

Elizabeth Munger Tape T-2-45

Interviewer: Laurie Ann Radke

General Michigan City History

Radke: Interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Munger November 15, 1977

Radke: All right, you're hear to talk about your impressions of Michigan City when you first came here.

Munger: All right, I was just a child

Radke: How old were you?

Munger: That's such a long (pause)

Radke: I know, just go ahead, that's fine.

Munger: I came here in December of 1918. It was just after the Armistice had been signed. So I wasn't here to participate in the celebration of the Armistice which I understand was very dramatic on Franklin Street. John Stanfield could probably tell you something about that. Professor John Stanfield at Purdue. Our impressions were gained rather gradually because we couldn't settle down until our furniture had arrived. So for a number of days we lived with Dr. and Mrs. Sawyer. Dr. Sawyer was a dentist at the corner of Pine and 5th. Across the street, diagonally across where the old post office is, which is now a Tonn and Blank building, was Powell's Boarding House. And have you interviewed Mr. Powell? He lives here in town and is a member of AARP. Kenneth Powell, he'd be a very good person to talk to. Michigan City at that time had some hotels on Franklin Street, but it was sort of a drummers town. That's what they used to call the traveling salesman who went around and sold shoes to Throckmorton Shoe Store or to Fealock Shoe Store or clothing to Carstens Brothers or to the C.E. Meyers, some of the businesses that were on Franklin Street then. I was much impressed because it was the first time I had ever seen fried potatoes served for breakfast. We went to Powell's Boarding House here along with the bacon and eggs, the traveling men had their plates heaped high with fried potatoes. And I just couldn't imagine that. My parents talked some I imagine to those people, more than I did because I was quite young. But they said that, the traveling men said they never saw a town in which the difference between the parents and the children was so remarkable. That is the clothing of the older generation and the clothing of the younger generation, say in their 20's who were coming along because on any corner on Franklin Street on a Saturday morning you could see groups of people, talking perhaps in Polish, or German or Swedish and most of the women had babushka's over their heads and tied under their chins and many of the older women were rather dumpy in appearance with a belt around the middle and the younger generation were beginning to use more American clothes, more stylish clothes. Of course at that time there were many churches in which sermons were given in foreign languages too. There was St. Paul's Church and St. John's Church at the corner of 9th Street. I hope you somewhere get the story of the rivalry between those two churches. Have you done so?

Radke: I know, I haven't talked to them yet but I've read about it.

Munger: Yes, well there was a great rivalry especially when St. Pauls built their church taller and put a clock in the steeple. If you look at one of the early maps, pictorial maps at the wall down at the lighthouse, you will see that St. Johns Church had been built but across the street diagonally is a vacant lot. This the 1869 map because St. Pauls wasn't built until 1876. You see it had its centennial year last year and I understand that when some of the people broke away because I think they thought the doctrines of Martin Luther weren't being taught the way they would like to have them. Or perhaps they took in other members who, I don't really know the story because I wasn't a part of that, but I understand some of them used to pour water on down through the church basement windows. You better check out that because I'm not really in to the history. But I would get in touch with some of the older members of that church. Have you talked to Miss Ruth Kemeny? Her father was at one time a minister. Kemeny. Just now she's cruising the Mediterranean. But there are others. Mrs. Marie Zorn Haller, a member of the Zorn family, would be able to perhaps tell something about the St. Johns Church I think. And of course her family had an important business here, the Zorn Brewery. And if you haven't talked to her she would be a good person to talk to. We were talking about the impressions of the town. Of course in those days the personal approach of the merchants to the people was very important I think. There was Finski's Grocery Store and Welnetz's store. Welnetz's at the north end of the street was a large store with many departments, a bakery and so on. And I'm sure you've heard of the Henry Miller Meat Market. In fact it was Henry Miller's fathers meat market first I think, at the corner of 10th and Franklin. That corner had once been the sight of one of the earlier schools in the town. A business school, have you gone into the history of the schools at all?

Radke: No, another member of the staff is doing the education history and I don't think she's gotten into that yet.

