

RESIDENTS RECALL OAKLANDON LIFE

Stories of dairy cattle, big bowls of popcorn and tollgates on Pendleton Pike filled a Lawrence church on a cold January evening in 1999.

Several residents, - some who have lived in Lawrence all their lives - met at the Oaklandon Christian Church to reminisce.

Victor and Margie Harris, Steve Hamilton, Edgar Mock, Edgar's son Tom Mock, Dan and Betty Glossbrenner, and Tom and Deloris Watson shared stories, smiles and memories.

Various paths lead to Lawrence

Except for a few short years, Victor Harris was a lifelong resident, graduating from Oaklandon High School in 1935.

Steve Hamilton's first ancestor in America came from County Tyrone, Ireland, to Virginia. When they homesteaded to Indiana in 1836, they moved to Warren Township. His Grandmother Whiteside's family farm was purchased in 1880 at 52nd Street and Germanchurch Road. That property remains in Steve's possession.

Tom Watson claims a Mayflower connection; however, they came to Indiana in 1840. Watson's grandfather, Joe Watson, owned an 80-acre farm on the curve of Pendleton Pike - the house still stands. The farm extended to the present location of Veteran's Memorial Park and Watson's Pools.

Deloris Stoner Watson is the granddaughter of Josiah and Anna Mary Smith Stoner. The farm they purchased was at 52nd and Germanchurch. A later owner sold the property and it is now the site of the golf course at the Windsong addition.

Betty Teter Glossbrenner's parents, James and Jessie Teter, came in 1919 to Oaklandon. They farmed 80 acres across Sunnyside Road from the old Sunnyside Sanatorium - now Westminster Village North.

Dan Glossbrenner moved in 1927 to the Oaklandon area. His parents, Daniel and Edna Glossbrenner, purchased 240 acres and Rainbow Farm grew to 1,000 acres. The senior Dan Glossbrenner had been a captain in the famous Rainbow Division during World War I. By World War II, he was a colonel- still with the Rainbow Division.

Edgar Mock, now in his 90s, was the son of Michael and Jane Mock who farmed north of Oaklandon at 79th Street. They moved there in 1910. As a student at Oaklandon High School in 1917, bank president Harvey Childress asked the school principal to recommend a student to bring into the banking business. That student was Edgar Mock. He eventually succeeded Childress as bank president; his banking career spanned 48 years. Edgar's son, Tom Mock, also is in the banking business and lives in Oaklandon.

Changes through the years

Although no one actually recalled the event, the group at the Oaklandon Christian Church said the name "Oakland" was changed to Oaklandon in 1879 to avoid confusion with a town called Oakland City in the southern part of the state.

They remembered Germantown - now at the bottom of Geist Lake. Land acquisition by the Indianapolis Water Co. began about 1924. Construction of the reservoir started in the 1930s; it was filled about 1943.

Germantown included three to four houses and a furniture factory. The first post office in the township was at Germantown; later, the Germantown mail went to Oaklandon.

The Universalist Church was founded in 1850 - one of the oldest churches in the township. There have been three buildings. The second building, built in 1875, burned in 1920 and again in 1925. Today's structure reused the walls of the third building.

Oaklandon Christian Church began in 1866. They remembered a big white frame church, circa 1912.

Betty Glossbrenner remembered with fondness the free shows - movies - projected on the side of the Red Men's Hall. There were also Girl Scout, events and dances for a young girl to relish.

For a time when it seemed Oaklandon was all Apples and Pickles - the surnames of several residents. The Pickles especially were an independent lot. The Oaklandon International Order of Odd Fellows Cemetery has stones from family members with two spellings Pickle and Pickel.

Lodges and organizations were a large part of the community. The Oakland Masonic Lodge kept its name when the U.S. Postal Service changed the community to Oaklandon. The original lodge dates to 1856.

The Red Men's Hall, north of the Universalist Church, was destroyed by fire. The upstairs was the lodge hall while the downstairs was used for business - a hardware store, a pool hall and grocery at one time or another.

The Odd Fellows' Lodge was a square, white-frame structure on the southwest corner of Oaklandon Road and Verdin Street. The lodge is gone but the foundation is still visible.

American Legion Post 128 was across from the fire station.

Phones, gas lines and motorcars

Oaklandon was blessed with public utilities: Betty Glossbrenner worked for one year as operator for the Oaklandon Telephone Co.

The Newhouses, the family of Steve Hamilton's mother, operated the company for a time.

His uncle, Milton Newhouse, was the last president of the company before it was sold to Indiana Bell.

Hamilton recalled being paid 25 cents at the age of 6 for doing odd jobs around the switchboard. By the time he was 10, he was paid 50 cents.

Six parties shared a line and each party had a distinctive ring. When there was a problem, the operator would send six short rings and everyone would pick up the phone. That was why the fire station was next door to the telephone company - so an emergency alarm could go out quickly.

Natural-gas wells were located under the village, giving rise to the Oakland Natural Gas and Oil Co. in 1888. In 1950, the company was sold to Citizens Gas and Coke Utility of Indianapolis. As happened elsewhere, the gas wells were exhausted eventually.

The Oakland and Indianapolis Gravel Road Co. operated a toll road on what is now Pendleton Pike. The tollgate was at the corner of Oaklandon Road and the pike. Maude Apple's mother ran the toll.

In recent years, Pendleton Pike became Indiana 67. For a time, Ind. 67 was a three-lane road with the middle lane reserved for passing. "If you pulled out to turn, you'd better be sure no one was coming," Victor Harris said. "There was a lot of blood shed on Pendleton Pike due to that idea."

