

State parks in LaSalle County: an oral history
an Oral History

James Housby, Interviewee
Of LaSalle, Illinois

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Narrator's Name: MARY STACHOWIAK AND JAMES HOUSBY
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Interviewer's Name: FLORENCE CLARKE
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Q: We're at the LaSalle Public Library this evening having a conversation with Mrs. Mary Stachowiak, City Clerk in LaSalle, and Mr. Jim Housby, labor historian for the Trades and Labor and also a city employee. One of the things we've been interested in is the historical background of Starved Rock State Park and both of you have grown up with this. Could you tell us a little bit about it?

A: H: Florence, Starved Rock State Park is an integral part of our state park system. It has rich national and state historical value. The park is located along the shoreline of the St. Lawrence Seaway navigation channel. Most important to its historical approach is its natural, scenic, geographical terrain with its buildings and recreational -- outdoor recreational facilities for over the past 65 years with the changing cycles of time.

Q: One time we told there was a miniature steam engine at Starved Rock. I can't recall that. Do either of you remember that?

A: S: I don't remember too vividly but I think Jim does.

A: H: Yes, Florence and Mary, I remember the little steam -- the miniature steam engine very distinctly. The steam engine -- the railroad circled the swimming pool, and the miniature steam engine was a replica of one of the big engines that would be seen on any railroad. It had a tender; it had a bell, a steam operated whistle and especially the whistle when the whistle was blown, the echo would bounce off the south bluff and being in the valley it gave one the sound that they were out -- out in the mountains in the west. It had the chug-chug as

it started and the choo-choo as it got going. And if I understand and I have got this down through the years from legend that the engine originally operated in Lincoln Park in Chicago and the State Of Illinois procured the locomotive and approximately eight cars and they had it at Starved Rock and I understand it was only two or three year duration. There seemed to be a little conflict; it was so close to the swimming pool and it was something of a pioneer Disneyland.

A: S: I did talk with Francis Conerton who operated the swimming pool at the Rock and he said when he took over the concession, the swimming pool, it had been eliminated. But he said he understood the reason that they got rid of it, it was quite noisy. The people, swimmers, you know. It blew soot and smoke and everything on the swimmers and. . .

Q: Well, for heavens sake.

A: H: Well, Mary, yes now. You've recalled something to my memory. It had like a little platform and that was served at the -- right at the diving board was a kind of a platform that served also as a crossing for the swimmers and I guess that was the technicality that wasn't so -- didn't go so good with the swimmers, Mary.

A: S: Oh, I didn't know that _____ And we had quite a colorful character at Starved Rock; his name was Frank Hart. He was an Iroquois Indian and we affectionately called him Frank the Indian. (laughter) He did enjoy it; he didn't resent it at all and he was a very lovely person and he didn't -- he had a -- a tent -- he lived in a tent back of the swimming pool, as I recall, was it not, Jim?

A: H: Right, Mary.

A: S: Yes, and -- but during this summer, the busy season, he would

set up a tent, like a wigwam, on the lawn over there close to the hotel.

_____ . The hotel was down on the lower part of the park at that time, and he'd sit in front of his little tent cross-legged like an Indian but he didn't dress in the regalia at all. The only thing -- he dressed in civilian clothes -- but he wore a black hat. Do you remember the black hat?

A: H: And the white shirt, Mary, and the blue trousers. (laughter)

A: S: He had a colorful band like in his -- quite a bit like the Indians in the southwest. And he was Iroquois, as I said.

Q: The Iroquois were always the enemy of the Illini, you know. . .

A: S: Yes, I know.

Q: It's interesting an Iroquois should come back here.

A: S: Yes, I was surprised, too, because I talked with Florence Harbeck and I thought he had -- was an Illini that he was a descendant of the -- of the Illinis and she said, no, that he was an Iroquois and she knew him quite well. And I knew -- we knew him quite well; he was a friend of my parents he used to -- I know when I was a little girl we'd go over there and he sat by his tent and he made, oh rings -- he beaded rings and necklaces and bracelets and I think I had every design there was because I was one of his little favorites at the time.

