



Celebrating 150 years of life in Lansing

VOICES OF LANSING
Memories of the City

By the Lansing 150 Celebration and the MSU American Studies Program

Acknowledgements

In the spring of 2008 a committee convened consisting of Lansing Rotary Club members and community leaders who demonstrated an expertise in local history. The purpose was to work as part of the Lansing 150 Sesquicentennial Celebration, providing historical content for the year long anniversary. Among many projects the idea for this oral history program came from author and retired MSU Arts and Letters professor, Marilyn Culpepper.

Committee members volunteered their time interviewing select longtime Lansing residents from a variety of backgrounds. It would not have been done without the stalwart effort of Marilyn Culpepper, Mary Jane McClintock Wilson, Bill Dansby, Christy Nichols and Polly Schwendener.

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A single regret stands that a most excellent interview with Eugene G. Wanger was lost due to technical problems. Mr. Wanger deserves several interviews. For the enrichment of the community; hopefully we can persuade him to favor us with another chance to document his memories.

David Votta

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West Ottawa Lansing Women's Club in 1954

Whenever one thinks of activists for women's rights in Lansing, certainly the first name that comes to mind is Gladys Beckwith. Not only did she help found the MSU Women Studies program, she also founded the MI Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame. Gladys served as the director of the women's historical center from its beginning in the early 80s to her semi-retirement a few months ago.

The Michigan Women's Historical Center and Hall of Fame is a project of the Michigan Women Studies Association. And we were organized on the MSU campus, actually, by five members of the Department of American Thought and Language. And that was way back in 1972. And, for about 6 or 7 years, we operated in the same way that most academic organizations operate; that is, we did an annual conference and published a newsletter. Our aim was to provide a place where people who were teaching in this new discipline could come together and share our research, and we also, in our conferences, hoped that we would provide a place where young women scholars could present their materials. Well, we did that for about seven years, and then we really wanted to move off the campuses. That was part of the philosophy of Women's Studies; that it was off-campus working in the community, and sharing the research that academics did with the broader community. And then we also, as part of that, we would be enriched by what was going on in the broader community. And that was kind of a goal in feminist education. And that's how we saw ourselves, and still see ourselves today, as feminist educators.

We talked a lot about it, it seemed kind of hard to accomplish, but then low and behold, right here in the city of Lansing, this historic house, the Cooley Hayes House, there was a great brouhaha about that, because our then-mayor, Jerry Graves, was bound and determined that he was going to tear that house down and also dig up all of Cooley Gardens and make there, what do you think, a splendid parking lot. Well, we didn't want that, the city, many people of the city did not want that, Lucille Belen, who was in chair of the council, certainly did not want that. In fact, we owe a lot to Lucille, because she counted her votes and she knew she had the votes there to overcome Jerry Graves. So, we were able, then, to get our lease from the city of Lansing, two short-term leases to begin with, and then a long-term lease on the Cooley Hayes House, contingent upon our ability to renovate this house and bring it up to code. And it was structurally sound, but it needed an awful lot of work. It required about a quarter of a million dollars to renovate it. At that time, we had, in our treasury \$900, and a lot of faith, I guess. But we were lucky, though. The city took the house for \$125,000, which was dedicated to the renovation of it, and Oldsmobile took the land for the parking lot. So the city let us have access to the \$125,000, although we had to raise matching money. It took us five years to raise the money, two years to do the renovations, and we opened June 10, 1987, which was the anniversary of the year that Michigan was one of the first 3 states to ratify the federal suffrage amendment. And every year, right about that time, we have our picnic on the lawn, which kind of commemorates that.

Our intent was, and still is, to influence education and get material into the curriculum

of our public schools, junior colleges, colleges, about women. So we have held a number of conferences. Two years ago we had a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities and brought English teachers, that was Katie Cavanaugh who did that and her sister Shane, to the center for a summer workshop. Katie also interviewed women veterans of WWII as part of the veterans' history project, and we partnered there with the Library of Congress, and those tapes are filed now with the Library of Congress, but we also have them down at the Center. So that certainly was a significant achievement in terms of the preservation of the history of our state.

We do exhibits, of course; we're about to open a new one very soon our art gallery. The Shabazz Academy is showing some of the work of their young students for African American history month. And last year we did women lighthouse keepers that I think has never gotten the recognition it should have. Pat Major, who is our assistant director, is now working on an exhibit on women environmentalists in Michigan. Katie Cavanaugh did "We Can Do It" and "A Few Good Women" about the Rosies, and women, again, in WWII. And then most of our exhibits are then made into traveling exhibits so they can travel around the state to various museums and other sites, and that is a way we have of continuing our ongoing education. We have also done publications. And then of course we have the hall of fame induction, which we do every year. We are opening nominations right now, this will be the 26th year, and we have inducted over 200 Michigan women, both contemporary and historic. And these are wonderful role models for young women, really remarkable role models. We view this as one of our more significant accomplishments. Right now, we are in the final stages of doing a documentary, it's going to be an hour-long documentary, on the development of the center and some of the women who have been inducted into the Hall of Fame. So that's what we're working on now, what we're working on for the future.

Tony Benavidez, a long-time Lansing resident, discusses his relationship to Cristo Rey, his memories of Lansing and Lansing today.



Photo by Tony Benavides of a jalapeno eating contest when he was Director of Cristo Rey

We came in 1952 from Mexico straight to Lansing, Michigan with my mom and dad and another brother who was younger than me. He served in Viet Nam. He was a Viet Nam veteran. So those are the two. Then of course, I had eight other brothers here, brothers and sisters, so there were ten of us all together. My first job was helping my mom and dad work in the fields at Stockbridge in the migrant camps simply because both my mom and dad and two sisters did not speak English and therefore the only work they could do was in the migrant fields and the farms and so I went to work for them and I was with them until I was almost eighteen years old. So I was fifteen years old when I came to the United States, June 13, 1952. It is interesting you talk about back in the old days I had when I went in we had English second language back then and I used to sit on the table with a Chinese, a Greek, and another one, I can't remember what the other one was, and all together and we learned how to speak English through actually coloring books and they would show us the coloring books and they would have the car and the house so we would learn that way.

After I started school, I looked for a job and I got myself a job at the YWCA running the elevator up and down to the tenth floor. It is no longer there but it was very, very interesting. It was like 60 cents an hour, something like that. Then after that, about a year later, see one of the things that the school district told me, the counselor told my brother that if I learned how to read and write and do math and I knew what was go-

ing on in the classroom that they could promote me and they said if he can learn that, if he can learn the language we can move him up and they finally did, but I was still twenty years old when I graduated from high school at J.W. Sexton in 1957.