Munger: Yes, well there was a, that's where a Shell Station is today but when we were children and at the time that I came to town the Miller Meat Market was a place where children loved to go. The floor was scattered with sawdust and there were huge maple foot tables on which the butcher cut the meat. And Mr. Miller always gave the children a little slice of bologna or something like that to nibble on. Edwin Way Teale talks about Miller's Meat Market in his book Duneboy. And from Duneboy you can also get some impression, even earlier than mine of what Michigan City was like. See, since I haven't lived here all the time, I don't have the sense of continuity of the past that others have but I have always been interested in history and taught Michigan City community history in the schools so I'm in touch with it.

Radke: You're much more aware of it than a lot of people are.

Munger: Family didn't take part in it all. My father was always public spirited as my mother was and my father helped to establish the Boy Scouts here. He worked along with people like Mr. Herbert and Dr. Rogers and I don't recall all the others in establishing the Boy Scouts Council in Michigan City. I have the Silver Beaver that was awarded to him at one time to hang on a ribbon around his neck. A little silver beaver about two and a half or three inches long.

Radke: That's the highest award for the Boy Scouts isn't it?

Munger: Yes. I think that the history of the churches is a very good way to approach the development of a city because as various national groups come in, they establish churches. And I believe I have told you that in the early days when there was a great deal of lumber around here there were Swedes and Norwegians and a few Danes. There was a Norwegian church down Pine between Second and Michigan. And Mrs. a, I told Mrs. Peterson that you, that she may be expecting a call from you. Mrs. Peterson on Franklin Street. You have the address. I think she was christened in that church. And I think Paul Nelson was. Of course, Paul as a brother of William Nelson, a local artist and musician could tell you a lot about that. And he has given talks to the Historical Society on the Swedish part of town which was sort of south of 11th Street and near Oak and Maple and on out that way. That was one feature of Michigan City when I came here. Many of the Polish people lived along Barker Avenue and toward the west. And Tennessee, Buffalo and so on. Many Irish and Germans lived on the west side. And there were Germans also in what we call Canada, because it was across the river. There were some Italians, mostly in the north end then although many settled in little businesses later and some are still there today along the sort of middle part of Franklin Street, out between, along Ripley and Ann and south of that. But there were definite ethnic neighborhoods. People who spoke the same language liked to grow together. Have you ever talked to Mr. Clem Spaholski. He gave a talk on what it was like to be a polish boy growing up in the middle of Swede town for the Historical Society. And I bet he could be a valuable resource for you. There were always some of the blacks in Michigan City. In blacks in Michigan City, even in the early days. Dude Calvert might be able to tell you about some of that. One, a character that Miss Charlotte Taylor could tell you about would be a man who had a peddler's card. I don't even recall his name but Dude could tell you. Or Charlotte could tell you. Well, you can turn it on, maybe I can go and, I know too that Mr. Fernal Cochran who was quite an archivist over in LaPorte grew up as a little boy in Michigan City and over there in LaPorte they may have some of his memoirs. Mrs. Robert Coffeen is one of the outstanding people since you're gathering LaPorte County history. She's one of the outstanding people to interview. She wrote the book for the LaPorte schools as I did for the Michigan City schools. Her's is called This Is LaPorte I think. But her grandparents were among the first five, her grandfather I believe was one of the first five men who established LaPorte and she has been president of the LaPorte Historical Society. She is more or less housebound. She's a very keen person but her eyesight is giving her trouble and she can't get around very well. But if you make an appointment sometime she'd be a good one to talk to. And her husband is writing the little historical column in the Town Crier and he's been a journalist and can give you a great deal over there. Well this Fernal Cochran I spoke of was a relative of Mrs. Coffeen. She was Ruth Andrew and her sister Florence Andrew still lives in the Andrew home at 1408 Michigan Avenue. Fernal Cochran wrote an article once about a time I think he lived in the bank building. Perhaps his father was one of the bank officers. And he told in that about the fact that there were black children in the town that came to play. So that would be one of the early traces. Of course the development of the Pullman Company and the war helped to bring some of the blacks into the neighborhood. And the Spaulding Hotel did also in the 1820's when that was in its heyday. Many of the people were employed there. Have you talked to Russell Allen? He's a councilman. Put down Russell Allen in Michigan City as one of the earliest blacks to be here and he's always been important in Michigan City civic life. He has taken a great interest. And he could also

tell you some of the others. In my Michigan City's First One Hundred Years you will get some other names that

Radke: I've been going through it, taking notes.