Q: Do you still have them?

A: S: No, I wish I had. I really do. My nieces came along and, you know, over the years you just don't value them like you should.

Q: I remember the hotel and a dance pavillion where we used to go to dance there. Do you recall much about that?

A: S: Yes. Yes.

A: H: Yes, Florence, remember that very distinctly. Prior to the building of the new lodge which was completed on or about 1935 the building locations were about six hundred feet south of the Illinois River and to the west of the Rock, and the big white hotel was the two-story hotel and kitty corner across the street was the restaurant and the big concession stand and there were many other concession stands in the area and there were four cottages south of the concession stand what the employees that worked at the hotel and restaurant which they lived in during the season that the park was open. Now the park at that time and the buildings were located -- this was a high knoll where these buildings were situated. And there were -- most of the people, I would say, that about eighty percent of the people going back in the twenties -- early twenties -- and to the thirties that perhaps eighty percent were people out of the city of Chicago. And what they used to get a big kick out of and something was new -- they called it Hairpin Turn. It was on old Six [Route 6] and then they changed old Six [Route 6] to Route 7 and people thought that was quite a -- a traveling road with Hairpin Turn in -- within the park's horseshoe canyons and it was a dangerous place and, of course, they didn't have the speed as they have today and thirty and forty miles an hour was Indianapolis speed at that time and era.

A: S: That is -- we called it Canyon Drive. (Words not understandable)

A: H: Yes.

Q: Oh, was that the present Canyon Drive?

A: S: . . .from Ottawa up toward Utica, you know, to Route. . .

Q: Wasn't there a dance pavillion with many local bands or did they

have out of town bands?

A: S: They had _____ in the twenties and early thirties when I was going to dances at that time, but as a child I remember going to the Rock. My mother used to just love to sit and watch the dancers and listen to the music and we had -- Bobby Bierman was quite famous at that time and he -- these local bands were kind of going out by the time I started to dance -- go to the dances. We had Wayne King and he was one of our favorites and Guy Lombardo and we had all the popular bands of the day and I remember Perry Como came there one time.

Q: Oh, he did!

A: S: He was with Ted Weems' band and I -- he -- this is amusing. I probably don't know if it's historical but it's amusing. Perry -- we were all waiting for Perry Como to sing. In the meantime he met -- Perry was a barber in -- course I'm very partial to barbers. My husband and boys are barbers but Perry met John Sikes from Utica. Do you remember Johnny Sikes?

A: H: Not personally, Mary, but. . .

A: S: Well, one of the Sikes boys; I think it was John.

A: H: . . .but the name rings a bell.

A: S: And he was a barber. Well, he and Perry got tagged up somehow and somebody saw them walking out in the parking lot with their arms around each other calling each other Brother Brush and he never showed up to sing. (laughter) But he did come at a later time.

Q: I remember we'd go to Starved Rock on the old Interurban and I think -- it seems to me we walked and then took a ferry or something across the river. Do you recall anything about that?

A: S: I think Jim would recall that part.

A: H: Yes, Florence, the Interurban ran from Princeton, Illinois, to Joliet and then there was another Interurban line of a separate company they -- people would transfer and walk a block and then get on this other one in Joliet and go in the city of Chicago to 63rd and Archer Avenue. Well, now we're going back to the Interurban and Starved Rock. Well, approximately three miles east of the city of Utica, the Interurban had a depot and attached to the depot was a concession stand and these were painted white and the Interurban done an overflow business, especially on Sundays and holidays and then to get to the park one -- there was a pedestrian cinder path; it went down say about six hundred feet; you walked down and there was a ferry landing. Now I'm speaking of the twenties and early thirties and a Mr. Hess from Ottawa had the ferry boats and the ferry would take the people over to Starved Rock. And then there were other -- what they called excursion ferries -- this is prior to the building of the dam and the dam wasn't completed till about 1932 but during the early and late twenties, the ferries would go up to French Canyon and it was very -- it was a busy season because water is a very -- very attractive to the public and the scenery was just outstanding.

Q: People didn't drive cars probably. Was there any other mode of transportation?