I got married in 1958 and we were very active as a young couple in the church Cristo Rey Church, Cristo Rey Catholic Church which is now on Miller Road. But at that time it was on St. Joseph Street right across from Motel 6, Motel 8 I think it is. Cristo Rey was relocated to north Lansing, then it became a community center instead of a church. I was working for Schmidt Brothers, a grocery store, which is now the L&L's and at that time I applied to be the director. I was thirty-one years old. I went there with the idea that I would be there for three years and it ended up being thirty-three years.

When I first started looking at the changes and when I-496 went through everyone there had to relocate back into other parts of the city. It is very interesting that the majority of the people that live in that corridor where I-496 went through are over here in the south end of Lansing on the other side of Holmes Road here. It was very, very interesting. So that is one of the things that really changed Lansing. Then of course MLK now, Logan it used to be then, it used to be two lanes and they made it into a boulevard. All south Washington where REO town was, the RE Olds Museum, and all of that in through there and Baker Street and all of that had changed because I remember going to dances when I was a teenager at the REO club house and I remember so well Mayor Murningham being the mayor at that time and coming over and checking things out with us. It was very, very nice. And of course you know the Woman's Club House was another one that is now the Michigan Retailers Association that used to be the Woman's Club House which was built by the RE Olds people. We used to go to dances there as well. When we moved into north Lansing over there and you had all the bars on Grand River, Turner and all of that. Because when we first married in 1958, we rented an apartment with my wife's mother and father, the upstairs. They were downstairs, and all the bars were there. There was no Ferguson's townhouses. There was just the Grenadier, the Mustang what is the Unicorn now.

My brothers and brothers-in-law made their living out of GM plants, out of the auto industry and with the auto industry being gone now, that is really devastating for the City. The auto industry brought in a lot of people from all over the country. One of the things that I am very proud about Lansing being so diverse. We have a lot of ethnic people here that are Hispanics, Blacks, Indians so the opportunities that we had back then in education and the opportunities of getting a job was one of the main things. I did a survey while I was at Cristo Rey that we asked what would you say the main problems of the Hispanic community. Those being education, employment, health, housing and credit, in that order. With Lansing's future depends on jobs and education and the diversity we have in Lansing. So right now to think that there is no jobs for the youth. We incurred quite a few homeless as well. We don't have Oldsmobile, we don't have Fisher Body. Those plants are gone. I think that basically Lansing is a very good city to live in. It is very clean, very low in crime and I think we are doing wonderful. But there are changes and we see them coming all the time.

Jean Chamberlain was born in Lansing. She and her husband, Clark, who died several years ago, grew up and went to school here. Both have been active contributors and supporters of the Lansing community in many ways. Jean has watched Lansing grow and change and has fond memories of its early days.

We only had one traffic light. A man sat up in a booth and directed the traffic. It was in the early days of the automobile. I was born in 1917. My mother was born in 1885 in Lansing, so I remember all the stories she had to tell about her early childhood, too. My grandparents lived at 909 West Ottawa Street, which wasn't far from town. Ottawa was paved with brick. It was paved with brick up to Logan Street. And also, when Billy Durant came to town and built the Durant Motor Works, which later became Fischer Body, that street was paved in brick, from Michigan Avenue over to Saginaw Street. And people who bought cars in the early days would go up there and drive their cars up and down that wonderful street, because so many streets were just dirt streets in those days. And my mother would take me on a sled down Ottawa Street and leave my sled, a beautiful sled, with a picture of a poinsettia on it. And then we would go over to the Oakland Building across from the Capital.



Durant Motor Works

The City Hall backed up to it on Ottawa Street. And we would see a performance at the Bijou Theatre. That was in the Oakland Building, which was considered quite a building in its day. It was considered one of the finest and one of the oldest buildings in Lansing. It burned down in a tragic fire and later, the Hotel Olds was built on that corner. I've often thought about that; I'm glad I had a chance to see it when it was still there. And I remember one day the curtains opened on the stage and in walked... Ed Winn with his horse for his horse to be shod, and that was really a comedy act; that was interesting. And the other act I remember there was Edgar Burgin in the early days when he was planning to be a, well he was a ventriloquist, but he was also a magician, he did card tricks. But he had a dummy but it wasn't Charlie McCarthy in those days. And there is where I also saw one of the very early black and white movies. It was *The Gold Rush* with Charlie Chapman. We combined the movies with the vaudeville in those days; it was a transitional period. My grandmother always talked about Baird's Opera House, later known as Buck's Opera House because Buck across the street, had the Buck's Furniture Store, which was considered the finest furniture store in Lansing at that time. Behind Buck's was the first funeral chapel in Lansing.

And, of course, later on, Mr. Stahl, who owns Stahl's Hardware, in that block on Washington Avenue, had a beautiful toy store on the second level. And the window that

faced Washington Avenue was a stained glass window that said, "Toys." And inside that toy window was a dollhouse, and you would go upstairs and walk into that dollhouse. And if I went downtown with my mother, that was always the highlight. And to see that, well, Mr. Stahl decided to buy with a friend the Buck's Opera House and changed the name to Gladmer. And the old Sugar Bowl was in that block. We could walk in there, there was beautiful mahogany. Places we could sit and have sodas, you know, and I think Kositchek's is the only store that still remains in that block.



Oakland Building Bijou Theater



*Stahl's Hardware
circa 1936*



Waverly Park

We could go everywhere on a street car when I was a little girl. We could go to Michigan State College, Agricultural College in those days. And on Abbot Road the trolley would turn around and come back downtown. We could go to Potter Park, and Pennsylvania Avenue was wide because the streetcar would go down the middle of the street to Potter Park. And we had streetcars that ran to St. John's in the north and to Jackson in the south. They were called Interurbans. But transportation was so different in those days. And really, very good transportation. What we call Lake Lansing was Pine Lake, and that was an adventure to go out there to Pine Lake.

My mother, of course, had lots of memories of that and taking that little steamboat up the river to Waverly Park, from the foot of Logan Street up to Waverly Park. She often talked about that. I think there was even a rollercoaster there in those days, but that was before my time. And she talked about skating on the river, too. My mother was always very proud that she was born and raised in Lansing.

Eva Evons, retired from the Lansing School District, served as deputy superintendent for instruction, and before that assistant superintendent for planning. Eva came to Lansing more than forty years ago and has done most of her career with the Lansing School District.

I think unions have played a larger role in education, both good and bad. Good for teachers who deserved some protection under the law, and sometimes in the face of possibly the citizenry who serve education. But I have seen great changes in instructional procedure. There was a time when educator types thought that they could make the classroom, quote unquote, "teacher-proof." That means that children went to boxes of programmed information, selected a piece, went to their desk, completed it, returned it to the box, and someone corrected it. But we learned over time that the science – there is a science in education, as well as an art in education – it required a living, breathing adult in a classroom, because, after all, school is a teacher in a room with children. Everything else supports that activity.

