

Childhood in Spring Valley, Illinois
an Oral History

Minnie Bryant, Interviewee
Of DePue, Illinois

Interview Date: September 2, 1975

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NARRATOR'S NAME: Minnie Bryant
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DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 2, 1975
PLACE OF INTERVIEW: 2nd E. Lake St. DePue, Ill.
INTERVIEWER'S NAME: Marie A. Claus
FOR: Starved Rock Library System

I: Yes. I'm sorry.
N: That's all right.

I: This is the afternoon of September 2, 1975 in the home of Mrs. Minnie Bryant on the lakefront in DePue, Illinois. And it's 2:45 in the afternoon. We had a problem with the first tape so we'll do better this time. Mrs. Bryant do you mind if I ask you how old you are?

N: Not at all. I was born November the 19th, 1891--1891.

I: Wow. I said you had a long and interesting life, I was wondering if you could tell us about your family and where they came from.

N: My mother and father came from Scotland. I can't tell you the year my father came but he was 19 years old. Mother was 17--or 7 when she came and they went to Shamokin, Pennsylvania, and my father worked in the mines there and then they moved from there to Braidwood, Illinois, and later on they came to Spring Valley. There were five mines here. But he didn't work in the mines after he came here. He wanted to get out and he went into business and then later on he became the police chief there in Spring Valley and they had eight or nine policeman. At that time because there was more or less trouble among the miners and the colored people. Were about the location. The #3 mine cause it was _____ to and-but-there's no trouble among the people in town and the colored people. Just agitators that came in that cause trouble.

I: You mean, miners from the other areas or _____?

N: Just couldn't have been that, that came in.

I: Or was this maybe people trying to form unions and this type of thing?

N: Well, I don't know what they were doing but as a child I remember Carrie Nation being there with her hatchet.

I: Oh?

N: _____

I: She should of had a good time with all of them they had over there.

(laughter)

I: Do you remember- did you ever hear her speak or anything like that?

N: No, no. We were never allowed to go on Main Street and stayed on our own street. When we went to school all the school children would go downtown to the Post Office. See if there was any mail. My father was on the corner and all he had to do was this with out a word to us. We'd get off there.

I: Tell you it's time to leave, huh?

N: That's right.

I: What were your parents name?

N: My father's name was John Steele and my mother's name was Janet Craig.

I: And they came from?

N: Scotland.

I: Scotland. What were some of the things you did when you were a cid. You know, just for entertainment. I know you didn't have a movie to go to or---

N: Well, we did. We had movies. At the end of the week we would go to the movies. It was a nickle, the movie. Went to Sunday school every Sunday and as we got older we would run into diferent class. Finally got as far as the choir and Sunday each one of us were given a nicle. We'd go down, you hesitated whether you wanted an ice cream soda or a bag of peanuts or bojj of cracker jack.

(laughter)

I: That's a big decision. You know, when you got that one nickle a week. It was a lot diferent then what it is now.

N: Oh, yes it is- but we had parties. We could have all the parties we wanted in our home and very few parties we could go to. We were always home at 9 o'clock and whenever the curfu@rang we would play up under the light on the corner and when curfu@rang, why every body went home.

I: You had quite a conglomeration of nationalities at this time.

N: Yes, but on our street. The people up at the mine, the superintendent and those people all lived on our street and shut that off cause,--this sounds boastful but it's not supposed to be.

I: No, no.

N: Grace Jackson's half brother, Bob Ram lived on that street too. And there was a druggist right there and everybody went home as soon as curfew rang and that was it.

I: Did they have a whistle or -----?

N: No, bell.

I: A bell. Everybody had to be home or else. What kind of work did your father do?

N: Well, he was--he had this store. Tea and coffee store and after--and later on, 5 or 6 years became a police man and well he was on _____ and then he went into the harbor coast business on the _____ until he was too old to _____

I: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

N: _____ I've got 3 brothers and 5 sisters.