Munger: Mrs. Graves of course is gone. But her husband, Tenola Graves, was one of the first professional blacks in town. He was an attorney. And another good family to interview would be the Cullpeppers. They have lived here a long time. Now we have such a an explosion of population in all ways that sometimes it's hard to get to know who are the key people in the various ethnic groups that represent families who were here originally. You have talked to the Neiswanders I know and Miss Gladys Bull? Well what else do you have in mind?

Radke: Well you said that you've been leaving Michigan City and coming back. When did you come back after eight years? What time was that?

Munger: Well I of course was away in college between 1923 and 1928 I was finishing college and teaching in Chicago. And then I came back here to teach. Mr. Knapp asked me to come back in 1930. I married in 32 and lived in Chicago while my first husband was alive. So I came back here at the time of his death. In January of '41. I returned and taught for nine years. Then I married a half cousin of his and moved to Michigan and was gone for another, well I came back in '61 after my second husband died. So I was gone during the 50's and I was gone during the 30's. From 32 to 40. I was gone. That was the time of the depression, so I can't give you any impressions of Michigan City at the time of the depression. I wasn't living here then.

Radke: What was it like when you came back in the 40's though, after being gone?

Munger: Oh, I taught in the junior high then and was very busy raising my sons and teaching at school. I don't have very clear impressions. The schools were excellent. The attention to the basics were very good then. I think television has made a great difference in the schools. Some for the good and some for the bad. But that's quite a whole story I think. I don't know what more to say about that right now.

Radke: Well then we can go back to the landmarks, like Bridal Hill and Tannery Hill so I can get the exact locations down on tape, too.

Munger: Oh yes, well if you look at the pictorial maps on the walls at the museum, you get some idea of how the town developed and there's really, when I came here of course Baltimore Street was what they called our present 11th Street. The South Shore tracks ran along Baltimore Street. 10th Street had been named Boston Street by Isaac Elston. Miss Mary Glasscott, by the way jot down her name, was born on Boston Street. In fact her birth certificate reads Boy Glasscott, Boston Street. The doctor forgot what he had done that morning I think. But her parents, or her grandparents were one of the earliest catholic families in the area. She'd be good to talk to. They had to go to South Bend to be married because there was no priest here at the time of their marriage, which must have been in the 30's maybe.

Radke: That's Glasscott?

Munger: Glasscott, that's an old family, always been important in Michigan City. Oh, I was speaking of 11th Street. And of course, St. Stanislaus Church. When I came in 1918, was just beginning. The basement had been built and the superstructure had not been built. And the school on the corner was a two story wooden building. That has been demolished of course, and the church has really grown. But we were quite impressed living across as we did. We lived at the corner of Ann and Washington. And to see the priests in their serplusses and their gowns and all children following behind as they left the school and went in to the church for festivals or special worship services. And that church had been built on what was originally called Tannery Hill because when the town was young in the '50's and so on, they wanted the smelly tannery out of town. So it was put on Tannery Hill. You do know of course that the first cemetery was where the Isaac C. Elston Senior High is now. But of course that had been moved to Greenwood long before I came here. The hills, the dunes grow in ridges so Tannery Hill was the highest. And then to the north of that, along what is now Warren Street was another ridge of dunes, and that got the name of Bridal Hill, because some of the young men wanting to build out of the center of the town built homes for their brides on that hill. The Mullen home, T.C. Mullen's home at the corner of Washington and Warren was an early home there. Ms. Alice Lay lives on Warren in a house that was owned by her grandmother. And her grandmother was one who had come from Germany. I think her grandparents were married in LaPorte County. So I would ask her, or her cousin Mr. Michael Kane on the west side for some details about some of their people. Miss Lay's, or one of her ancestors, had, there was a Lay Bakery and also there was a Lay in business with the Calvertson Photography business in early times. So there are some leads for that. Has anyone talked to you about the time a tornado struck here and demolished part of the wall around the prison?

