



# Orleans County Historical Association

TABLE OF CONTENTS Miss Katharine H. Billings Interview

SUBJECTS

- \*\*\* early Albion remembered —
  - Indian trails
  - plank roads / early roads
  - toll booth
  - unpaved streets
  - wooden sidewalks
  - first automobile
  - requirements for driver license
  - railroad crossings
  - flag-man on duty
  - trolley
  - horse and buggy
  - livery stables / parking lots
  - early stores
  - houses / homes
  - care lawns
  - landscaping : Hart's Hill
  - canal widened/Swing Bridge
  - first sewage system
- \*\* Albion State Correctional Facility
  - State Training School
  - House of Correction
  - history/changes, etc.
- \*\* Albion school system
  - first parochial school
  - Dame School
  - first High School
  - whipping students
  - interesting teachers
  - basket-boarding
  - horse-drawn school bus
  - first integrated
  - working papers for children
- \* Swan Library
- \* DAR (Daughters of American Revolution)
  - organized in Albion
  - history, etc.

SUBJECTS , continued

- churches
  - Presbyterian/Albion, Barre
  - Pullman Church
  - Baptist Church
  - St. Joseph Church
  - Catholic Church
- Holland Land Company
- Hart family
- Billings family
- "Who Was James Little ? "
- \*\*\* true story of freed slave boy  
in Albion (page 31-32 )
- Albion public schools
- Vassar College
- Brockport Normal School
- Columbia University

1899-1992



# Orleans County Historical Association

## INTERVIEW

Miss Katharine Hart Billings  
120 West State Street  
Albion, New York

Miss Billings was born in 1899.

The Interview is conducted by Mrs. Marjorie Radzinski, Albion.

B





# Orleans County Historical Association

## ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The purpose of this project is to collect information about the historical development of Orleans County by means of tape-recorded conversations with people whose experiences reflect the county's growth.

These tapes and transcriptions will be preserved as educational resources and possible publication (all or in part).

I hereby release this tape and transcription to the Orleans County Historical Association.

Katherine H. Bellinger  
Signed

20 March 1980  
Date

Understood and agreed to:

Marjorie C. Radzinski  
INTERVIEWER

3-20-80  
Date

B I'm Katharine Hart Billings. I was born in 1899 on the shores of Lake Ontario in the little white house at the end of the Sawyer Road. My parents had four years before moved there as bride and groom on an 100 acre farm that had previously been owned by the Anderson Family who were the ones who had taken it from the Holland Land Company and had cleared the land.

I've **said** there was a 100 acres in that farm. My father would be horrified to see that now the whole shore is lined with cottages, many which have been made into year **around** homes. Because the land was settled by the Andersons that little promontory jutting out into Lake Ontario was known as Anderson's Point. Today it is called Brighton Beach which has no local significance whatever.

At that time the road to Point Breeze was a one lane road of cobblestones as I remembered in my early child-hood.

I should not say cobblestones but probably lake stones.

And I can remember the sound of the horse's hoofs as they sometimes slipped on those shoes.

Later on it was where I learned to drive the family automobile. Father would drive as far as Point Breeze and get the car headed east and then he would say: "Do you want to drive?" And I was about 12 years old at that time. There were no such things as driver's licenses. And it just might be of interest to know that when such a law went into effect a person had to take an oath that he or she had driven 1000 miles in order to be given that driver's licence. Father wouldn't help me to think how many miles I had driven and it took the husband of a friend to say: "When did you last drive into Rochester? Well how many miles is it? How many times have you done it in the last two or three months?" And then I realized what a simple thing and an honest thing it would be to say that I had driven much more than my 1000 miles.

Going back to the farm, we lived there until I was 5 years old. My mother's father had died and a little money came to her and she was able to buy a home in Albion. Her health was rather delicate at that time and it seemed best that she get away from the hard work of the farm, Because in those days a farmer's wife had to feed all the help on the farm. If threshers came they were there for breakfast, a crew of 8 to 12, they were there for their noon-day dinner and sometimes working into the evening, had to be given their third meal of the day. And for a village girl who had never cooked for such numbers it was quite a proposition. And so when I was 5 years old we moved into Albion, having bought a home on East Avenue where my parents lived for the rest of their lives. And it was in 1962 that I was able to sell that home and move into the present apartment where I am now living. I believe I did not say that I was born in - - - I did say I was born in 1899.