Oaklandon open for business

Commerce bustled in Oaklandon. As the group at the Oaklandon Christian Church mentioned several merchants by name, it was as if they had returned to their storefront.

Hobart Weaver was proprietor of a feed store.

Erbin "Micky" McCord operated an incongruous combination of businesses: a funeral parlor and confectionery. McCord was recalled with fondness.

Norval Peters owned one of the gasline stations.

The local blacksmiths were Ad Trimble and Elvin Sturn.

Clad Jordan ran the icehouse and tilling station southeast of the present fire station.

Car dealers flourished. Leigh Fisher first sold Overland automobiles. A man named Pollard bought the dealership and sold Chevrolets and Pontiacs after the demise of the Overland vehicles. Howard Hauser bought the venture from Pollard.

Vern Bruce and his son Smysof ran the grain elevator. Smysof Bruce eventually went to teach at Oaklandon High School. He later taught and coached a number of sports at Lawrence Central High School.

O.W. Mohler and Son was a favorite general store. It occupied the first story of the Odd Fellows' Lodge. Leslie, O.W.'s son, inherited the business from his father. The group recalled there was never was there a nicer man. A loafer's bench sat outside the store. A Yum Yum Bread box, big and yellow with a lid on top that lifted from a hinge at the back, sat at the store. Customers could order groceries and, if they couldn't get there by closing time, Leslie Mohler would put them in the Yum Yum Bread box for pickup after hours.

Leslie would pay boys of age 11 and 12 in the community to cut his grass. Tom Mock recalled avoiding Leslie once. "I didn't want to cut the grass that week."

Steve Hamilton said his older cousins, Alan and Stanley, also were among the boys paid to mow Mohler's grass -possibly due to Tom Mock's lack of industry.

The following story about Leslie caused laughs all around: There was a young lady who came in and had forgotten her money, so she asked Leslie to put the purchase on an account. Leslie had known the girl all her life, but she had recently married. He couldn't remember her married name, but didn't want to admit it. "How do you spell that name?" he asked.

"J-O-N-E-S," she replied.

Betty Glossbrenner especially remembered Township Assessor Newton Hinds. She said he always carried wintergreen mints in his pocket. "I would always sidle up to him and he would give me' a mint," she said.

Later assessors weren't quite so charitable. "Keith Conrad actually came in, sat down and would count your dogs," they said.

Tom Watson recalled that someone once said Conrad "asked one farmer what his cow was worth and then he asked if the farmer would sell it to him for that price."

Medical practitioners

The medical doctors in Oaklandon were a special lot, based on the memories of the group at the Oaklandon Christian Church.

Dan Glossbrenner recalled Dr. Carl Kneer's favorite radio program was "Amos and Andy." When it came on, the good doctor would pull off to the side of the road to devote his full attention to the show. Usually he would fall asleep and his aggravated wife would never know when to expect him home.

Dr. Kneer made house calls and he often visited the Watson's home to check on Tom's

ailing grandfather. "He would come in and we would have a big pan of popcorn and he would ask, "What are you eating that stuff for? It won't do you any good!" Watson said.

"After he finished with my grandfather, he would come in and sit down and eat the whole pan of popcorn."

Dr. Joe Miller years later administered his practice from Dr. Kneer's place, the big house on Oaklandon Road. He was also remembered by the group as a good doctor - especially well-liked.

One local veterinarian was Dr. Hutchinson.

Dave Peters worked at Fort Benjamin Harrison and shod horses on the side.

Memories of milk and mushrooms.

There was a mushroom farm south of Oaklandon, owned by Paul Walton.

Betty Glossbrenner's family, the Teters, had a dairy farm and would deliver bottled milk daily throughout Oaklandon and McCordsville. Betty's brothers, Fred and Marvin, converted a 1928 Chevrolet into a delivery truck. The boys would take turns driving and Betty would accompany them as they completed their route before school.

When subdivisions were platted and sold, it meant growth. The Glossbrenners developed the first major addition, Oaklandon Northeast in 1954. The addition took a portion of their Rainbow Farm property for the project. Later in 1954, Myron Mills platted Oaklandon Village across from Motel 67.

Annexation anxieties

A cloud came over the group as they switched their memories to the annexation of Oaklandon into Lawrence.

Lawrence began the annexation process in 1968. Oaklandon went to court and delayed the action until 1976.

"We were given a choice, Indianapolis or Lawrence, or we could be a part of Metropolitan Indianapolis under Unigov," said Victor Harris.

"Not much of a choice," said Betty Glossbrenner.

Most of the group knew Morris Settles before he became mayor of Lawrence in 1960. As Lawrence town marshal, Settles had been the green flag safety man at school crossings.

Victor Harris said, "I've know all three mayors of Lawrence and I've considered all of them as friends."

The group at the Oaklandon Christian Church also recalled the community's penchant for

music.

Oaklandon had a notable town band, the group said. The band's performances were often from the gazebo on the corner adjacent to the fire station. Local banker, Edgar Mock, played clarinet. Raymond Newhouse was director.

When asked about the notorious Plantation, a speakeasy just across the Hancock County Line on Pendleton Pike - now housing Casio's -the group said they never recognized a major gangster, but there were a lot of people there from Chicago.

Betty Glossbrenner said her two brothers worked at Plantation and the place had a system of tunnels, apparently for patrons to hide in when law-enforcement officers descended on the place.

Steve Hamilton said, "In the '60s, I did some sound work there and I saw some cases of Vita Nerva - 94 percent alcohol-left over from Prohibition days." With only a portion of the groups' memories exhausted, the clock dictated a conclusion to the recollections.

Edgar Mock said, "This has been a fun evening." Everyone agreed.