I: Oh, gee, you all kept him hopping and your mother hopping all the time.

N: Oh, he was strick but he was a lot of fun. He was stern with us but he never whipped us or anything. WNytime he ever hit us or whippe us, he'd take a newspaper and fold it up. You might just as well whipped us with his hand but he never did.

(laughter)

I: I was going to say, how long did you live in Spring Valley before you were married?

N: I was married when I was 21.

I: Did you go to school all your life in Spring Valley?

N: They only had 2 years of high school. We went that far and then we went to

DeKalb two summers and to Normal at that time. Took up courses there.

I: For teaching?

N: Well, mine was classes we didn't have in Spring Valley,

I: Oh, I see.

N: That was when Nell Smith or Kelly and I went up there one summer. She was there when I was there.

I: OH. She traveled from DePue----?

N: Yes, we stayed up there in a supervised home.

I: Oh, I see, and then you came back and you taught.

N: I went back to school and I finished there and took up a bookkeeping course and then they called. Superintendent county schools called for a teacher for a couple of months in DePue and they recommended that I should go and I went there and lasted 2½ years and I got married.

I: Was your husband-----?

N: That's where I met him after _____.

I: In DePue.

N: His father was PRESIDENT OF THE SCHOOL BOARD. I had to go to him for my pay checks.

I: (laughs) Well, you knew where it was coming from anyway. Now what was DePue like when you first moved here?

N: Well it was a small town and all the businesses were on Lake St. because the shipping by lake, of the ice down in St. Louis and later on. Well it would be after Mr. Bryant was mayor and they had the lake dredged. They had shovels come in here and then we had _____ excursions as the lake filled up, why they had to do away with all that. And Br. Bryant tried to get them to open the other end of the lake up toward Marquette and out the Southern end, but that was defeated and also when hard roads were put in, why he got them to pave the roads from out on Route 26 down into town through the

N: And from White City on 26 there and got that road there _____
but the town paid for that I'm sure at least they got them to poor cement
and that part of it/

I: But do you remember when they did all of that?

N: Oh, yes.

I: This was your father-in-law, George.....?

N: George M. Bryant.

I: George Morse Bryant. And your husband was -----?

N: Walter.

I: Walter Bryant and he-and his brother George ran the hardware store?

N: The hardware store, yes.

I: What was----- did you ever take any excursions on these boats at night?

N: Oh, yes.

I: What were they like? I bet they were fun.

N: They were really nice. They went as far as Henry, I think. And came back.

They had dancing and then they had lunches. Lot of people just went for the
rides and then they excursed on the showboats, why half of the town and
country-~~and~~ came down to the showboats. You could hear the calliope when
it came into the mouth of the lake and everybody ran "Calliope is coming. The
showboat is coming" It really was nice and people enjoyed the trips.

I: It was a chance to visit with people and _____.

N: That's right.

I: How long did a trip like this usually take?

N: ~~Imagine~~ it would be 2½ hours or 3. They's stop down at Henry if you'd
want to get off for a little while. Not many people got off.

I: They just made sort of a round trip?

N: Tha's right.

I: I guess at one time the industry on the lake would be iced and the show-

E: boats must have brought a lot of revenue into DePue.

E: Yes and another thing Mr. Bryant tried to do was get a township high school here. _____ wanted to have a football team _____ towns down there and it would have brought in so much money. tuition into this town and because they had students coming from Bureau. _____ students from Bureau came here to high school and Hollowayville, Seatonville and children that were out in the country on the farms came down here to school. But that bill didn't go through and I think they were sorry afterwards that they didn't because they lost all that tuition money to divide up between Hollowayville and PRINcton.

IL Br. Bryant sounds like he was on the hard working Mayors of -----
DePue.