And I graduated, always went to school in the Albion Public Schools. Had I lived on the farm one more year I would have had to go to the Rural School at the corner of the Lake Road and the Kent Road which now has been turned into a private dwelling home.

We had nothing but horses in those days in those days to get us back and forth and it was practically a day's trip to come the ten miles into Albion to do the family marketing or shopping and get back to the farm. Of course there were grocery stores that as a part of their regular routine had a cart, horse drawn of course, that came from - - - down the road from farm house to farm house. And when they opened up the cart there was a miniature grocery store inside and all the staples the farmer's wife might need were right there. On another day in the week a meat man might come through with his assortment of meat kept in - - So there were ways of getting food without coming to town.

From our farm it was not too long a drive over to Kent

where there was a General Store. And Kent, by the way I think, was still called East Carlton at that time. The other store that I remember more clearly was Bamber's at The Bridges where Narby's Grocery Store is today. That has been for my whole life-time a grocery store of one kind or another. And at that time there was also a meat market on the other side of the road where I believe there's a boat livery now.

As I said, when I was 5 we moved into Albion. We came early in April. The roads were very muddy. My father was getting ready for an auction on the farm and so he hired what was known as a hack to come out from Albion to bring my mother, our hired girl - - maid or servant you'd call her today, and myself into town.

Now a hack was a double seated conveyance, all enclosed, with the driver sitting outside. It was usually used for weddings and funerals so we must have made quite a sight driving the ten miles into town that day. It was my first experience of driving and riding backwards and all enclosed in by the time I get to Albion I have experienced my first bit of car sickness. Something that I have had with me upon occasion all the rest of my life.

In Albion I was very fortunate to have a neighborhood with a number of children so that I grew up with the Brooks kids; Mrs. Velma Miller is the only one living locally today. And I had Dr. Sutton as a next door neighbor with a son five years younger than I am and really he became my little brother or kid-brother and we still have a contact today.

As I said, I graduated from Albion High School and went on to study at Vassar College where I stayed three years and then, because of a health problem, was at home a bit. In time I graduated from Brockport, which was then a Normal School, not a part of the State University as it is today. And with

that background went to teach on Long Island. From there I commuted into New York and finally obtained a Bachelors's Degree of Science from Teacher's College, Columbia University and a few years later extended my training to include a Master's Degree from that same school.

Like so many people who were young at the time of the Great Depression, around 1929 and 30, I was caught in it and lost my job, which was then in a private school in Yonkers, and came home where I stayed for about three years. Partly from health, partly because I didn't have a job and eventually took employment with the Albion Public School system where I spent the rest of my active teaching years.

You have asked about my back-ground. On each side of the family I am a third generation to be born in Orleans County. My mother's family, the Hart Family, came first. Her grandfather, Joseph Hart and his wife, Lucy Kirtland Hart, came into this area. He coming first in the fall of 1811 and again bringing his family in the spring of 1812. At that time, if I have figured correctly, he had five children; four sons and one daughter, who came with them. He had been born in Connecticut, had brought his bride up the Hudson River to probably Catskill and they had gone inland to Durham in Greene County where they stayed a short time - - some of the children were born there - - and then they moved into Seneca County in the area of what is now Seneca Castle. And according to a letter written by his father-in-law he should have stayed there. But apparently he thought he must get more land as an inheritance for these four sons and so in time he came on into Orleans County and bought the tract of land that would extend from what is now Main Street to Clarendon Road, from East Avenue almost up to the present Day Provision Plant on the east side of Route 98. Before his death he divided that farm, giving the north 100 acres to his two oldest sons, William and Elizur, and at his death willed the rest of the farm, I believe it was

about 128 acres, to his widow and the son, Joseph, who was next to the youngest of the children, who became the farmer and in time was my grandfather. He married a girl from what is now East Lee Road who's name was Harriet Cole. She was young, quite a bit younger than he. She was a rural school teacher and they in time had five daughters; my mother being the youngest of the five.