Radke: No.

Munger: Well that has been written up. Mrs. Paholda is gone now and so it Lottie Born. Lottie was a cousin of Alice Lay. But when they were young, one time there was a storm that came along and it demolished part of the high wall around the Indiana State Prison. And I'm sure that Mr. Calbert can give you more that has been written up and I know Bob Kaiser had something about it in one of his columns one time, and we probably have something on it at the Historical Society. You have seen the file of things down at the Historical Society that they keep building up?

Radke: Yes, it's nice.

Munger: Well that must have been quite an event because they had to be on guard at a time of panic. I wasn't here at the time of any of the great fires that swept the Pullman Car Works or anything like that either. The fire at the Milner Hotel is something that took place in my time. Don't know whether I was living in town at the time.

Radke: How were fires like that, you know, disastrous fires handled by those volunteer fire departments?

Munger: Well they had a fire department at the time of some of these. There is a history of the fire department and I believe we have it at the museum. Mrs. Harris can tell you about that because we have had talks at the Historical Society. We have a very excellent file of talks that have been

given over the years. One talk I wish we had was the talk about the Jewish community. Because for our, during the years when Sinai Temple was celebrating its 50th Anniversary I believe and it was the 20th Anniversary of Rabbi Richter. I asked him to give a talk to the Historical Society and in his imitable style he gave a marvelous talk on the development of the Jewish community from the first ones that came and the old Orthodox Congregation and then the Reform Congregation. The meetings that used to be held at the building near the corner of Cedar and 7th. And the early businessmen such as Mr. Stern. Have you talked to Mr. Stern? He's a honey. And then there was C.E. Meyer and Levine and so many others. And Rabbi Richter gave a very thorough discussion of the moves of the congregation to the little church which is still at the the corner of Warren and Pine. That building has gone through many different, serving many congregations. But unfortunately, Rabbi Richter didn't give a copy. I had asked him in advance to do it. And his secretary kept saying she would try to get it from him. He must have had notes. He may even have the notes down in Florida. And Miss Merle Mortimer, Mrs. Mortimer, has been active in the library out there at the Sinai Temple. And she might be someone to contact. Do you know her? She's a member of the Historical Society and you see her at practically anything that has a good cause, Save The Dunes, Save The Animals. She might be able to try to contact Rabbi Richter and see if he does have notes on that. He even brought it down to the boys who had gone through school here and have now achieved fame and distinction in various fields, such as one of the older Blieden boys and of course David Lilienthal who was head of the Atomic Energy Commission. You knew he was from Michigan City?

Radke: No. Someone had told me that. I wasn't too positive.

Munger: He graduated in 1916. No doubt they would have an Elstonian, I think we would have one at the museum, the 1916 Elstonian. He'd be a, from the point of view of important people who have lived here, he would be one of the outstanding ones, I'm sure. I think that you have had some notice of film actresses such as Ann Baxter but David Lilienthal would be one who'd been in the public eye as a government servant. You're going to have fun sorting out all these notes when you get through.

Radke: Yes, this helps me a great deal though. When I get leads like this. Otherwise, I spend a lot of my time running around trying to find out who was who to talk to. It does.

Munger: Yes, well perhaps that's one of the best things that I can do is to try to put you in touch with some of the key people. And as I said, Mr. Calbert was the one who handled the publicity at the News-Dispatch at the time the Friendship Gardens were created and can give you the true facts about the two Stauffer brothers, not the present one, who established the gardens and also the local people who helped to promote art and culture in that area. Of course some of them are getting past the reach of any historian. Miss Marie Wilcox was a librarian at the time and she was very important but in that work but I don't think you

end of first side of tape

Munger: Miss Mellie Luck is at home now at 716 Pine. Her telephone number is 874-4925. It would be well to call her in advance because she is recovered from a heart attack. But she has some time and freedom now and might even