When I came to Lansing, the school district had completed the process of desegregating its junior and senior high schools even though it caused some consternation in this community. That was in the early 60s, 65, 66, 67. They then began the process of desegregating the elementary schools, which caused even greater consternation in the Greater Lansing Community. As a matter of fact, Lansing went through groups who formed themselves as anti-desegregation groups. The ones whom I remember most vividly, one of them was elected to the school board. And five of my friends were recalled for their efforts in the desegregation of elementary schools, one of whom was, and remains, a very dear friend of mine. I remember that Lansing decided that it would not go the way of some communities in Michigan, that Lansing had responsible people who would not burn buses, who would not line out on the street to protest school desegregation. I can remember the League of Women voters and their great role in that effort. Others, I recall, coming to school board meetings and loudly and vigorously protesting. I recall some of them grew to be supporters when they were elected themselves to the school board, to learn that children are children. I think that we have gotten past that.

You were national president of Alpha Kappa Alpha, which you've told me was the oldest African American sorority in the United States of America, about 101 years old?

Alpha Kappa Alpha, the love of my life, I have been a member since I was an undergraduate, so it's been a long time. I did serve as the national president last year in Washington D.C. We celebrated 100 years, from 1908-2008. Alpha Kappa Alpha was begun on the campus of Howard University in 1908. 100% college-trained women, many of whose names you would recognize. For example, Maya Angelou is an honorary member, but five of our members when I was president served in the United States House of Representatives. Many of them are physicians and we have lawyers for days. But it's a marvelous organization and I wouldn't have missed it for the world.

Over the years, real estate in Lansing has had a rollercoaster ride of highs and lows. One person who can give us keen insights about real estate in Lansing is Edward Thomas Hacker. Ted was graduated from Sexton High School and MSU, after which he entered the real estate business with his father.

I was in the real estate business for approximately 50 years. And I learned a lot because my father and my grandfather were in the business, and it was just automatic, I guess, that I went into the real estate business, also. When I graduated from Sexton High School in '45 of January, I went into the service in April of '45, got out of the Service in December of 1946. I was a baker in Korea at the time. My first job was being a meter reader for the Board of Water and Light. And I want to tell you a quick story about that. I had this route that I took care of over on the south side of town, and as I was working over there, I found that there was one house that I had to go into and I always knocked on the backdoor, and the lady let me in. So I went down the stairs and, unfortunately, she never told me that there were two steps missing on the bottom of the floor. So when I got into the house, I found that there was two feet of water in the basement, also. Well, I fell of course, and she laughed and laughed and laughed, thought that was just a great story.

Well, let's go on about the changes in the real estate business. My dad told me one of his first subdivisions he put out, it was called Arlington Park, if you purchase a lot, you got a free airplane ride. Lots were up to \$189 a piece, up to \$459, only \$10 down and \$10 a month. Course, you wouldn't be able to do that today because of the liability. But those were some of the things that he remembered back when he first put out Arlington Park. Also, when my dad first started in the real estate business, he went in with his father, called T.W. Hacker and Sons in 1919. They rented a two-room suite for \$17.50 a month. My dad was twice president of the Lansing Board of Realtors and president of the Michigan Board of Realtors in 1929. And for 16 years, he was vice president, first name, of the National Association of Realtors. As you can see, I kind of grew up upon only knowing that the real estate business was the business I had to go in. One of the changes I remember in the real estate business was when we put in the Shaw Estate subdivision, in the 1960s, this anticipated investment in land and buildings was approximately \$40,000 and up. Today it would be more at a minimum of \$160,000 and up. So those were some of the things that I remember, the changes in the real estate business.

I believe that I was in love with subdivisions, and we put on a lot of them, probably between 12 and 15 developments over the years. And you've probably heard about West Chester subdivision; that was built in the 50s, and then Kimberly Downs and Brentwood were in the early 60s, and then in 1964 we developed Shaw State Subdivision. I'm very proud of the fact that my father, Edward G., and my son, Tom Hacker, and myself all served as president of the Lansing Board of Realtors.

Ralph Crego ██████, who served as mayor of Lansing for 18 years. His daughter, Joanne Crego Hacker, has some vivid remembrances of those days. Jo was graduated from Sexton High School and Michigan State University, and later served as assistant to the Dean of Women at Michigan State.

In 1936, my father, Ralph W. Crego, was first elected as an alderman from the second ward in Lansing. He remained on the council and became president of the council. He had a grocery store at the corner of Allegan and Logan, and at one time he had another grocery store on Saginaw Street but said he couldn't run the two stores and be in two places at once, so he sold the one on Saginaw Street. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, and President Roosevelt declared that the second World War had begun. Sam Street Hues was mayor at the time and was called back into the navy. My dad, who was president of the council at the time, became acting mayor, and was elected mayor in 1942. He served almost 'til the end of 1960, the longest time anyone has served this community as mayor. He was also on the Ingham County Board of Supervisors, and he was president of the Michigan Municipal League at one time. During his tenure as mayor, a new city hall was built, four new fire stations, and numerous park buildings.



Mayor Ralph Crego

The State Journal called his term as mayor the most progressive and dynamic in the city's history. We had remarkable growth in programs but also sound fiscal management, which has kept Lansing free of debt, they said. At one time, he was called to New York City to receive an award for Lansing having a triple-A credit ranking. He was on television, which was new at the time, and we saw him. My twin brother, David, was on a committee to form a new student council. Dave won as president, and I was vice president. I earned a B.S. in social work at MSU in 1951. Ted and I were married in the fall, and I couldn't get a job in social work because I had to have a car, and we were lucky to be able to afford one car. So I got a job in the Records Office in the Administration Building at MSU. After a few weeks, the Assistant Dean of Women saw

me there and asked me to be her secretary, so I moved up three flights. It was a fun job, because the fraternities and sororities had to register their parties with me, and I knew most of them. I worked there for 3 years but finally quit to start a family.

Janet Goodell Haley, a native Lansingite, has devoted much of her spare time to volunteer activities. Her husband, Gilbert Haley, was executive secretary of the Michigan Automobile Dealers Association.

In the history and the romance of the automobile in Lansing, Michigan, it's very important that we remember the standards and the way the wonderful Rotary International Club began. And I remember fondly, as a child, school children around Morris Park, little red school house, were out taking care of the horse that delivered the milk, and the little child looked up and said, "Look, look! Look what's coming down the road! And it's not making any noise!" And there was the first electric car, which Mrs. Olds was riding in with a large flowered hat, and she continued on down to the Mars Park where there were two brick pillars, and that was one that Mr. Moore had given Douglas to honor him for his great gift of this beautiful park to the city of Lansing. And that great generosity is akin to the wonderful generosity of the Rotary Club, who gives money for scholarships, and for children, and many, many things through the years. And their wonderful motto is, "service before self," and that has continued all through these 150 years and built such a strong contribution in this club to the city of Lansing.