Of Joseph's children, the eldest, William always kept the farm and in time willed it to his son, John Hart. And I don't know whether it was William or John who built the brick house on the east side of our Main Street which is now the home of the lawyer, John Russelli. Elizur sold his half of his inheritance to his brother, William, and he invested his money in loans to local farmers and in time became a banker. It was Elizur, who at his death, left money to help build the present Presbyterian Church in Albion. His family is now all gone from Albion.

My grandfather and grandmother are represented by two young matrons who live at Lakeside and myself.

The other two boys who came here as youngsters, John died as a bachelor, Benjamin went back into New England to get a medical education and finally settled in Alton, Illinois where he became a doctor. He died before his father died apparently his health had become poor and he had stopped in Michigan to see his sisters and supposedly was on his way to the sea-shore for his health when he died in Adrian, Michigan.

The youngest boy, Samuel, went to Adrian, Michigan in time where his three sisters all lived as married women. And he in time, became a druggist and one of the outstanding businessmen of Adrian, Michigan.

My grandfather was always a farmer. He, I wouldn't say a recluse - - - but he did not care for the social amities and he was just a home-body. Of his five daughters, one married and went to Clarendon to live. The eldest died here in Albion. And the other two, one died here, the other died in Florida. And my mother lived until 1962



and died at the age of almost 92 years of age.

On the Billings side of the family. My great-great grandfather lived in Chenango County and came up here in 1818 and bought land on both sides of the Ridge Road. Enough to set his three sons up in farming. They were Timothy, Joseph and Lauren Billings.. Timothy built the brick house which today is owned and lived in by Ralph Poelma. Lauren built a cobblestone house on the north side of the Ridge. It would be somewhere at the - - across from the inter-section of the Lattin Road and Ridge Road. My great-grandfather had the middle section along Marsh Creek and he lived first, I believe, on the north side of the Ridge Road where he had a saw mill and later built his home on the south side of the Ridge, on the bank of Marsh Creek. He married Charlotte Drake, who's father had come a bit earlier as a miller and had set up a mill on Oak Orchard Creek west of Gaines.

So on both sides of the family I am from the early stock of this area.

I've seen a good many changes in my life-time.

I remember our first automobile very well. It was a Case Car. The Case Company made farm machinery. My father's best friend was a dealer in that brand of machineries, so my father felt obligated to buy his first car from Horatio Swartz who also lived down on the Ridge. It never operated very well from the beginning and I think all of my father's training as a driver took place in the first hour he owned the car. And I remember distinctly his coming into the house and saying to my mother: "Kittie may I take you for a ride if you're not afraid?" And then the question came up of where should they go. Because Mother was willing to take the chance and her reply was: "Might we go to Millville? I've heard of it all my life and I have never been to Millville." And so I think of it every time I drive through that little hamlet. That one could live in Albion to be 40 years old and never have

gotten that far from home. In time the Case car was traded in or we had Buicks for some time and then my father and I decided we liked a Chevrolet and for many years we drove one type of Chevrolet or another. And although I am now 80 years of age I am still driving an automobile.

That is one change. Of course the roads are another great change. I remember when East and West Avenue were just dirt streets as were all the other streets in the village. And when the first improvement in hard surface roads was made in Albion; Albion had to have them of brick. Main Street was brick paved and so was East and West Avenue. And of course we have found problems with them and long ago they were concreted over and macadamized and so on.

But another thing that might be of interest. My mother's home was the home on South Main Street now owned and lived in by Dr. Antoine Nassar. We don't think of it as up a hill but you will have to stop and think that the lawns on either side at that point are cut down to the street level. And in the beginning the road went over the top of that rise and that was known as "Hart's Hill". And you would hear many people say: "Well I'm going up on the Hill." Something that we would never think of today. The I saw it cut down and cut down again in my life-time. At least three times I have seen it lowered to its present level. There is a big Black Walnut tree near the entrance of the Nassar drive. That tree has been there as long I have any memory.

