they were all women, there were no men waiters until later years.

LR: What about the suffragette movement? Did that ever hit Michigan City?

HC: Yes, but it's all kinda hazy to me. I mean when...they'd have parades, you know, there weren't many in a small town that wanted to be identified with things like that, that was...all that happened more or less in the big cities, the big demonstrations they would have, you know. And uh, I don't ever remember a parade or anything for women's suffrage here in town, now they may have had meetings, but I was too small to know anything about them. And then when women got the vote, I was quite grown up.

LR: Was there a big newspaper coverage, or were people...

HC: Oh, there was a lot in the newspapers.

LR: I mean were people generally against women getting the vote?

HC: Oh, yes, that was the whole thing. Well, the men were all against it, and a lot of women didn't want to participate in things like that. And of course, a lot of husbands just wouldn't let their wives. And it was these women in the bigger cities that launched this and the pressure was well on until they were finally given the vote. No, it was a long, long fight.

LR: I just wondered how involved women in Michigan City got with...

HC: Not very much that I can recall. I mean, no I suppose there were some that had meetings, but I would... no one I knew.

LR: When you were growing up and old enough to know...you know, what was going on, what were the big civic issues, did the town ever get excited, you know, in an uproar?

HC: You mean like strikes and things?

LR: Yes.

HC: No, never, I don't remember anything like that. Demonstrations and things? Never. Nope I don't remember anything like that.

LR: What about the men at Haskell-Barker? Didn't they go on strikes every so often.

HC: No, never heard at Bailey's, Haskell-Barker. I don't think I ever heard of us having a strike at that time. There weren't any strikes over the country in those days. Well, you see there weren't Unions in those days, then when the Union was formed, that changed the whole complexion of labor. But when you stop and think that way back in the 1800s men worked for a dollar and a quarter a day. And that meant from early morning to late...not just three or four hours or something like that. And there were...now the Haskell-Barker Car Company for many years only paid their men a dollar and a quarter...a day, not an hour. Now, of course, everything was cheaper and of course, women, their homes, canning season, it was such a different life that that dollar and a quarter way back then really went someplace, when you stop to think way back, you could get 20 loaves of bread for a dollar and eggs 10 cents a dozen. And well, I can remember that when butter...I can remember there was a family in the country that made this wonderful butter and used to bring it in on Saturdays and used to bring it in in little crocks and it was wonderful, and for a three pound jar, you only paid 25 cents. See things were so much cheaper. Now, when I was pretty good sized, you could buy a crate of strawberries, a whole crate for a dollar. That didn't mean you had to go out and pick them, they brought them in to you. And peaches 50 cents, 75 cents a bushel. So the value, when you say a dollar, a dollar went quite a long ways.

LR: Was working at the Haskell-Barker Car Company was that considered a good job, I mean did a lot of men try and get in there?

HC: Yes, it was our biggest factory. And then the Ford and Johnson Chair Company was another very big concern. That's out on Hitchcock...it was out on Hitchcock Street near the prison. And then of course there was a lot of men that worked on the boats, the lumber boats, and in the lumberyard and things like that. And the Sash and Door Factory, that was a big factory down, at the end of Spring, on 2nd Street, I think the building's still there, I'm not sure, not far from the Pioneer Lumber Company. And uh, then there was the (indecipherable) and Cooper Shop, that employed a lot of men, they made barrels. And then there were factories, you know, within the prison walls. But those people, they were perfectly happy, there was nobody agitating like, you know, when the Unions got. And it was all the agitating that wives...got people...well sort of ...I can't think of the word I want to use that fits it...got them torched up about it. But those were the main factories in town.

LR: Could women work in the offices in these factories, or...?