It all began, it moved on through the years, and many, many cars were different cars. And so they had common challenges and decided that they need to be an association, which began in Detroit but which came to the capital city of Lansing and formed the Michigan Automobile Dealers Association. And they now have a very fine building out in East Lansing where there is much, much going on, which is helping to build and continue the industry. So I can't say enough about Rotary and what they have done, and how the automobile impacted all of our lives. It helped people get to Rotary meetings, and to get to church, and it helped families celebrate holidays, and it's grown and grown to make such a contribution to our lives, it's impacted our lives so much. And I just want to thank you for this opportunity to praise the automobile. I'd like to say, when they first were made, little boys and girls played with little cars, and that was their joy. And it has continued through the years, and today, little boys and girls are still playing with model cars. And they'll continue to grow and contribute to our wonderful, wonderful Michigan, particularly, to the global world. What the automobile has brought into our lives has been a wonderful thing.

Dr. Bonta Hiscae is a long-time Lansing resident. He came here more than 50 years ago, first as a plastic surgeon, and after many years, he also became the first health maintenance medical director of Lansing Health Central.

When I first came to town, the doctors were mostly general practitioners or even like a surgeon did more than just one specialty. But gradually, over time, specialties have come in and the way medical care is paid for has changed dramatically, and so, basically, we've gone from a very collegial community to one like other communities where everyone is sort of taking care of themselves and not as group-oriented, if you will. Two hospitals, which were the social center for medicine, St. Lawrence and Sparrow, while I was here, Ingham Medical, which was a tuberculosis sanatorium, changed into a general hospital, which is now Ingham Regional, and Lansing General was housed on Townsend Street. They had just a house, it was called their hospital, and then they built the unit on Pennsylvania Avenue and became a real player in the hospital business. So we went from two hospitals to four hospitals. And then, as the economy changed and the games they play in medical care, we went back to two hospitals when Ingham and the osteopathic hospital merged and Sparrow and St. Lawrence merged.

Back in the early days, the doctors used to do free medical care, or they'd get paid a very small amount by the county to take care of indigent patients. And that money was the medical society decided, rather wisely, I think, to put it all into a pot, and that was the county medical society fund, and it financed dinners and so forth and so they had good turnout and a very good relationship. When Medicare and Medicaid came in 1965, things changed. Nobody had to do anything for nothing anymore. The county didn't pay for health care, and gradually, when those funds were used up, everybody sort of went their own way and the self custom today is not to belong to groups nearly as much as they used to, and so the attendance at the Medical Society is down.

Discuss a little bit of the technology you've seen over the past 50 years...

Well, it can be broken down into three parts, actually; I've done some thinking about it. In the science side of it – I mean the basic science side of it – we used to talk about growth organs, and rearranging how you sewed them together to try different ways, and we knew there were cells and we studied them in med school, but now, science has progressed to the place where they're going at the anatomy of the cell, and biotechnology, and biochemistry, so that we're down on the molecular level and we have the DNA stuff. We've learned huge amounts about the basic fundamentals of life and disease. Then the other part of technology is the gadgets we've developed; the MRIs, and the CTs, and the scopes that go in all kinds of orifices to look at so we don't have to cut 'em open as much as we used to. And then, one of the huge things that people don't think of as a medical tool, computers. And computers have made a huge difference and they're going to make a huger difference. You've heard Obama talk about, oh, electronic medical record and so forth, and that will change the way medicine is practiced. But one of the basic things computers have done is, patients now have in-

formation. When patients used to go to the doctor, the doctor knew everything and the patient knew nothing. Now the patient can look it up on the computer or the net, so the balance of power is much more even than it used to be. I think that's good for the practice of medicine. In the long run, as medical director of an HMO, we try to identify quality and quality medical care, and when you got down to it, it was a very kind of fuzzy thing. At the first of it, the doctor used to say, "Well, it's because I said so," and that's not a very good thing to base it on. So, we've been evolving over the last 30 years or so. One other thing that's happened in Lansing that I think made a huge difference is that we've had, right on our front doorstep, two medical schools started. They started with the College of Human Medicine in '68, and then the '70s, the osteopathic college came in, and that had a huge impact on how things went, and created a lot of tension between the community doctors and the university doctors.



Knapp's Department Store

June Johnston was a familiar face at Knapp's Department Store, where she served for many years as vice president in charge of personnel. Knapp's Department Store was located where Walgreens is today and then moved to a brand-new store in 1936 on the corner of Washington and Washtenaw.

Downtown changed from the retail center of the Lansing area to what it is today, which is mainly office and some financial. It was a very thriving retail center, the whole length of the street, with our boss anchoring at one end, and Penny's and Knapp's, all the way down to the Gladmer theatre with specialty stores, dress shops, jewelers, and shoe stores, and so forth, all along the avenue. And it's quite a change; I can remember when we had three prominent men's stores downtown. It was Kositchek's, and Smalls, and Herds. Now we're just down to one and that, of course, is Kositchek's. There are hardly any upscale or even medium-scale retail stores downtown. A gift store or two, but everything else is mostly fast food, that type of thing, which has replaced the thriving downtown. In the old days, if you can remember the song "Downtown," downtown Lansing was like that. It was busy, the young people were shopping; it was a busy, busy place. But with the beginning of the malls, the decline took its toll, and stores like

Knapp's saw the writing on the wall and of course established stores in the malls themselves. But that depleted the downtown traffic, because people thought they could park better, I guess, out at the malls, and the malls became the place for the young kids to hang out, rather than riding up and down the avenue. Then along came the Lansing Mall shortly after, couple years after the Meridian Mall, and Arbaugh's which was another prominent store downtown at that time, established their anchor store out in the Lansing Mall. That was eventually taken over by the JW Nap company, but when the JW Nap company went out of business in, I believe it was 1980, Penny's took over the store at Meridian Mall and the store in downtown Lansing. Then Penny's closed their downtown store, which was on the corner of Kalamazoo and Washington Avenue. But the retail district ran from Kalamazoo Street all the way down, as I said, to the Gladmer Theatre. And there were good restaurants there also, in that particular area, which attracted a lot of people, ones where you could get service and better food. So it's quite a change; the downtown, while it seems to be thriving on the usual Monday to Friday days, especially during the lunch hours when all the office employees from the state and the other businesses that have established their offices in the downtown office building, it looks quite excellent again. But whether it extends over the weekends or not, they're trying to make it a fun place for young people, evidently, is the new pressure.

Did you see changes in clothing, fad styles, dinner clothing?