N: He was. And he helped a lot of people and advised them. They'd come to him asking him, well, with there grain, asking if they should hold it or sell it and he'd tell them what he thought was the right thing to do. And when they were building the Congregational Church his daughter was much interested in that and she went up after a meeting and talked to him about it and asked him what he was going to do. He says, "Well, I don't know, let me think this over." She says, " Well, thing of someway you could raise money." Sp a few days later he told her he wanted to see her and she went there. He told her he had been to the bank to see Harry Ream and ask him if he wouldn't give notes to every -body that wanted to contribute to the new church from \$10 and up and would pay so much a month on that note. Well, they raised quite a bit of money that way and he started that , which was a big help.

I: It's and unusual way.

N: Itwas. It was. Then all his salesmen he told them about it and asked then to contribute to it and they contributed a lot to it. And now when the Sun Club was here he told Mrs, Nava if she didn't aske them for money down

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N: there, she was taking care of the meals and her husband was running the gun club, he said he'd ask them so they got quite a bit of money from them. He was a man that went out to help anyone that he could.

(dog barking)

I: Well, was he also running the hardware store at this time?

N: Oh, no. He was over in the elevator buying and selling grain and corn.

I: And his sons were running the business right at this time?

(train whistle)

N: ~~ANN~~ George Bryant, his oldest son got a job on the _____ as a fire inspector _____ he was there four years.

I: I better shut this off.

(tape off)

N: I don't want to lose this train of thought but about what year then was the church built. I think I read somewhere around 1895.

N: I wouldn't have any idea. I can't remember.

I: Well, he was one of the charter members of the church.

N: Mr. Bryant?

I: Mhm.

N: No, I wouldn't say that he was. After they started this fund he became interested in it and they joined the church but they were all members of the Presbyterian church down in Peoria.

(pause)

I: Can you tell me what Mr. Bryant's name was?

N: Elizabeth Andrews.

I: And was she, did you say, what country did she originally come from?

N: Well, she originally came from Brimfield. It's just a short distance from Peoria and then she moved into Peoria.

I: ANd then they both came up here together.

N: That's right.

I: It sounds like Mr. Bryant was quite a worker for the town of DePue.

N: He was. He was always ready to help anyone. He was also a contractor for building and Mr. ~~Tinley~~ did a good deal of the cement work for him and Mr. _____ did all the carpenter work.

I: Well, when you came here then the plant was just starting up?

N: That's correct. I hadn't been here very long because the railroad was coming through. The Rock Island was up there and then they had street cars back and forth for transportation.

I: I was wondering, did Carrie Nation ever visit DePue?

N: Not that I know of.

(laughter)

I: Well, reading through the Bureau County books, DePue had quite an interest in getting the area started. Do you remember ever seeing any of the old Indians that were left in the area around here or any tales of -----?

N: No, I'm possible to young for that.

I: Yes, I know, but I thought maybe you know there had been some tales carried over from you know.....

N: I think I _____ and the Frey's were among the earlier people here and the Tinleys that built that store building and -----

I: You mean the hardware store?

N: The hardware store and MRS. _____ came up to see me one afternoon and she was telling me about the Tinleys. They were very well fixed and the story goes, there's a fortune built in that house up there someplace.

I: Oh, you mean hidden right in the _____.

N: Hidden in the _____ every grandchild has looked _____ that perch and hasn't found it yet.

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I: Did you ever try?

N: No.

(laughter)

N: There's too many holes and places like that.

I: I think that's fun. I never heard that before.

N: Oh, yes. But what kept them out of bothering anybody else down in the basement and up in the attic, looking for the fortune.

I: How did this story get started?

N: Well, they were wealthy, very wealthy people and she said she, Mrs. Tinley very often had balls. She said that they entertained a lot. I don't know what business he was in, Mr. Tinley. And she said that they had many good times in that house.

I: Oh, they lived right upstairs over-----?

N: Yes, they lived right upstairs.

I: Is this the same Tinley that?

N: Tinley Avenue is named after.

I: And I understand that Tinley Park near Chicago is _____.

N: It may have been, I wouldn't know.