HC: Oh, yes. It was oh...when I was a little girl that offices had women as stenographers. But, it's my understanding, what I've been told that way back women did not work in offices and they didn't work in banks like they do now. No, when women had to go to work it was either as domestics in people's homes, or taking nursing training, and teaching and that was about the extent of it. Oh, and dressmaking. Oh, yes, that was...we had what we called fashionable dressmakers, they were the expensive kind, and then we had the kind that people had come to your house and they'd come Spring and Fall, and they'd come and get you all set for the summer and then they'd come and get you all set for the winter.

LR: Do you remember what kind of...descriptions of the dresses?

HC: Well, when I was a little girl most all the children wore what they called Peter Thompson suits. And they were like...they were sailor, little sailor suits. Then on Sunday you'd have a white one, and maybe blue during the week, and then Easter, everybody really had a really fancy kind of a dress, your Easter outfit.

LR: What kind of material were the Peter Thompson's dresses?

HC: Serge...blue serge. And the white ones...I suppose they were white serge, I never saw a white serge, but they were white, no...they were flannel, they were flannel.

LR: And did they wear them...

HC: I'll show you a picture of a Peter Thompson, come on in here. Children look darling in them and one thing, in school, you didn't have to wear them, I mean, it wasn't a uniform, but everybody loved them, and it was really nice in school. There was two or three girls that had kind of fancy dresses, but most of the parents tried to keep their children dressed very simply.

LR: Did they wear leotards underneath them, or short...what kind of underclothes...?

HC: Oh, you wore long black stockings. Uh, huh, and high shoes, there was no such thing as low shoes or little slippers. The only time I had slippers, I

was a flower girl in a wedding party and we had white slippers, outside it was always high shoes.

LR: Even in the summertime?

HC: um hmm. Well, when I was about oh probably nine years old, I think we did have little slippers in the summer. I don't remember...I remember the high button shoes and long black stockings.

LR: How'd they keep the stockings up?

HC: With garters, uh huh, you had little (indecipherable) you wore with garters when you were little.

LR: Did most of the girls have their hair cut like your daughter's, the little buster boys.

HC: Well, not when I was little, but when she was little that's the way most of them had their hair cut.

LR: What was it like when you were little?

HC: Braids and hair ribbons.

LR: Did girls get their haircut very often?

HC: Oh no, that was...um mmm, nobody had their hair cut. I can remember...well, what started the fad of women having their hair cut was Irene Castle, the Castles, Vernon and Irene Castle, and she had...oh, people were horrified because she was on the stage, and they said...then gradually it took hold. Now when you see a person with long hair, you know, now it's kind of a fad, but what I mean, the general run of the thing, why, everybody likes short hair.

LR: I know, I don't wear long hair at all.

HC: No, not I. But I remember when I had my haircut, I was married, and a lot of people thought it was scandalous. And gradually, you see what's happened now.

LR: Yeah, long hair's probably the exception, very few people...

HC: Course a lot of these youngins that are wearing long hair, that's more of a fad now, but when I was a girl, oh...a woman with short hair was...I recall a woman here in town that wore trousers and had short hair. And she was a very respectable woman, I mean there was nothing funny about her. But I can remember people making remarks, they thought the police should pick her up, any woman that would appear on the streets with pants and short hair, there was something definitely wrong...now look. They'd have the jails full.

LR: Who took care of these, when you had long hair and you were really small, was it the mother's who had...?

HC: Oh, yeah, have you wash your hair and dry it out in the sun. There were no beauty parlors, and had there been, children wouldn't have gone.

LR: How often did they wash their hair, when you were small.

HC: Well, in summer, as I recall, it seemed like it was being washed every week. I don't know, hard to tell you. But then you'd sit in the sun and let it dry. And, course it was good for your hair. And then in winter, why, you'd dry it over the register if you had a furnace, or just sit near the stove and they'd rub it dry with towels, it was all done at home.

LR: IF a girl wanted to curl her hair how could she...what could she use..

HC: Oh, they're were no permanent waves, they did them up on rags. You take the hair and a white rag and twist it around, wet it, and go to bed with it and suffer all night. You get up in the morning, and then they'd take the white...these rags off and your hair would be curly.