My memories don't go too far back, but I know that Mr. Knapp back in the 20s prided himself in getting the latest fashions and putting them in the windows downtown. And there's quite a change in the cost because I can remember I won \$25 in some contest out at Michigan State about 1940, and so I was really rich, so I went downtown and bought a new spring coat for \$15. And I also managed to get a pair of saddle shoes, which probably cost me \$5, and I had some money left over. And I thought I was quite fashionable in my new spring coat in my, I think it was black with a white piqué collar. So, times have changed a great deal these days, and in the fashions. Of course, I don't go back to the flapper 20s, but I'm sure they had their fashions then, too.

What do you see as the future of downtown Lansing?

Well, it's difficult to say in these present difficult economic times. It was showing so much growth, with the expansion of new office buildings downtown, which may or not be complete like the one that's going to occupy the former Border Water and Light Power Plant. And the one that's going up for the State Police, and so forth. That's the type of thing that I think is occurring. It's more a business-oriented, government-oriented downtown. I don't think it's ever going to be what you call a vibrant nightlife type of situation, but perhaps I'm wrong in that regard. Perhaps the young people will think it's fun to be downtown. But a lot of those stores that are downtown now would have to be updated and rehabilitated to make them fun places for young people, I'm sure.

Olivia Letts and her late husband, Richard Letts, have been and were outstanding members of both the black community and the Lansing community for many years. She was an elementary school teacher and then a principal at the Past Oak school for many years.

Richard was born here, so he had lived here all his life and was truly in love with Lansing; that's why they called him Mr. Lansing when he died. They changed the name in 1997 in November and he had just died, and it became the Richard and Olivia Letts Center. I go through Letts Center once a week, I play bridge there, and occasionally I go there more often. Frankly, I just was there Tuesday Night in a dance class.

Times have changed so much when I first came to town. There were many more schools than there are now. Now, they're talking about even, you know, making them in a different manner. But I believe there were at least forty elementary schools then, and now it's down to twenty-some, I believe. So, times have really changed, and children, where as it was really 100% black school – it may not have been that way in the morning, but if there was a Caucasian child there, by the afternoon, they had gone to a different school. So, as I said, it was a very small school, but we had some wonderful parents there. In fact, I can remember one of the parents, the Bulls family, and the granddaughter is on the present City Council. I can't think of her first name, but her married name is Robinson, and I just thought that's kind of a nice thing to, over the years, to be able to see. But we've had a lot of supportive people in town, as I always say. I lived with my mother-in-law when I first came to town in 1951. I lived with my mother-in-law for three years and, as I said, I could not say one bad thing about my mother-in-law. And to be able to say that when you've lived with a mother-in-law in a very small home, but, it is a cherished memory. And she was at Burcham Hills for seven years before she died, and her daughter is at Burcham Hills right now. But there are lots of things that I can remember about Lansing; you know, before they put the highway, 496, through, we had a number of stores and I believe the only one that I can think of, the person who's still around doing their, Letts', used to be Letts' fashions when he was on St. Joe way back... But he has Letts' Bridal still going right now, so at least for 50-some years, he has been in business. And he started out just going door-to-door selling hosiery. And his dad had Faylett and Sons Furnace, Heating and Air Conditioning. And for over 50 years, Faylett and Sons was in town. So we've had a number of people doing some nice things, and I have been very fortunate to be a part of such a good family.

Healthcare has played an important role in Lansing's life throughout its 150 years and includes in great part the role of the hospital. Betty Lorenz, a Michigan native and a longtime Lansing resident, has been involved with Sparrow Hospital for many years as a volunteer with the Women's Board and in other ways.

My first visit was when I was about eight years old. I stayed at the nurse's residence. My mother had come back to Sparrow to complete her training after my father died at a very early age. She was the first married woman who had ever been granted that privilege. She was very successful at what she was doing. I had a tour of the hospital, and as I recall, it was a quiet place, you just "shhh", everything was quiet. It has changed so drastically, but I remember what good order it was. There was a Ms. McClellan who was supervisor of nursing at that time, who just took my mother under her wing and it kind of settled into my heart, and that's why I've stayed with it. The hospital itself was very orderly and limited. I remember they made deliveries to the back door opposite the stadium that opened right into the lobby. It had a very steep stairway going up the center of the main part of the building. There was a wing on each end with an open porch, then the porches were enclosed when they needed more space. I think it had four floors. I remember going there to have my appendix out when I was about fourteen. They gave me what was called the Presidents Room. There was a room on the fourth floor that they reserved for special people. I remember when it was time to go home after staying in that bed for 10 days, Dor Hoffmeyer came with the ambulance and took me home.

When my youngest child got into kindergarten I thought I've got to have something meaningful to do. Carl Newman asked if some of us would take some other responsibilities, so I became involved with an orthopedic clinic that was across the street in that building that was torn down to make room for the parking ramp. Dr. Johnson at that time was one of the physicians; it was interesting to work with him. They were hiring more people and we were replaced by professional people, which was appropriate really. So then I kind of phased out of that part, well it just ended that's all. We were probably active for 8 or 9 years in that capacity.

I received an invitation (for the Women's Board), from Helen Walder was president, and I received an invitation by mail that I had been nominated and would I accept, which I did. The first meeting I went to was in the hospital itself because the nurse's home had been torn down, it is right where the South wing is. It was a very nice building, very nicely furnished and the women there enjoyed living there as much as they could really as hard as they did work. It was a real experience because it's changed so drastically. It met at 2 o'clock in the afternoon, no lunch, just the meeting. We met up on the old B-floor in a little classroom really and sat in rows of chairs and the president was up here. The ladies wore hats and gloves and the meeting lasted about an hour and that was it.

Lansing embodies a unique history of automobiles: their manufacturers, the people who sold them, the people who drove them. John Lorenz, a Lansing native, attended Michigan State College, and was involved in the automobile world as the son and nephew of Early Lorenz Brothers Buick Dealership.

My father and my uncle started the car business in 1920. They were Franklin and White Truck Dealers. They were on North Grand Avenue. They rented an old delivery stable to use as a dealership at that time. They sold gasoline and stored cars. Houses didn't have garages at that time, and people didn't drive their cars too much in the wintertime, so they needed a place to keep them, and thus we stored cars. I think we charged something like fifty cents a week. A small amount. And then in 1923, they built a building, which is still on North Grand Avenue 315, and they were Franklin and Buick Dealers at that time. And my first recollection is about 1931. My father, I would have been 6 years old, and my father took me down to the dealership and walked me through it and showed it to me. He and his brother had a brand-new 1931 Buick, and they took me for a ride in it. That was quite a thrill for me at that time, and I've been active in the dealership ever since.