A: S: Yes, as a child I remember that Mr. Manley, that would be Bill Manley's father. Bill -- I don't know if you know Bill was an undertaker in Utica.

Q: I recall that name in Utica, yes.

A: S: And he had a livery stable right at -- where the present site of the museum is now, that stone museum right by the canal, and he would meet the Rock Island from Chicago. . .

Q: These were horse drawn.

A: S: These were horse drawn. He had two horses on this -- it was a surrey type vehicle and there was long seats that people faced each other and they had the fringe on the top.

Q: Oh, the fringe on the top.

A: S: And it was very colorful. I remember it was painted sort of a sand color and it had a picture of Starved Rock on the outside of it.

Q: Oh, for goodness sake.

A: S: And the horses were very good looking horses and he would meet the train like on Friday or Saturday where people would come and spend the weekend or vacations at the Rock. I think that ferry -- that surrey met the trains almost daily in the summer months.

Q: Did he ever rent those?

A: S: Not to my knowledge. I don't remember that. No, I don't remember him renting them but I remember one of my cousins used to work for him and he'd pick the people up, Ed Neary; you've probably heard of him, Mary, _____.

Q: Oh, yes, that's a name in Utica, the Neary's.

A: S: (words not understandable) my mother was a Neary.

Q: You know we always think of the recreational part of Starved Rock but was there ever any industry carried on there?

A: S: In the park?

Q: Or around that area.

A: S: Well, across the road from the Starved Rock on the -- that would be the west side of the road -- there was on the top of the hill opposite Starved Rock, you come in from Utica, cross that bridge, and up that hill and on top of the hill they did -- there was a clay pit there. That was on my folks' farm and a man from Ottawa, a Mr. George Gleim, owned the land on which the clay pit was but he had an easement to transport this clay across the property that my folks -- my dad did not own the farm but he had worked that farm for years and they -- they would bring this clay by wagon load and they would dump it into a chute. This chute was from the top of the hill. I don't know what -- how big a grade it was and they chute it right down onto the lower part right into practically just a short distance from our home and they had cars like box cars. They'd load this clay into the box cars. I think there'd be about three box cars would be loaded and there was a little -- we called it a dinghy -- a little motor, a train-like that would take this and they had a track and it went right across our property down across the -- right by the field my father farmed there to the Illinois River and there was a ferry boat there and it -- they took the train, the whole bit, and they transferred it into Utica where there was a brick kiln.

Q: That's what I was wondering what use was made of the clay.

A: S: They made ~~the~~ brick.

Q: Oh, they made the brick there.

A: S: They made the brick right there and that -- that evidently was discontinued in the early twenties. I was quite small when they had that, but I remember my brothers -- actually my brothers didn't work there because they farmed but their friends worked there and I've been

trying to get in touch with one of the fellows, the only one I think that I would know that was left that had worked there would be Hobart Payne from LaSalle. He lives on Fourth and Wright. But evidently Mr. Payne is out of town because I couldn't get him but he could really give us the name of the company that -- although Mr. Gleim owned the whole business. He owned the clay pit and all. And right now this -- they tore this brick -- this kiln down. They tore it down years and years ago but it's the sight of the little recreation park in Utica, the Carey -- Carey Memorial Park. And it's -- they hold picnics down there and their pig roasts and all in it.

Q: LaSalle had a brick factory, too. The present Lincoln School, some of the brick in that, was really made in LaSalle but I think that's quite interesting. You know the canyons are so beautiful in Starved Rock. You were curious about their names. There's one that's called, is it Horse Thief?

A: S: Horse Thief Canyon, now that would be on the -- our property -- my folks' property, yes. That would be across the road from Starved Rock and at one time they said it was one of the more beautiful canyons in the area. Of course I never got too close to it, it was . . . (laughter)

Q: Why Horse Thief though?

A: S: Well, there was a secret passage; it was very steep cliffs but there was a secret way to get down in there and they said the, oh, settlers and the Indians, whoever stole horses took them down into this canyon and painted them and resold them.

Q: Oh for. . .

A: S: (laughs) So that's where it got the name.

Q: (words not understandable) Horse Thief Canyon.