I: For him also but you had a lot of kids looking for treasures.

N: That's right.

(laughter)

I: Somebody told me that at one time there was a dance pavilion around here.

Do you know where it _____?

N: Yes, that's right. There was one. It was _____ built that and it would be possibly right here.

I: Oh, where Van Cleves live?

N: Yes, right there, yes.

I: Oh, the corner of 2nd and Lake Street. Did they have band concerts and _____?

N: No, I don't think so. They had dances every so often. See, the engineers and the young people who came in here, they formed sort of a club and might have been private in a way but they had dances every so often. And in those days, you know, you had programs for your dances, not like it is today when you dance with the girl you brought and that's all. You don't dance with anyone else.

I: Well, everybody's dancing altogether anyhow so it's kind of hard to tell.

N: Yes, And then Bosnics had right on this corner -----

I: 2nd what -----

N: That's 1st street.

I: First and Lake.

N: They had roomers and then they had a tavern downstairs. And that eventually moved out of there and they put up these houses and then on the other corner, a tavern on the other corner.

I: Over towards where the VFW is.

N: Not that far over. toWhere the clubhouse is.

I: There were quite a few taverns there, weren't there?

N: yes, there were. I couldn't tell you how many though.

I: What was it like teaching in DePue?

N: I enjoyed it.

I: Did you teach all one grade?

N: All ____ grade and when they'd get to the 4th and 5th, they knew more than the teacher but in the 3rd grade they have to believe everything you tell them.

(Laughter)

N: But I did , I enjoyed but I have always liked children. Maybe because I have a large family at home.

I: Well, how many did you have in your class?

N: Oh, I imagine 34, 40.

I: I would imagine discipline was a lot different then from what it is now for

N: I imagine so. They didn't have as many courses as they have now.

I: Oh. well, like what did you teach?

N: Well there was mostly reading, and spelling and arithmetic and-----

I: No social studies and that kind of thing?

N: No, when I took the teachers examination all the rest of the girls in the class were taking it so I wasn't going to stay in school alone. I went along with them. Hadn't studied for anything- any of the subjects and when I got my grades I had failed in Illinois History and Physiology and so I didn't have Illinois history. One of the things was to locate every Post Office in Bureau County and I had no idea of that and in Physiology I had a lot of questions' about the body and I knew nothing about that. There was one other subject I knew they asked us to describe a moles hind foot. And my idea of a mole's hind foot was the same as his front foot. _____

I: (laugh)

N: I studied the next time and went back to them.

I: That seems like a pretty odd question to ask?

N: There were no hunters in my family so-----

I: Oh, I _____ Do you remember what year this was when you took this test?

N: Well, it would have to be in 1909 because I started to teach down here in 1910.

I: Did you find out how many Post Offices in----?

N: Yes, I did.

I: I could see that question but a mole's hind foot, I just..... (laughs)

N: _____ (laughs)

I: You said you had a high school?

N: Two years , that's all I had.

I: In DePue?

N: No, in Spring Valley.

I: In Spring Valley. What about _____ ?

N: Well it was years later they put the high school here. It was great.

They had two buildings. Marliere Flats _____ and then the other school was an old brick school. The first four grades in a wooden school.

I: Whate the present school is stanging?

N: That's right.

I: Then if somebody wanted to go to high school here before that had one, where did they have to go, to Spring Valley?

N: Either Spring VALley or Princeton and in Spring VALley if you wanted to go on to high school you went to LaSalle and took your last two years of high school there.

I: Oh, then it was quite a bit of travelling.

N: I was.

I: Were there many that went on to high school?

N: Not to many.

I: I was mostly the boys then?

N: Well, there were the girls to but I don't thint that education ment so much to the parents in thase days as it does today. Every child takes it for granted that they are going on to collage.

I: Yes, this is true.

N: _____

I: Oh, I do to. I'm all for that. I understand that at one time in DePue there were a lot of besutiful elm trees here.

N: They were just beautiful.