I started when I was 12 years old. We had gasoline pumps inside of our building, and I was in charge, on weekends, of gasoline pumps and was taught how to say, "Good morning, sir," and taught how to greet people at that time. I spent two years in the Navy and a couple years at MSU, and then I started working at the dealership. I vividly can remember the first car that I sold was a 1950 Buick. And I remember the process. I was up north with this car and I ran into a man up there who said he'd like to buy it, and I didn't know what to do. So I called my dad, and my dad said, "Well, sell it! You know, you can't fall in love with these automobiles when you're in the car business. They're just commodities." And so, I sold that car and delivered it to the man. And then I worked in all the different departments. I was a service writer. I didn't physically do any mechanical work or any body work, but the major part of a car dealership is used cars. If you can't sell the used cars, you're in trouble, so... I worked in that division. We were on Grand Avenue and in about 1932, my father couldn't make the payments on the building, so the Capital National Bank took it back, and we moved to the corner of Kalamazoo and River. There was a triangular-shaped building down there. That particular building at that time belonged to Frank Vandervort. It was built as a Durant dealership, Durant's being made here in Lansing, or course. And then, over the period of years, we built different buildings on River Street, and we owned a business on Grand Avenue.

John Irvin Nichols was born in North Carolina, graduated from Duke University and took a Masters Degree at the University of Michigan. Irv came to Lansing in 1957. Upon retirement he became a popular and hard-working volunteer in the Greater Lansing area.

We've lived here the last third of the hundred and fifty years in the sesquicentennial in 2009. When my wife and I arrived with two young sons, Lansing was a rather small capital we thought. We found it, though, to be a very dynamic place. Washington Street had angle parking from Shiawassee on the north, where the Lansing library was, to Lenawee Street on the south. And fronting on this street were the major businesses, including Knapp's, J.C. Penny, Arbaugh's, Shepard's Shoes, Kositchek's, Smalls, Liebermans, American Bank and Trust, the Bank of Lansing, and both the Michigan and Gladmer theaters. We had, I think, two drug stores, couple of five and dime stores. And the owners of most of those, or the managers, were Rotarians. And today, I think Kositchek's, which was founded in 1865 is the only remaining store. I'd come to Lansing to take the job of Executive Director of the Michigan Tuberculosis Association, having held a similar job in Kentucky. At that time Michigan had 5,000 people under treatment in some 22 hospitals across the state. The average length of stay was about 18 months, and the cost was \$10 per day, which was paid mostly by the State of Michigan. Frandor was our only shopping mall. They'd recently opened when we arrived, and each weekend they had fireworks to attract crowds. There was no Meridian Mall, no Lansing Mall, no Lansing Community College, no Cooley Law School, no MSU School of Medicine, or Wharton Center. And there were very few motels and only two hotels. The major employer then was General Motors, state government, and Michigan State University. Legislators were restricted to the capitol building for office space. And if they were to communicate with constituents they telephoned them or used a stenographic pool. They didn't have offices and lots of staff as they do today.



Shepard's Shoes

You've been a long time member of Rotary. How has that group changed over the years?

Well, in addressing the group when I completed 50 years, I said the biggest difference looking out and seeing all of these young people. When I joined the club in 1958 everybody was old it looked like to me. But there have been a lot of changes. At that time, we used, at community service, opportunities to help many, many organizations. And when we organized a foundation, in about 19--, well it was about 31 years ago, '67 or so. We started doing big projects, signature projects. Our first activity was to build the tower, the clock tower, that's on the corner of Grand and Michigan. And then we got into large programs like the Hope Scholarship. We built a medical facility for the Potter Park Zoo. We developed a new gymnasium for the Boys and Girls Club. And projects of that magnitude. This year we've taken on the sesquicentennial celebration, and our foundation has already appropriated \$50,000 for that event, \$50,000.

David O'Leary, Chairman of the Board of O'Leary Paint Company is a native Lansingite. David graduated from the University of Notre Dame.

After graduating from college I had an obligation to serve two years, as everyone did at that time, in the military. I served two years in the Army in downtown Boston in the finance corps. When I was released from the Army, I was very anxious to get started on a career and the family business was available. It became obvious to me, when I joined the company that our future could not be wrapped up in doing what we were doing. We were distributing national brand Sherwin Williams paint in five counties (plus) here in Central Michigan, and we were limited to that. So, we decided that we wanted to go our own way. We would develop a label and we would hope to build it up to the point where we could start manufacturing ourselves and control our destiny. It was kind of an interesting challenge, because the only thing we had going for us, was our name that we had had for eighty years, Silver Lead Paint. But, at that particular point that became the dirtiest words in the English language, "lead paint". So, we had to walk away from that and we decided to use our own name. So, we developed our own new logo and labels and we got another manufacturer to make the product for us 'til we had enough volume to justify the manufacturing. In 1980, we started manufacturing in a building we purchased in the north end of town. We were there for ten years until we built the new manufacturing facility of 45,000 square feet on the corner of Baker and Cedar Street which was the old REO property.



REO Plant

From there, we started opening our own stores in cities around the state and at this point we have a number of cities, from Travers City, Muskegon, Ann Arbor and a number of cities around the state. About twenty-seven years ago when I could see that I was turning over the interest in our company to my sons, I was having lunch with a friend and we were talking about the fact that there was no local community bank that was headquartered here in Lansing. It felt like that was a shame because you really need bank involvement to develop a city—to have things happen. So, we said, let's start a bank. We had meetings. We met with a group of people and asked them to help finance to get it started. We wrote and got information of how to do it and we opened our first bank. That was financed by just local people. We just went out and had meetings to get them to invest in it mostly on a promise that we could pay them back and that it would work, and it did. We were able to hire some excellent people that knew banking. None of us pretended to know banking, but we knew what we wanted to do. It was successful almost instantly. The second bank that we opened was in Kalamazoo, again with hiring local people and they had the connections. We were able to finance that locally in Kalamazoo, and then in Ann Arbor. Then we formed a holding company and went public and were listed on the New York Stock Exchange. We just went ahead with that program of financing half locally and half out of our headquarters different banks around the country. At this stage we have sixty-four banks in seventeen states. Our stock is listed on the Exchange and like all stock we've had ups and downs, but it's worked very well for the investors. This is a tough period for banks, but we feel we're adequately capitalized. We will be here. I think the future for community banks is a good one. I think there's just a spot for community banks, and were happy about it.

Betty Price formerly owned Liebermann's with her husband in downtown Lansing. Now 95, she is still active by traveling and buying jewelry for the Betty Price jewelry show, a fundraiser for Michigan State University's Wharton Center.

The original founder of the Liebermann's store was my uncle Julius Liebermann in Saginaw. My dad always wanted his own store and he decided that he would open his in Lansing because there had been a very successful one at 107 S. Washington and the people who owned that business grew old and tired and decided to just sell out. It was an ideal opportunity for my dad to open a store in the same location, because people were used to going there to buy luggage and leather goods. So, we moved from Saginaw and that was the year that I started Michigan State as a freshman. I used to take the trolley from East Lansing downtown. I loved the business and the store. I'd do anything that needed to be done. I said I was the world's best tester! My dad was a great teacher, so I learned all about leather and luggage.