A: S: It does have another name. I believe it is Curtis Canyon. I think that's what it -- its right name but they don't advertise that anymore because too -- it's all grown up with brush and timber and all.

Q: Do you know of any other -- of course every park has a lover's leap.

A: S: Oh, yes. (laughter)

Q: Why French Canyon? I don't know why that's called that. I've never researched it.

A: H: Well. . .

Q: It would be interesting to research it.

A: H: I presume, Florence, that perhaps, of course, we do know that we had many French explorers through the area and, psychologically, I think it was based on that.

Q: How about the motion pictures. Someone told me once a motion picture I don't recall who it was in it. Do either of you?

A: S: I wish I remembered more. I said a person should really. . .

Q: That's why we're taping this so we'll have it.

A: S: And when I was -- I was -- it was probably about 1916, I believe, or 1917 they made a western picture at Starved Rock and my folks, living across the road from the Starved Rock entrance, they kept their horses and a lot of their stuff in our barn and in our yard and the child star at that time was Mary Miles Minter. Yes.

Q: Oh, I remember her.

A: S: And she was very beautiful; I just couldn't quit looking at her and my mother wouldn't let me get too close outside; she was afraid they were going to steal me. (laughter) I don't know why they'd want me when they had Mary Miles Minter.

Q: I should say they would be fortunate to have you, Mary.

A: S: So -- but she was very beautiful with the little banana curls, you know, and I thought oh I was one of those with the straight black hair.

A: H: Well, Mary, your dog Spot played a prominent role in the picture.

A: S: Yes, he -- we had this little dog; it was not a very tall, not a very large dog, probably a mixed breed a little black dog and he had a couple white spots on his body and he was just so busy when those people from the motion picture company were there. He rode up the canyon with them one time. We went to see the movie and we sat there just thrilled to see our dog. (laughter)

Q: That was a wonder!

A: S: He was in about ten different scenes. (laughter)

Q: OH? Be an ideal place to shoot a movie or a western, wouldn't it?

A: S: It was. The scenery is beautiful even -- even -- even in Starved Rock also but in the -- in the area where my people lived, now of course they don't farm; that place isn't farmed anymore. They have a riding stable there after my mother passed away and now they have right about the area where that clay pit was that park they have this White Oak swimming -- camp ground and swimming pool.

A: Oh, that's where it is.

A: S: That's where it is. And that is, I guess, very beautiful over there.

Q: Is that a private camping place?

A: S: No. No, you can -- I imagine for a fee you can go in. I know my daughter-in-law and her children go over there swimming.

Q: I can remember horseback riding through the trails there. There must have been a stable where we rented horses.

A: S: Yes, that was formerly my folks' farm.

Q: Oh, was it?

A: S: After my mother -- my father passed away in 1929 and my mother stayed there just a few more years and after that the owner -- the owner of that property was Rector Hitt, an attorney from Ottawa, died and some of his heirs took it over and they are the owners of that property right now.

Q: We could go on endlessly about Starved Rock; it's fascinating but we were talking -- Sunday we were out riding and went past Buffalo Park, -- Buffalo Rock State Park. . .

A: S: Oh, yes, we've got a lot of tape.

Q: . . .and we were wondering how it got its name and do you remember anything about (words not understandable)?

A: H: Yes, Florence, Buffalo Rock State Park was deeded over from the Crane family, makers of plumbing equipment and so forth; they were manufacturers and they had a big home that set up on Buffalo Rock and it had approximately twenty rooms and the building, if I recall distinctly, was made out of stone and wood and during the summer months, vacationing season, I would say there were hundreds of different people would rotate a continuity of guests would come there. They had maids and they had chefs, so on and so forth and there was a large family circle of the Cranes and then they had a big business relationship, they had many friends and many relatives, and, if I recall right, sometime in the late thirties it was deeded over to the State of Illinois and now it's

in the state park system.

Q: That's very interesting. I heard about a Motor Inn Island. Is that part of Buffalo or Starved Rock Park or just ~~where~~ was Motor Inn Island?

