

**Memories of early DePue, Illinois**  
*an Oral History*

Melissa Harrison, Interviewee  
Of DePue, Illinois

Interview Date: December 7, 1975

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Narrator's Name: MELISSA HARRISON  
Tape Number: 1  
Date of Interview: DECEMBER 7, 1975  
Place of Interview: DE PUE, ILLINOIS  
Interviewer's Name: SUZANNE HARRISON  
For: STARVED ROCK LIBRARY SYSTEM ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Q: 201 Liberty Street, DePue, Illinois. I am interviewing my grandmother, Mrs. Melissa Harrison.

PAUSE

Q: Okay, Grandma, would you tell us your name?

A: Mrs. Melissa Perkins Harrison.

Q: What is your address?

A: What?

Q: What is your home address?

A: 117 Pleasant Street.

Q: Okay. What is your age?

A: Eighty-one years old.

Q: Okay. When were you born?

A: August 13, 1894, Newark, Illinois, Kendall County.

Q: Okay. How old were you when you came to DePue?

A: Twenty-nine. I came down here in November 11, 1923.

Q: How was DePue when you first arrived here? Was it a lot different than Newark?

A: Yes, it was. I thought it was rather a hard place to get acquainted in. And yet I had never lived in a place like this where they had a factory and so many different nationalities. And I -- then I always thought something -- that had something to do with it.

Q: What were some of the different nationalities in the town of DePue when you first arrived?

A: There was Polish, Mexican, Austrian, Serbians, just to name a few.

Q: What do you remember most about the town of DePue that struck -- struck you as very interesting?

A: I thought when they -- it was a dusty town -- the roads were dusty. They weren't fixed like they are to date. I thought the most important thing was -- at that time was the sewer system.

Q: Was it a lot different in Newark? I mean were the streets paved and everything there?

A: Well, yes, we did. We had nicer streets. Now Main Street up there -- two of the main streets are really nice just like they are down in front of our house. Real nice.

Q: What do you remember about the showboat that used to come to the lake?

A: The showboat? I only saw one that came in. That was when Bob was a baby. They had a little difficulty getting in down here.

Q: Do you remember the name of it?

A: Cotton Blossom.

Q: What did the inside of these boats look like?

A: Well, they put the gangplank down so the people could go in and see. It's just like going into a theatre. There was a stage up in front and the seats opened and shut just like a theatre.

Q: About how big were these boats?

A: Well, that's what I -- it was a pretty good sized boat and, I believe, I don't -- you could walk all around the theatre -- where the theatre was -- what they call that? It would be like an aisle. I don't know what you'd call that.

Q: Do you remember much about the ice houses?

A: I remember them down there. I've seen them and they burned.

Q: Was there a fire?

A: There was a fire.

Q: How many of them were there down there?

A: I don't know.

Q: Oh. What about the fish markets?

A: Oh, they had -- there were several. There was Ernest Marliere -- Ernest and Hec Marliere. They were the two at one and Ernest and Hec and Ed Hogler, Ed Powers, and Phoebe Fowler.

Q: Was this these men's major source of income, the fish markets?

A: I think it was.

Q: What did -- did they get the fish out of the lake?

A: Yes, they had net -- they had cages for them down there and then they used to ship them out.

Q: Where did they ship them to?

A: The other fish markets like Chicago and -- they were shipped out to different cities.

Q: Did the lake used to be good for fishing and that?

A: Used to be a lot of fishing done down there. PAUSE . . .some places that time.

Q: About how deep?

A: I don't know but I've heard -- men used to say it was over your head. The business street -- that was paved after I come here. And then there was some new business places that went up. And some of the old places were remodeled and made more modern.

Q: What were some of the different business places up town?

A: Well, there was variety stores, Dobovski's and Feldman, and we had two theatres -- picture shows.

Q: Were there a lot of taverns? As many as there are today?

A: Most of them about twelve or fourteen but I don't know about them. There was two picture shows.

Q: What about -- did they have pharmacies and jewelry stores and that?