As time went on I kept seeing things that I thought we ought to have in our store, (originally Liebermann's was strictly a luggage store). My dad said, Betty, if you can sell it, you can buy it. Liebermann was my grandmother's maiden name and my Dad adored his mother. So, even though the Saginaw store was Liebermann's, Daddy decided that he would call this store Liebermann's too, so it's a family name. I loved it from the very beginning. So, instead of teaching English I decided I was going to sell luggage and leather goods and trunks. Back in those days people traveled with trunks and students would buy packing trunks to go to school with. Little by little when air travel started coming into the community people were thinking in terms of smaller, lightweight luggage. I used to go to the luggage shows with my dad and they also had gift shows. I'd start buying gifts and I showed the things to my dad. He'd say, if you can sell it you can buy it. When I saw things that I knew there was a need for in this community I bought it. And little by little the gift things I was buying started to push the luggage and leather goods off the shelves. So, my dad gave me half of the lower floor, we never referred to it as the basement, and I could do anything downstairs that I wanted to do. He put a nice red carpet on the steps going down to the lower floor. It was very successful. Little by little I took over the whole lower floor. Then there was a building two doors down that had been a very successful general store and the people who owned it got old and decided they would just close it. So we bought that store and that became Betty's Gift Store although it was still part of Liebermann's. We were able to combine the two stores up on the second floor we could walk through stockrooms so it was very convenient.

I was in the business and loved every minute of it. And then I got married and my husband was in the business. Little by little he became interested in the business, I didn't try to convince him. I wanted him to do what he wanted to do, but he decided that this is what he would like to do. So, gradually we took over the whole business. We used to go around the world looking for unusual things for the store. We really enjoyed every minute of it, because we had a free hand in what was going to go into the store. It still was a luggage and leather goods store but we got rid of the trunks. As long as it was

something that was appropriate for our store and it would sell, we could buy it. It was fun, it wasn't work.

In my lifetime, Lansing has become a much more sophisticated community. We have everything at our fingertips, and what we don't have in downtown Lansing, we have in East Lansing. It's the ideal place to live because you have so many opportunities to see things and do things. I wouldn't want to live anyplace but Lansing. There's turmoil every place. I think as we have more generations appreciate what we already have, it can't do anything but get better. I'm the original optimist. The people here are wonderful. Anybody who walked through our door down at the store was our friend. It wasn't work; it was a wonderful way to spend your life.



Arbaugh's Department Store

One thing that made the store very unique and made it very successful was the parking lot. Knapp's didn't have a parking lot and that was a big item. A lot of people parked in the store parking lot. The parking lot made the store. There was no question about that, and everybody realized that. There was a toy department down in the basement. I used to work in the toy department at Christmas time. To be honest, I was known who it was going in the store. That was there. That was a part of it. But, we never hung around the store. If we went in the store, we went in to meet them and to get home, or to do this or do that. But, we never lingered around the store; that wasn't allowed.

What was the feeling? You don't have to get specific. There must have been some competition between the Knapp's. Was there any socialization with the families?

No (laughter) But the competition, there was, and you're asking me an unfair question. Undoubtedly, Granddaddy and Howard Grimes communicated routinely for community things. Granddaddy Arbaugh, F.N. Arbaugh, was a very community-minded man. And mother had part of that, and I think she kind of continued and I don't know so much about the other two. Oh, I'm sure they communicated. But there was no question that they were competitors. There was no question about that that we knew of.

But, F.N. Arbaugh was a very unusual man. Even as a child you didn't run in and sit on his lap. On the other hand, if you were playing around there, he might come in and play on the floor with you or something. He wasn't a stern man; he was just a quiet man, and Grandma Arbaugh, she was the same. But, they both had a very deep sense of Lansing, and they both expected us to follow that. Some of us did, some of the grandchildren didn't (laughter) but we won't go there.

But, the demeanor of the family definitely was set by, if you'll excuse the word, the prominence of the family. That was what it was. That was what it was. And, the other thing was, we lived out on Waverly Road, just off it there. So, for me there was no mingling after school with groups, you know how you do this or do that after school. I couldn't do that because I had to get down to 400 Townsend, down to grandma's house so that I catch a ride home.



Townsend Street

So for me there was not an issue. I never was involved in that kind of thing, which was a plus and a minus. Mother and dad, mother particularly, dad was strict on a whole bunch of stuff. But, mother was strict on public behavior in the city of Lansing. We were not to abuse the privilege.

Dorothy and Lenard Silk moved to Lansing in the early 1950s. Both had busy and interesting professional lives. Dorothy was active in education with Head Start, special grants, and supplemental services in schools. Both were leaders in the Jewish community.

I thought this is really a small town. It had diagonal parking downtown. But we thought this is a nice little town. I remember downtown there was a lovely linen store. Others might have remembered. And Knapp's was still active, a very lovely store.

When we first came, we had a synagogue on Pennsylvania Avenue, which is now the headquarters of the Salvation Army. And we were very involved in the community. People who still have their stores there, like, the Kositchek's remembers, and those things were all part of that experience. Our synagogue, as I say, was on Pennsylvania Avenue, and it's still there, and the Salvation Army. This is 50 years or more, and the synagogue really changed it a lot. They built a new building on Coolidge, which was farmland. That was an important change. And they made a lot of changes to the activities that we did, which we couldn't do before. It was pretty much an educational thing, a spiritual building—no entertainment. When I moved here, there was one rabbi here, Rabbi Frankwell. But now, they have a rabbi, a cantor, and an education director. And the rabbi, cantor, and educational director are all women. Well, the big difference now is that there are all sorts of other facilities. There's Hillel – that's a Jewish student activities... and they... the activities at Hillel are very important. 300 Jewish students come every night for a free dinner, a Jewish dinner. The other thing is, the University has a Jewish studies program now. And that's enriched our community.

This may be a loaded question; does the congregation welcome women in those leadership roles?

Well, those who are really active, they think it's alright. Some of the others... they like it the old way.

When I first came here, there were about 300 people of my faith here. Not all of them belonged to our synagogue. I think today as many don't belong to a synagogue as do. We all thought the Greek community was great, and I never felt any discrimination. In 1967, a group developed something called the Interfaith Council. It started out they used to meet in the homes of the members of this community. They were members of the Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, and Greek Orthodox. And they (Greek Orthodox) came in later, they asked to be in. I was a great volunteer, and I said, "The way you get to like people is working with them, so we should have a volunteer project." So our project was to have an event for a weekend at City Hall featuring all the opportunities there were. When the Wharton came, there were so many things to do that, a lot of people had never volunteered, but they started volunteering at Wharton.