A: H: Motor Inn Island, Florence, was out in the middle of the river directly across from French Canyon and it no longer exists. On the completion of the lock and dam on or about 1932, the island was -- the trees were all sawed down, the brush was cleaned up and now it's part of the navigation channel but Motor Inn Island has a great historical past. About 1914 there was a Captain Ballard; he had been the -- a river captain on the Ohio and Mississippi and Illinois and they had built this hotel on the island and the hotel had about sixteen rooms and coming back from his, psychological point of view being a river man, he named the rooms after states that bordered the Illinois or the Ohio. . .

Q: Oh, isn't that interesting.

A: H: . . .or Illinois Rivers. And it was and they -- and on the first floor, I remember that distinctly, I was only eight years old at the time and some of my folks hunt ducks and they camped two weeks in 1919 and approximately two weeks in 1920 on the island. And this hotel still was intact. The first floor was an elaborate saloon and the second floor was the hotel. And they had -- it was a pioneer Las Vegas is what it really was from 1914 to 1918 over a period of four years. Well, they had roulette and they had dice and cards and they had the old Dewey slot machine and, Mary and Florence, you ought to remember the old Dewey slot machine.

Q: I never heard of it.

A: H: It looked like a big Victrola and instead of pulling the handle

on it they turned a wheel and what some fellows that would play that machine the average of them, I think, was a quarter in the Dewey machine at that time; they would hire someone with good, big and strong arms and they would spin this wheel for them. . .

Q & A: S: Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhh.

A: H: . . .and see if they -- the digits came up just like the regular modernized slot machine with the fruit on it. And I seen -- well, I seen prior to that but they had two or three in the building and today they would be a real -- a real antique. And they had Dewey's picture electrified and a picture on the outside and they were made on a very good wood perhaps walnut, a very expensive wood.

Q: Well, would the guests from Starved Rock go over to this place to gamble? Gambling's what it was.

A: H: I presume that there were stragglers that got over there.

(laughter)

Q: How would you get out to it?

A: H: Well you had to be a good swimmer, Florence, mostly a boat, mostly a boat -- you had to have a boat to get out there but from what I've learned prior to World War I, I don't think there were too many guests at Starved Rock. One reason was they never had the mode of transportation that they had in later years. Now that's just my supposition on the theory. But starting right after World War I Starved Rock became a -- an outstanding recreational paradise of a park and many people would come from all parts of the country and stay at the old hotel and also they do that today at the modern lodge.

Q: Oh, yes, it's very popular. We're fortunate to have such -- be near

such a beautiful park.

A: S: We haven't gone into Deer Park at all.

Q: (words not understandable)

A: S: That's my old stamping ground.

Q: I notice you call it Deer Park.

A: S: Yes, I knew it as. . .

Q: And the correct name is -- so did I. I still call it Deer Park and it's Matthiessen.

A: S: Matthiessen. The -- the side that the tourists go in, you know, the -- off of Route 178; of course if you go in through the old entrance, that would be on Route 6 that would be the golf club.

Q: Well, I recall as a child going over to Deer Park on the work train. We went at 6:30 in the morning on the "Q" [Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad] and then I'd get over there and write a postcard to mail at home because I thought I was in Europe when I was far away and they had a swinging bridge which I delighted in but I was frightened to death. Do you remember the swinging bridge?

A: S: I remember them talking about it. Of course I lived right in the area and I would never -- I had no occasion to use it or -- but I remember them talking about it.

Q: That was originally the home of the what -- Matthiessen and Blow family. And then I think I remember when it was deeded over to the State of Illinois; Dwight Green was governor. . .

A: S: He was the governor, yes.

Q: . . .and came here to accept.

A: S: Accept, yes.

Q: And the Matthiessen home is still standing there.

A: S: Yes, and there's a class of students at L-P [LaSalle-Peru] that are trying to make that a project for the Bicentennial year just get enough money to restore that mansion. Vandals broke in and they smashed a lot of stuff.

Q: I know one of those boys that he's so eager and he asked me if we could find a picture of it and Mary Dillon who was with the family for a long time told him much about it and had pictures of it. It's a shame that a building like that isn't saved.