I: They were really a picture to behold. I know my husband when he was here years ago said was pretty. When we moved back here, there was the biggest difference, He just couldn't figure out where it was and then -----

N: It was that disease, wasn't it?

I: Yes, that Dutch Elm disease. ----- Well, how many children did you and your husband John have?

N: Just Hohn and Shirley. Shirley was the older one.

I: How many years did John run the hardware store here?

N: Hohn never did.

I: Oh, he never did.

N: No, he never did. Just as soon as he could get in the service he went into service. He finished high school. They had 4 years then.

I: This is your son, now?

N: My son John yes/ And he wanted to go into the navy and was rejected 5 times. Overweight one time and worked on the railroad. Well, the last time he'd had an operation as a youngster for appendicitis and the Doctor didn't do a very good job on it and so finally they told us down at Rock Island that if he ever had a blow on that incision, it could kill him instantly. You could put your hand in the hole that he had. So the Doctor done take care of that so they signed him up. He was in from the beginning to the end of the war.

I: Oh, I see. But I was talking about your husband. That was Walter?

N: Walter. Well, he was in the store until he died.

I: It's an interesting building. I just love the place there.

N: It is.

I: I said it's one-I've seen pictures of it. The front of it was a little different but there really isn't much of a change to it over the years.

N: No, there isn't. And the upstairs there are four, well, you say the upstairs there large bedrooms and every bedroom and when the Tinleys were there had a stove up there and then the 3rd floor, that wasn't partitioned off into rooms but there was chimney up there. Evidentially they heated them up at one time.

I: But ~~you don't know what year~~ that was built do you?

N: No, I haven't, well the deed-I think, it would say 1848 or something like that. It's real-maybe the people in the locker would know.

I: It's probably one of the first buildings in DePue then.

N: It probably is but the only treasure ever found in the building I ever knew of when they put the furnace in, they were putting in controlled air. They were putting the vents for the furnace and the livingroom when they cut the hole in there, they found something back in there and they thought sure that was the treasure. Willis Rice was putting in the furnace and it was an old dress that was pushed back in there.

I: An old what?

N: Dress.

I: Oh.

(laughter)

N: AND in the kitchen when they took the wainscoting out they-it was trees they were cutting corners and it was put together with square nails and in-between these trees or 2 x 4's, I suppose they'd be, they found a box, a small box. That's sure was the treasure.

I: Everybody comes running.

N: There was nothing in that. It was an old oyster box.

(Laughter)

I: Those are the only treasures I ever _____ there.

I: Did you ever tell Dean that story about that old treasure in there that _____?

N: David _____ if he wouldn't be afraid to down in the basement. There's holes all over in the basement. That side part was added later. Some one had a tavern in there and they used to use for a beer cellar. I don't thin any of them have ever ventured through all these holes to see if _____.

I: _____. Maybe someone well turn up a treasure one of these days. What were some of the things you did for entertainment when you were a kid?

N: Well, you had your own group and we played cards and we used to go to these dances down at the park. And I was always active in the church. That was all the entertainment we'd need. We didn't have cars.

I: Well, this is true. I was just wondering I talked to somebody and they said their big entertainment on the weekend was taking a walk over the to Seatonville.

N: I never did that. We to _____ The show when they were hear and there were good shows in Princeton and in LaSalle _____.

I: Where--what did you say was across from _____?

N: Well, _____ be across from the school property. That big house the school has.

I: What is that, Angel-----?

N: Roger Harrisons live in that

I: Yes, I was trying to think-----.

N: Well, that was the Banschbach hone. Charlie Banschbach, one of the brothers of the other Banschbach girls and next door to it was a another small house. And the people in there, the onley name i can remember is that Samantha somebody or other. I've asked several people what Samantha's last name was.

I: Hazel _____ might

N: She might know and then there were some--to me they were elderly people.
Two houses there.

I: Well one of them I think, Mrs. Byer might of lived in one at the time.