A: Yes.

Q: Did they have any drugstores or jewelry stores?

A: Yes, one. There was one drugstore. That's in where or Alma Hoffman is. And then amusements, there was the dancing pavillion that was some summer dancing.

Q: Was that down at the lake?

A: Down by the -- no, it's the clubhouse. And on the west end of the park was the skating rink and that was quite a -- oh, gee, yes, we use to have the carnivals and. . .

Q: Do you remember the carnivals?

A: What?

Q: Do you remember the carnivals?

A: I don't know who they were but I remember they used to come in here pretty regular every summer and so did boat racing and Labor Day.

Q: Do you remember much about the Depression?

A: Not too much, only that it was kind of a discouraging like -- seemed like everybody was depressed and so many were out of work. And I know we had -- we had Mildred and Bob and <sup>we</sup> were having a pretty hard time getting along on what we -- some of the salary, you know. It was pretty hard because we were paying for our home and two children and Ben was

working most of the time and there was some real good friends of his that he used to try to help along but that don't go too much.

Q: Do you -- have you always lived at the home that you live in now?

A: Yes, we lived there then.

Q: Has that always been the home you've lived in though?

A: No.

Q: No? Where did you live before that?

A: We lived in the home across the tracks. You know where -- you know where \_\_\_\_\_ Monnett lives?

Q: Yes.

A: And then the next house is Forest Peterson. Well, you know where Mrs. Kupke lives?

Q: Yes.

A: In the cottage in there. Bill Glover lives there. That's where we started housekeeping. PAUSE We moved over here. PAUSE This wasn't always DePue. It used to be known as Trenton.

Q: How long was it called Trenton?

A: I don't know. It was DePue when I come down here but I've been told about it.

Q: Okay. Do you remember the Interurban line that used to go through here?

A: Yes.

Q: Did you ever ride on it?

A: Yes, just once.

Q: Where was that located at?

A: Right over there close to the Mineral Point Zinc Company on that

right -- close to the entrance to the company.

Q: Was the Zinc Company here when you arrived?

A: What?

Q: Was the Zinc Company there when you arrived in DePue?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

Q: Were there a lot of people employed. . .

A: There were a lot of people working there then.

PAUSE

Q: Grandma, how do you think the town's improved since you first came here?

A: Well, the fifty years that I've been here, there's been a good number of homes, new homes have gone up. We've had two new churches; the school was enlarged -- the public school; and the nice gymnasium.

[Sound of someone closing a door] Who come in then?

PAUSE

Q: . . .the sewer system and that?

A: Oh, just -- there was some new business places.

Q: Like what? What are some of the new businesses?

A: Oh, let me see. Business places. Business places. Well there was Ducey's Place and. . .

Q: And Daugherty's.

A: Daugherty's been remodeled and improved.

Q: You said something about you thought the sewer systems have improved a lot.

A: What?

Q: You said something about you thought how the sewer systems have improved.

A: I don't know much about the system now at all or anything. They enlarged the school, I know. PAUSE . . .built on. PAUSE Living down here for fifty years, I have found the town a nice, pleasant place and nice people.

Q: What do you think of the kids today in town?

A: (Laughs) I'd rather not think about myself. Oh, I don't know -- don't you put that on there. I think the children today -- they don't clamp down on them enough.

Q: How come?

A: They have too many liberties.

Q: Oh yes? Like what?

A: Well, now, you take at home. Now when I was little, we didn't have a television, a radio and if we got to go to a picture show once a month, we were lucky. They don't have the privileges today that -- the -- well, we had basketball games and baseball team but outside of that, there was -- there was nothing.

Q: Did you play basketball or baseball?

A: I played baseball. Never played basketball.

Q: What about football?

A: Just to kick it, not to play football. (laughter)

Janet Kankaala  
Transcriptionist



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PLACE 201 Liberty St.  
DePue, Ill.

DATE Dec. 7, 1975

Mrs. Melissa Harrison

(Interviewee)

Roger L. Harrison

(for Mrs. Melissa Harrison)