A: S: It's very historical. Course the _____ out there.

PAUSE

A: H: Florence, I only finished half of your question. Well, getting back to Motor Inn Island, their trade came mostly by the Interurban. There were very few cars from 1914 to 1918 and what some would do and I got this story direct from some of the old-timers, they would drive down to the -- there was a farmhouse where the Interurban car had a -- I recall _____ in later years they had a little depot there for the entrance to go down to Motor Inn Island and Motor Inn Island also had a cinder path was very similar to Starved Rock's cinder path to the ferry. Well, they would walk down -- they get off the street -- Interurban line or they would come in and give their horses over livery to the farmer and they would walk down the center path and they had a post and a big farm or school bell was on this post and a rope and they would ring this -- keep ringing this bell and then they had a motor boat; they also had rowboats them days over on the other side and an attendant would come over and pick them up. Very interesting.

Q: Was gambling against the law then or anything illegal about it?

A: H: Well, I presume it was at that time but if things were -- I don't think unless there were registered complaints that the authorities went overboard to do any stopping but it was just one of those things and of course they were back in the wilderness but of course they had to have the people but I guess it was one of those things they subject to arrest if they were caught.

Q: For a long time liquor wasn't sold or served at Starved Rock until I don't know just not too many years ago.

A: S: Just beer is served right -- well, at the lodge. . .

Q: At the lodge?

A: S: Yes, you can get cocktails at the lodge. . .

Q: You can now but at one time. . .

A: S: No, you couldn't even get. . .

Q: Is -- was that a state. . .

A: S: It was a state law that there couldn't be any liquor of any kind in state parks. Because I know when -- just shortly before my husband was made custodian of Matthiessen State Park back in -- in the forties, late forties, just before we got over there they allowed the state parks to have beer and we sold beer in the concession stand over there.

Q: That's very interesting.

A: H: Florence, I would like to elaborate a little more on the swimming pool at Starved Rock.

Q: Oh, yes, I went in there many times. I have very pleasant memories of the swimming pool.

A: H: Well, the swimming pool was located south of the main hotel and a little to the east and it was also located in the valley and at the base of the south bluff. Now the swimming pool was a large pool, very fine pool of its day. It was -- there was concrete around the pool that circled the pool and in the middle they had a circle of concrete and then inside the circle, they had sand which served as a beach for the bathers and the beach house was to the west and it faced east; it faced the pool and, as we stated before, this for about two years this locomotive and its cars run passengers around the pool. And I can recall distinctly it was perhaps in the early thirties when the pool was discontinued because it didn't have the facilities that were essential to public health and naturally the state closed the swimming pool with the supposition they were going to build a modern one but there's -- it's still on the drawing board.

Q: That's very interesting. In Deer Park, too, a great attraction has been the country club there where one can play golf.

A: S: Play golf, yes.

Q: And that's a . . .

A: S: Beautiful -- it's a beautiful place. Of course I don't know about the golf course anymore; it's probably not as modern as . . .

A: H: Well, about Deer Park I can recall I never had a golf club in my hand but I can recall Walter Hagen and some outstanding champions of the day over at Deer Park and Vince Diamond, Stuart Duncan, they were in a position and they invited some of the outstanding pros of the day.

Q: Well, that's interesting.

PAUSE

A: H: Mary and Florence, there are some very supplementary statements that we bypassed first. Now going back to the garage at Starved Rock which the Harbeck family operated from about 1916 to about 1924 and I also -- our mutual friend Clayton Harbeck also informed me that Mr. Manley on or about 1921 modernized from the two-horse surrey to the Velie busses and of course that was very modern in its day.

Q: Was the Velie bus motorized? A Belie bus?

A: H: A Velie bus.

Q: Horse-drawn?

A: H: No, no, motorized. The Velie was an automobile name, a big square back the Velie with Overland in its day; it was one of the pioneers with Buick, Studebaker, Essex, Hudson, so on and so forth and then I recall distinctly the garage that the Harbeck family operated. There was a red gasoline hand -- which was pumped by hand to fill cars and if a car them days took ten or fifteen gallons it was really a big car. Tanks weren't too big; the average tank was -- the Model T had a nine gallon tank and the average had ten to twelve.