LR: Did it end up in banana curls?

HC: What?

LR: Did you end up with those long, Shirley Temple?

HC: Yes. And another thing they had what they called kid curlers, they were a funny thing, you'd wrap the hair and then double them back, and that just made a frizzy mess. But, uh, most all the young ones suffered with rags on their hair at night.

LR: How old was a girl when she stopped wearing the Peter Thompsons and started getting more dressed up.

HC: Oh, uh, I think maybe the fifth grade, the fifth or sixth grade you'd stop. I just can't remember. It had to be around the fifth or sixth grade. But there they were so pretty.

LR: What did she, uh, the girls start wearing then, in the fifth or sixth grade?

HC: Girl Scouts?

LR: No, what did the girls after they stopped wearing Peter Thompsons...?

HC: Oh, well, dress...dresses. And they...you wore dresses up to your knees, and then went you went into high school, they put them down lower, and a lot of the girls then started to do their hair up on top of their heads with braids and things. And, uh, but you wore knee length skirts until you went into high school and then you wore longer skirts.

LR: You still wore the black stockings, though, and the high button shoes.

HC: Yes, and they were lyle stockings. Silk stockings were just out of the question unless you were so rich you could hardly stand...and now that the

silk stockings...the first silk stockings you wouldn't wear today they were so heavy. I was given a pair for Christmas, and I...they were embroidered with little white forget-me-nots, and they were heavy...and uh, they were pretty, but lyle stockings were thinner. Then they got so they were real thin, and the girls used to put pale pink stockings underneath them so it would look like your skin was real pink. But, uh, silk stockings as...when they first came out, no one would wear them today, they were so heavy. They were beautiful, but not practical at all. But they didn't run, that was one thing...you didn't have to worry about them running.

LR: When uh...what kind of make...did girls wear any kind of make-up, or you said they used to wear pink stockings, did they do anything else to fool people?

HC: Well, there used to be candies called wintergreen drops, they were little red drips, and I can remember we used to take and wet them and try to do our lips with them. There weren't any lipsticks or things like that. You did have a, what they called a chamois skin and a little talcum powder and you were allowed to put that on your face. But there was no eye makeup no rouge, nothing like that. Except people who used those were considered not what they should be and actresses were the only one that used makeup. And, of course, I can remember that people that were on the stage were looked down on. Oh, yes. Actresses...people just rolled their eyes, you know, they weren't considered like they are now. But we used to do that with those wintergreen things trying to do lipstick, it wasn't very satisfactory. And take just a common lead pencil and try to do a little on your eyebrows, but it's a little (indecipherable) there was no makeup, I don't...we survived.

LR: What about little boys were they wearing Peter Thompson's sailor suits, too?

HC: Oh, they weren't called Peter Thompson's...they wore those sailor suits for dress up, but most of them just wore a little short trousers and little sweaters. And then they were...dressed up they wore little white blouses with great big square collars. But, uh, then I think most all little boys had one sailor suit. But then they wore little overalls and things like that, but entirely different than you think of it today. As I remember it, they wore just little short trousers and little sweaters or shirts, and then they'd dress up with the big collars, and...uh

LR: Did they wear knee socks and high boots, or...what kind of shoes and socks...?

HC: No, way back...I've often wondered...they wore long stockings, I don't know how they kept them up.

LR: I wonder if they had garters, too?

HC: I suppose they did. I wouldn't have any idea. I was gonna get that box of pictures out, and maybe, if you'll help me, we might get them out. (break in recording) As I told you in winter you wore woolen dresses and always...well, I do remember slippers, little slippers in summer. But, most all, like you wouldn't go to Sunday School in slippers. And when you got old enough, oh, along about 6 or 7 years old...you never went to church...

