

Interview with Mrs. Charles Brown

Mr. Vanderhoek- This is D. George Vanderhoek. I am talking this evening, August 27, 1975, with Mrs. Charles Brown, better known as Mae Brown. Mrs. Brown, you have been a long time resident of this area, haven't you?

Mrs. Brown - Yes, I have--all of my life. My maiden name was Meacham. My grandfather purchased the property on which our home was built in 1882 from Peter Porter Barton. The house was the first house in the town just outside the village on the Ridge Road on the north side. The home and some of the land was taken by the State of New York when the parkway to the north and Fort Niagara was built a few years ago. I have a painting of the home here. The property had six large elm trees on it which attracted my grandfather. He loved lofty trees and that was really why he bought the property.

My mother's family was named Hull. They lived on the Ridge Road, too, but to the east and diagonally across from Hickory College. The Hull women were teachers. Indeed, all of the Hull family, men and women, were teachers, and taught at Hickory College at one time or another. I have the bell the teachers used to call the children in from recess and when school started in the morning.

I attended Hickory College for only six months. Then I went to the Brick School on 4th Street here in the village. That school burned--I do not remember the year. The pupils were housed in the old Academy--part of them there and the other part in Moss Hall.

It was quite an experience going to school in the old Academy. The building was four stories high with a cupola on top. Occasionally at noon a group of us would go up into the cupola and look over the town and village, a beautiful view but dangerous because the cupola really wiggled.

The Academy, of course, was a very popular school many years ago, and at the corner of Portage Road and Center Street there was a five cornered stone house that housed some of the Academy students.

There were several ponds in the village, and there were wonderful skating parties especially on Burk's Pond located south of Tuscarora Street and down hill from the Starkweather house. In the evening the boys would make large bonfires and keep them going all evening. We would play "crack-the-whip" and at other times just skate. The Powell pond was another used for skating as was the Cooke pond and the Meacham pond. Of course, these ponds supplied ice for our ice houses and for the river front hotels.

Center Street was not paved at this time but did have sidewalks of wood planks and sometimes of stone slabs. There were no lights on the streets and so when we wanted to come to downtown in the evening we carried a lantern.

There were gay times at Moss Hall. The dances were particularly exciting. The orchestra would play from 9 o'clock until 12, and then we would take up a collection for them to play until 4 in the morning.

Of course, horses were used in farm work. Some men were horse fanciers. I recall seeing Caleb Raymond of the Frontier House driving on Center Street and out the Ridge Road with his spic and span horse and gig. This was a two wheeled light carriage. Another horse fancier was Mr. Quackenbush who had married Miss Raymond and also lived at the Frontier House. They had beautiful horses and they made a very fine showing on the street.

The library was started as a project of the Men's Club but Dr. George Hobbie was the leader. Residents were asked to donate books at the start. Over 500 books were collected. There was also a magazine collection and these were added to the library. It was first established at 467 Center Street in 1901. The building is now a beauty shop.

Our family attended the Episcopal Church when services were in the building at Plain and Niagara Streets. This was built in 1835-- the second church in the village. The front of the building is original showing the flat board or "plank construction". When the congregation moved to a new church at 4th and Ridge Streets the colored glass behind the altar and the bell were moved to the new building. The window is in the chapel of the new church.

My Grandfather Hull aided in the improvements to the building on Plain Street. The building is presently an historical museum.

I had a brother, Henry G. Meacham, who became Grand Lecturer of the Masonic Lodge of the State of New York and participated in the resetting of the cornerstone of the Academy in 1924, just 100 years after the original laying of this stone under the auspices of the first Masonic Lodge in Lewiston, 1824. The old Academy was demolished in 1927. The cornerstone is now at the Niagara Frontier Lodge building in Niagara Falls.

Mr. V.

Mrs. Brown, Thank you for an interesting account of village activities of years ago.