A: S: After Clay [Clayton] Harbeck gave that garage up Francis Conerton from LaSalle operated that garage.

Q: Did he?

A: S: Francis -- and he also operated the swimming pool.

Q: And then Francis Conerton operates the boats right now, doesn't he?

A: S: He did, now they've discontinued the boats.

Q: It happened just this year though. . .

A: S: Just this year.

Q: . . .because we took a boat trip. Well, the Conerton name had been associated with that for a long time.

A: S: Yes, they have. Francis' father was a state representative.

Q: OH.

A: S: Well, Clayton Harbeck was also.

Q: I was going to ask you was Clayton Harbeck a sheriff?

A: S: He was a sheriff.

A: H: Three times wasn't he, Mary?

Q: Oh, three times.

A: S: He was a Republican sheriff and a Republican representative.

A: H: Treasurer, too, I believe, if I'm not mistaken.

A: S: I don't know if he was a treasurer or not, and Mr. Conerton and of course he was the Democratic (words not understandable).

Q: I remember for years (words not understandable) served his country there, too.

PAUSE

A: S: That reminds me of the old swing bridge at Utica over the Illinois River and my brother Ed Flynn was the bridge tender and at that time they didn't have -- this was in the early thirties, late twenties and early thirties. I think he had the job for seven or eight years and he had a little business in Utica and when the barges would be approaching the Utica bridge, the bridge tender -- there was a regular bridge tender out at the shipping support bridge -- he'd phone my brother in Utica and he would get three or four old fellows and they would go down and they had a huge key, a large key and it fit down into a receptacle on the bridge and they would just have to turn that bridge

by just going around keeping that. . .

Q: Manpower.

A: S: Manpower and it was something, but I know Ed was stranded out on that bridge one time; he went down alone; he couldn't get anyone and so they called him and he went down and he opened the bridge and the span was open for about half a day and he was marooned out on the river until they could get someone down from Joliet to get that span back and it was quite a cold and raw day and he caught a terrible cold; I remember that much but it was -- it was something to really to see.

Q: And that was replaced by. . .

A: S: It was replaced, oh, and in the 1940's when they dedicated the Father Marquette Memorial at St. Mary's Church in Utica they had a mass down in the field near Utica and then this big memorial was right on the lawn of the parish house on Johnson Street in Utica. And Governor Stevenson and a bunch -- several dignitaries were going across the bridge and just at the time they had to swing the bridge and he was on one of the spans there and the thing swayed and swung and we had been wanting a bridge so badly and had been petitioning Springfield and he said, "If I ever get off of here safely," he says, "I'm going to see that Utica gets a new bridge." (laughter) It wasn't too long. I don't think it was in his administration but shortly afterwards.

Q: So that's how Utica got the new bridge. That's one way of getting it.

A: S: That's how Utica got the bridge, yes. (laughs)

A: H: Well, yes, Mary, I recall the old swing bridge had a big year, as you said, and it took that key to move it and they were skeptical

during winds and moving that span because they were very skeptical that that would drop into the river and as navigation progressed on the Illinois River then they had to have three shifts of lock tenders with a swing shift and then it was mandatory that they replace it and which they have replaced it with the present bridge today.

Janet Kankaala
Transcriptionist

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January 16, 1976

Mrs. Mary L. Stachowiak
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Dear Mrs. Stachowiak,

We wish to thank you for the Oral History tape which you made with Jim Housby and Florence Clarke recalling early days of Starved Rock Park and surrounding area.

This taped interview is being processed and soon will become a part of the Starved Rock Library System collection. At this point we have 45 tapes available through your local library which have been processed.

We encourage you to make use of the Oral History collection of the Starved Rock Library System as it affords an exciting way in which to learn of our past and our present from those persons like yourself who have taken part in the making of a history of our people. Your personal contribution has made this collection possible.

If you have any questions or comments on the Oral History project we would be most happy to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Helen E. Hayner

Helen E. Hayner
Coordinator - Oral History Project

HH

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