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HC: And I don't recall any of my friends, until...oh, maybe around the eighth grade, and still at high school dances, they'd have...why, uh, you didn't wear long dresses, and they were usually made, some were of voile and dotted Swiss, that was...you were really dressed up when you were dressed up in dotted Swiss, I think it's very pretty now. And voile, as I said, (indecipherable) voile, very few that I ever recall in any silk dresses, and silk underwear wasn't heard of. No, it was a material called mainsook, very fine (indecipherable) m-a-i-n-s-o-o-k. And your underwear...you couldn't buy underwear, no...you could winter...flannel underwear, you know in winter, everybody wore flannel underwear, they don't anymore. But, summertime they were all made at home.

LR: You could buy the material in a dry goods store?

HC: You could buy up to, yes, uh, I know grandma always bought a bolt of mainsook, and then when the seamstress would come, she'd come for a period of time and make nightgowns and things and then when I got older, I was taught to sew, make my own. And, uh, oh, it was...you couldn't buy mainsook underwear right today...there are lots of people prefer it to silk, it's cooler. And it uh, now...I've got several sorts of what they call cotton nightgowns and it isn't as thin as the mainsook, but it's supposed to cooler than silk or chiffon.

LR: You said in the summertime, would you even still have to wear your two or three petticoats under those, all those...?

HC: Oh, yes, you always had to wear petticoats. I can't imagine what in this hot weather that we've had, how we lived through those petticoats and long stockings, you know.

LR: You couldn't have any bare skin..?

HC: No, no bare skin, oh no. Now, when we were little children playing like in the yard, I showed you, we could go barefoot around, but no, not out it the street. Oh, they were children who did, but they were frowned on. But people lived through it. We didn't have air conditioning, we didn't have electric fans, we didn't have, uh...we had palm leaf fans that you had to fan yourself if you got too warm, but we all survived it.

LR: What would you do on days when it was 90 degrees or..?

HC: Never think a thing about it...it was 90 and it was pretty hot, and...drink lemonade, go down to the beach and go bathing...swimming...but houses, they'd keep closed up, you know, and the shades down, and keep the houses dark...the heat of the day...but I don't know how we lived, but nobody had them and nobody knew about them. And, when you say now about air conditioning, people say I couldn't live without it, well, look at all the people that lived without electric fans let alone air conditioning. But all these new things have spoiled people and in the old days, you didn't know about them and they lived happily...not comfortably, but happily.

But, oh lots of people say , oh for the good old days, well I think what they mean...they wouldn't want to go back without electricity and gas and all that,

but I think when people make that remark it's because of all this violence, and all this crime which did not occur in those days, there probably were things in big cities, but Michigan City....why we never even had a key to our front door. Go out of town and leave the house unlocked. People just didn't ...you didn't know anything about vandalism and things like that. I think that's what people mean when they say they wish they had the good old days. Cause... 'course crime is getting out of control. But, we're spoiled with a lot of things, you know what I mean. You press a button and on comes the light, you never have to think well, that chimney has to be shined, and I have to fill it with oil, and have to do this and change the wicks, and we take the things so for granted now. And I suppose way back, there were such changes that they took things for granted. Can't imagine what, but...

LR: Changes that have been a lot more gradual.

HC: Yes, when you stop and think of all the changes in the, well, let's say in the 19th and 20th Century, of all the things like the automobile, the telephone, the planes, well who ever thought anyone would walk on the moon? So, you never can tell what another 50 years is gonna bring. You'll be here, I won't.

LR: Well, who knows?

HC: I hope you are. You never know of course, what's gonna happen. Oh, lots of people it's so silly, they say in the year 2000, it's gonna be the end of everything. Well, they been doing that way back, every so often, someone...1900 was going to be the end of the world. You know there are people that...now there's this outfit that said 2000 the year 2000. Well the year 2000 will come, and we'll still be...I won't be here, but I hope you are. Oh, you could very easily. And everybody'll be fussing about taxes and everything. Course it is a problem now, with the price and things and everything and the cost of living is going up and it's very hard on families with big...or on people with big families. People who survived this long, they'll have to keep struggling along.