enjoy talking about this and she was one of the people who was active at the time when the Chicago Musicland Festival Area and District contests were held in the Friendship Gardens. She helped to coach for instance when they had things like Midsummer Nights Dream and Evangeline produced out there. When we all took our mosquito spray and sat on bleachers on the side of the hill and watched the play while Gabriel went by on this little boat down Trail Creek while Evangeline slept on the island theater. So I would suggest you call and see if you can come sometime. Tell her that I suggested it. She doesn't get up early in the morning but she needs rest so I wouldn't call until after 10. I think that any history that you do of Michigan City now should include more full information about the lighthouse and you can get that information from Mrs. Harris at the museum. You see, when they were concentrating on raising funds for the restoration of the lighthouse there was a tendency to emphasize Harriet Colfax as a rather dramatic little figure of a woman who operated the light for 43 years. She was not the first woman lighthouse keeper, nor the first lighthouse keeper. She was the fourth lighthouse keeper and the second woman. And down at the museum we have a complete list of all the keepers and assistant keepers and the changes that have gone on as the light was moved to the pier and electrified and as fuel methods changed. So, this history of Michigan City's First One Hundred Years that I wrote was done at a time just before we were getting into the real restoration and so I don't have much on that. I wrote this for use in the 7th grade and I don't have a full story of the lighthouse. The lightkeeping service we should say. And I do think that is one phase of Michigan City history that we need to put more attention on. Of course I put in the Appendix of my book a little bit about Hoosier Slide which Mr. Calbert wrote and he did a talk on the glass factory that was at the base of Hoosier Slide for a year before gas was discovered down in Muncie and it became easier to ship sand down there then to pump gas up here. I think the development of the harbor would occupy a lot of time but it may be hard to go through and get all the various changes that were carried out by the government, but the development of the harbor is very important. I think the South Shore has always been very important too, for Michigan City and I don't know how much you have on that.

Radke: We have, I haven't interviewed but someone else has talked to quite a few people who are historians of the South Shore.

Munger: Well, Mr. Hedstrom, do you have

Radke: I think we have

Munger: C. Edward Hedstrom, he gave a talk on it for the Historical Society and I even remember the period of the Samuel Insall period when the South Shore had a dining car on it and we, this must have been around 1929 or something like that. And we could dine while riding to Chicago. Well, you have about the development of the Airports. There's a very little bit about it in my book but I stop my book in 1932. I said I wanted a cut off date that was manageable so I said Michigan City's First One Hundred Years. So anything that took place after 1932 I have only touched perhaps in an Appendix to the book, because, or I probably summarized and pointed out some of the developments of gas and electricity, and road development, city expansion, park development and so on. I remember when they had the Chautauquas here. Has anybody talked to you about the Chautauquas? One time they were held down at the park. Then another time in the playground of Central School. Then, also up at the corner of Lafayette and Detroit where the senior high is today. I remember when I was about 16 I sold tickets for the Chautauqua and

my area and I did a door to door sales campaign went. My area went from 8th Street to 11th and from Franklin Street to Michigan and I really contacted a lot of people. But one of the men at that Chautauqua gave a speech one time on recreation and I still remember what he said. He said I haven't seen them but I know you have beautiful parks scattered all through the city. And playgrounds where the children can play. Of course at that time there was not much aside from sandlots and Zila Square which is the playground of Marsh School and of course the lakefront. Did anyone tell you how Zila Square got its name? Mrs. Marsh, for whom the school was named, was making her will and Martin T. Krueger was her attorney. And he asked her who she wanted to leave her land to because she didn't have children. So he persuaded her, or suggested that she leave it to the school city. And there was that playground back there and he asked about a name and she said Gazila. And he said oh, I think that's a name from the Bible isn't it? And she said well it's the name of my husband's first wife. I think that's a charming story for Michigan City history. Don't forget to contact some of the Syrian Catholics too, of Sacred Heart Church. That church had Reverend Michael Abraham who was a very important religious and civic figure in our town. And anything else I can think of I'll get in touch with you.