N: Did she--Samantha Fox.

I: Samantha Fox.

N: That's right. But I can't remember the name of the other people that lived
in the other -----.

I: A lot of these houses are gone now.

N: Oh, yes. They've all been torn down.

I: I was going to say--that it--about what is the oldest house here in DePue?

N: I would say where George Bryant lives that was the Banschbach--either that one
or the Charlie Banschbach, the school property where Roger Harrison lives in.

I: ~~Who~~ did you say lived in the one where George Bryant lived?

N: The Banschbach Sisters.

I: Oh.

N: There were three of them.

I: None of them married, did they all live here together?

N: Millie, the oldest one went out to Denver and she attended the university
and taught school out there until she retired and came back and lived with
her to sisters.

I: One thing about DePue I have never heard such a variety of nick names that
have come out of the town and for the Bicentennial one of the things we want to
do is put all of these nick names into a book because we thought it would be
something to really treasure.

N: Yes, I would think so.

I: I was going to say now give me a couple of real unusual ones maybe I haven't
heard. Isay some of them were really-----.

N: Well, one I don't think I'll ever forget was. Shirley and Lois came home from school one day and they were telling me something about Muscles--I don't know his name but he was a little bit of a fellow but he did have muscles and I asked them who Muscles was. Who they were talking about. They told me and I say ~~him~~ and I thought he's anything but muscles. He worked for the school for awhile. He was custodian over there, I think, But that's really the most unusual one I've heard.

I: Well, I said it must be a tradition here because each class and some of the nick names has carried on from brother to sister or cousin and It just amazes me, you know, that you can get these names all the time.

N: Sure. (pause) You know, Emma Peters might know a lot of history on this town too. Right here on the corner.

I: Yes. I hadn't thought of that.

N: I hadn't thought of it until right now because her folks lived here a long time. And Liddie Turner might know a lot about it. Savages, they were-----.

I: They were one of the original settlers in the area. They Mr. Bryant, you father-in-law, he lived here all his life here in DePue?

N: No, he lived in Peoria.

I: No I meant after he came from Peoria.

N: Oh, yes after that, that's right.

I: I had been under the impression that he had lived in Princeton part of the time.

N: No, he never lived in Princeton.

I: Wasn't that his brothers that started the orchard over there?

N: They are related, yeas. But they were making a family tree of the Bryants and there was on Bruant who left Ireland. They never could find that brother. Mr. Bryant told me that it was his father that left there.

(pause)

I: I knew there were Bryants but I was wondering-----.

N: Poet was one of the-----.

I: You mean William Jennings?

N: Was it Jennings or Cullen?

I: I don't know. I think it was Jennings.

(Laughter)

N: Well, he was one of them too.

I: He was related to _____?

N: Yes, he was related but they could never find out what became of the other one.

I: He just took off and nobody knew where he took off too?

N: But he was in this country and he was a marine and he was sand bagged or something of that sort and Mrs. Bryant took care of him. That's my husband's mother took care of him for a long time.

I: I was wondering during the depression the plant was still over here.

I know the country was hurt really bad but how was things in DePue then?

N: Well, they were really bad. The store was hit badly. They couldn't sell any----- they couldn't get any _____ especially _____

that was the depression of 29 but going through World War I was bad enough then we went into the depression and made it worse.

I: I understand though the plants tried to keep them all and rotated them at least working them a couple of days.

N: They did.

I: I sad, It's hard for me to remember, you know. I remember the aftermath, you know with my parents _____ and everything but I was wondering, you know, I have been told things kept going too. Say, I don't want to tire you out and we'll just kink of close this out for the time being. I hop I can come back and talk to you again.

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N: No on a recorder.

**Beverly Black
Transcriptionist**

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PLACE 305 W. 2nd St
DePue Ill

DATE Sept 2, 1975

Missie Bryant
(INTERVIEWEE)

Mark A. Claus
(for J. R. L. S.)