Another thing that is a great change is the way of caring for lawns. People had lawn mowers, hand propelled, as long as I can remember but on a large lawn such as my grandmother had there on South Main Street a scythe was used a couple of times a year and that was all that was done to that lawn. And now with the riding-powered lawn mower, think of the beautiful spaces and expanses of lawn

we have done in less time than probably it was done with a hand scythe when I was a youngster.

Another thing this is a great change of course is in the stores of the village. We used to have grocery stores and meat markets and specialty stores and dry goods stores. And of course today we don't know what a regular grocery store is. In the country they used to have General Stores and it is with great amusement that I go into such a store as our present Bell's store and see them selling shoes and jackets and things of that nature. It seems to me that we've just about come full around because they are back to the General Store again and perhaps they don't think of it that way but that's the way I look at it.

In my long life I have experienced World War I. I was old enough at that time, still a high school student; but I remember my neighbor boys going to War. And that was when I learned to knit. I promised to knit socks for one of the boys and I did and I have been knitting them ever since. Then I lived through World War II and sent my own pupils off to War at that time. And then I have experienced the Korean War and more recently, in a very detached way, the War in Vietnam.

I also experienced, as I mentioned earlier, the Great Depression. And when I hear people talking about having to cut back today, I'm wondering if the present generation will ever have the courage to face what we went through at that particular time. One of the two banks in Albion failed. I had lost my job in Yonkers and so I took what savings I had and at that time went to do my Master's at Teacher's College. One morning a friend called and said: "Do you know anything about the Citizen's Bank in Albion?" And I said: "Yes, why?" And he said: "It closed it's doors, according to the New York Times today." And I said: "Well

then I won't stay for my second semester." Because all the money I had saved and was using for that year was in two banks. One was in Yonkers and one here at the Citizen's National Bank in Albion. I felt that the Albion bank in the day of many bank failures and foreclosures was much safer than the one in Yonkers so I had spent my Yonkers money during my first semester and was saving the Albion money for the second semester. I went to the college offices and said: "I shall have to change my plans and I will leave in about two weeks at the end of the semester." And they of course asked "why?". And it was explained and they said: "Oh, and we have made all the student loans we have money to make." And I said: "well I didn't want to get into debt," because I knew that this bank failure had affected my family financially back in Albion. But I was told to "sit tight" and presently I was told that my tuition would be forwarded to me and I made a few alternations in my life. My board and room was paid for and so I stayed on and finished my work for my Master's Degree. But came home without a job because at that time teaching jobs were like hen's teeth, they just didn't exist. That is new ones. And there was no expanding field. But eventually I was able to save a little money here and there and was able to repay my loan and then was offered a job in Albion which I took with great gratitude.

When I first came into the Albion school system for five years I taught sixth grade. And at that time it - - - the sixth grade was in what is the gray stone building that is now been abandoned as a part of our school system. I believe the school offices are there and other specialty classes still exist up there.

The I moved into what is now the Middle School and most of my work was with Junior High eighth grade youngsters for the rest of that time.

But when I came back here the village was still feeling the affects of the Depression. My salary was \$600.00 less than I had had in the last teaching position I had had. And on top of that, I had to accept, along with all members of the school faculty, a 4% cut because the village did not have the money enough to even pay the \$1400.00 they were offering me as a year's salary.

Times have changed a great deal and when I hear my teaching friends of today talk about getting their raises



The Swan Library, Albion, N. Y.

The Swan Library was founded in 1900, through a bequest of \$30,000 from a townsman, Mr. William G. Swan, later augmented by \$10,000 from Mrs. Swan. It occupies a centrally located building which was formerly the residence of Mr. Roswell Burrows.

The library proper, located on the first floor, comprises a large reading room and children's room, a stack room, a small study room, and entrance hall. Beginning with 5000 volumes, a consolidation of older town and village libraries, it now (1929) has a well-balanced collection of 15,500 volumes, and large files of magazines. Sixty current periodicals are taken. Two librarians composing the staff care for the school needs as well as the general public. The circulation in 1928 was 58,139.

The second story has well equipped club rooms, and is in constant use as a community center.

You have asked about Main Street and the village as I remember it.