Diane Anderson Tarpoff



Gladys Olds Anderson childhood home, The Olds Mansion

My great-grandfather, RE Olds built a beautiful home at 720 south Washington, where later my grandmother, Gladys Olds Anderson, one of his two daughters, lived until late in her life. We called her Gaga. The house had a caged elevator, a beautiful reflecting pool in the yard, a ballroom on the upper floor and a turn-around garage my great-grandfather made. As children we would make it go like a merry-go-round. We went there Sundays and all holidays.



Michigan Theater

Gaga took me and my younger sisters to Saturday matinees at the Michigan Theater. We always went in a chauffeured car which embarrassed me when the people waiting in line saw me getting out of the car, but that was the way she traveled. She took the entire family on a yearly trip to wonderful places like the Bahamas or out to a dude ranch.

She gave Woldumar, on the Grand River, to Nature Way to create land primarily for use by students in the Lansing and surrounding schools. She also gave Lansing schools land for Camp Ebersole, a nature camp southwest of town. The YWCA was another one of her causes. She worked at the national level, but gave support locally. She was head of Ransom Fidelity, a foundation started by RE Olds in 1914 as a way to make charitable gifts within the city. It was passed on to my father, Olds Anderson and now my mother and the name was changed back to RE Olds Foundation.



Hotel Olds

Over the years, downtown Lansing's Washington/Capitol Avenues had a multitude of varied businesses from horse barns to upscale restaurants. Angie Vlahakis, Lansing native, MSU graduate and owner of one such eating establishment, the never to be forgotten, Jim's Tiffany, shares his memories of his restaurant—its beginning and the family who was involved in the downtown area.

My earliest memories are the late 1930s. The only way I could get to see my father was to go down to the restaurant with my mother and have Sunday dinner, because the restaurant business was seven days a week and in those days. Especially with the depression on, it was a seven day a week job for my father. At that time it was a white tablecloth restaurant with counter service as well. I still have a photograph of my father and myself standing in front of the restaurant celebrating Fourth of July. The exact year I would say about 1936 or 1937.

It was located at 203 South Washington Avenue where Kelly's is now located. If you are to walk into Kelly's and look up at the ceiling you will see the original tin ceiling that was in my father's restaurant. And we were there from 1914 till 1937. And then in 1938, my father moved to the location next to Consumers' Power Company on Michigan Avenue. The original name of the restaurant was the Lansing Café and then eventually in 1949 my father when he was on the Michigan Avenue location, he purchased the building next door to the restaurant which was then located next to Consumers' Power Company and put in an establishment known as Jim's Bar. Over a period of years the name became Jim's Tiffany Place. But originally they were two separate establishments right next door to each other. Because in those early days, in the 40's still, some people just didn't want to go into a bar and so we had the restaurant separate from the bar, next to each other, with an opening. But we found out that over the years, people's attitudes towards drinking, shall we say became more open minded and we eventually combined the two businesses and it became Jim's Tiffany Place. I started working for my father in 1940 and then I successfully sold the restaurant in 1980.

We had payroll books from 1932 that showed that servers working seven days a week were paid as little as six dollars a week. They existed on the tip income that they made. And I still remember, this was in the 1940's, that if somebody made a quarter tip, it was something to yell out loud in the dining room. Ah! Somebody left me a quarter! Nowadays you better not leave a quarter.

It was very challenging to say the least. My father had been very successful over the years, during very, very hard times to exist, to stay in business and he urged me to go on to college after I got out of the service and I went to Michigan State University and I received a degree in hotel and restaurant management. So here is this young kid coming back and trying to introduce new ideas to a well established restaurant and at times it became shall we say conflicting, for lack of a better word. But eventually, my father realized that times have changed and he went along with the various changes. We introduced Greek food as a specialty in about 1967 when we had our first what we

call Zorba Night. Those were smashing successes. And people said, "Why just have it one night every couple of months? Why not have it every night?" And eventually our menu, certain portions of the menu became ethnic—selling Greek items. It was immensely successful. We gained a national reputation and had numerous awards nationally and through the Michigan region as well for our food and service. Movie houses—The Strand Theater which eventually became the Michigan Theater that was located in the same block as our restaurant. The Gladmer Theater which was at the other end of Washington Avenue. Numerous other places—Stahl's, Lansing Dry Goods store, Knapp's (which was immensely successful), Arbaugh's department store and Mill's Dry Goods, The Peanut Shop. Coming here for the interview I drove by The Peanut Shop which is still in existence in downtown Lansing. Also, the Kositchek's original owner, Mr. Kositchek senior and Dick Kositchek, they were all good customers of ours.



Kositchek's in 1930



Washtenaw E 119-123 circa 1935

Lansing embodies a unique history of manufacturing automobiles. The people who sold them and the people who drove them. Mary Jane Wilson is a Lansing native, a graduate of Michigan State University. She shares some of her observations about Lansing and cars and car distributors.

My father was in the automobile business from the time that he graduated from high school. He came to Lansing in the early 1920's. He'd been in Ann Arbor with a Ford dealership, and Studebaker dealership. And after the war he came to Lansing, and eventually had a Packard dealership that a number of others. His showroom, his office was on the corner of Capitol and Washtenaw. And when we were children we used to go down there, it was a small showroom compared to the sizes of today. It could hold two automobiles. And in the back there was the shop, where they could probably take care of a couple more automobiles. Dad's staff consisted of two salesmen that I know. We used to love to go down there because he would have these cars that we could sit in; he'd have all kinds of different cars. I remember an automobile that was made for a chauffeur, that had glass between the chauffeur and the passengers, and they had a little microphone so that we could talk back and forth. So my brother would be the chauffeur and I'd be the elegant passenger.

I remember it was a very close nit family in the automobile business. And I remember during the depression dad saying that there was one lady that bought a car every year, and when that car was purchased, dad would share whatever profit they had with his small force. There was also the personal touch with his customers. Over the years businesses began to grow, and at first the few automobile businesses were right downtown. Then, they began to go out onto Michigan Avenue.

My father's business went out to 2400 East Michigan Ave. Al Edwards moved out to East Michigan Ave. Bud Kouts moved to Michigan Avenue. And of course Oldsmobile moved to Michigan Avenue. Of course their workforce expanded; they had many, many salesmen. The ownership started to change after that. They were still personal owners, you still know the owners. But in more recent years now, they're kind of absentee ownership. And when Capital Cadillac, which, after, my brother took over Capital Cadillac. And he moved it out to Pennsylvania Avenue, where several more dealerships started to go. And then when my brother sold his business, he sold it to Massey Cadillac. Massey Cadillac had a woman general manager. Now that's the first time I've known of that. I know that the Dykstra's had Candy Dykstra to own a dealership outside of the Greater Lansing, I'm not sure where hers was. And I know Jenia Tan had a dealership over in Charlotte. But there have been women that have gotten into dealerships. But I think this woman that Massey had was the first woman that was the manager.



Michigan Ave E 427-429 circa 1938

Capitol Building circa 1902