Well let's start with my grandparent's home on South Main Street, the present Nassar house. Grandfather died when I was four years old so I have almost no memory of him. That house was then just as it is now except that it was my grandmother who saw that the front veranda was added. It was simply an entrance with **steps** that went up to the front door when I was very small. It was Grandmother who planted the trees around the house in the yard. It must have been rather barren in my early child-hood. Across the street from that is the low two story Federalist type brick home that was built by Ebenezer Rogers or his son and was in the Rogers family when I first remember the house. There were very few houses; they were scattered down Main Street. The one I remember that is now, I believe, Dr. Fernandez home was very different at that time. It was brick, it had a bay window in front and it was inhabited by a Mr. and Mrs. Robert Stout. They were both poetically minded and Rosa Stout had her poems published, privately I'm sure. They were devout Methodists and my recollection is their going down Main Street, walking of course, hand in hand, arm in arm to attend services in the Methodist Church. Below them was a long, low or so it seems to me brick house, painted a very dark, drab gray which as my mother spoke of it, was the Field house. It had been built by a Norman Field who had operated a marble works here in town and sold cemetery markers and things of that kind. That has been raised (the roof) and changed a great deal and is at present the home of Eugene Haines and his wife. The next house I can remember is the one that is now the Murray Dailey home. The garage which has been transformed into offices was always there; of course long before it was a garage it was a stable and I have no idea how many horses the people who lived there had.

The next house I remember, really, is the brick house which was on the corner where there is now a Mobil Station. That was a very square, boxy brick house with a narrow, small entrance and in my child-hood the north side of the house was completely covered with ivy and the sparrows loved it. And so the man who lived there always had long bamboo fishing poles which he would use to swat against the side of the house to scare the birds away. And it was one of my child-hood delights to watch him do it and to see the birds, the quantity of birds that would fly out from that.

Across the street was a very elaborate home which had been built by Mr. Swan and I believe an etched door from that house is still in the Swan Library which was a bequest by his will to the Village of Albion.

South of that there were two other houses that were always there, wooden homes, in fact there were three. One was painted a chocolate brown, one was painted a yellow and the third one, going up the street, which was probably the next house to the Hart home that I mentioned earlier; that home that white house in my child-hood was inhabited by a bachelor and his sister and he was very eccentric. He was thin, he was grey, he had a beard, a white beard and to me he was something of a ghost because he never spoke to anyone and he just sort of glided along the streets. It was really quite interesting to me.

On the north east corner of Main and East Avenue there was a chocolatey brown - - on two story home which at that time was occupied by the Superintendent of Schools and his family, Mr. Willis Carmer.

North of that was the house that many of us remember, a three story home, which had been built by the Sawyer family and which in its last days was known as Maple Manor and a very nice over-night home for travelers coming through this area. The predecessor of the modern motel.

Then north of that was a large yellow house owned by Mr. George Waterman who with his doll-like wife lived there. They had no children. I always thought they must rattle around in that house most terribly.

And then near the rail-road track and set well back from the street was a little low story and a half home which was occupied by a Mr. and Mrs. Taylor and their daughter, Alethea Taylor.

On the other side of the street across from the Taylor home there was the brick house built by a haberdasher here in town, Mr. William Dye, a very dignified looking man with walrus mustaches.

And south of his home was the very lovely Greek-Revival white house owned and occupied by the banker, William Cornell.

And south of that was a Medina Sandstone and wood home owned by a Druggist, Mr. Clarke.

And then in my early child-hood on the north west corner West Avenue and Main Street there was a vacant lot. And when I was perhaps ten years old, somewhere in that neighborhood, a lawyer, Mr. Burrows, Mr. Albert Burrows, built a Greek Revival type home there. Many people as the years went by thought that that was one of the oldest houses in the village but really it wasn't.

Those have all given way now to commercial industry. To me it is rather sad. And I might say that the maple trees on South Main Street were exceptionally beautiful. They were tall enough to arch over the street and you really, in the fall especially, drove through a bower of color. North of the rail-road track there were a couple of small houses on the left side of Main Street and then there was the three story mansion which had been built by E. Kirk Hart, son of Elizur the banker. And he too was a banker along with his father. He dabbled in many things. He was a politician and spent, I believe, one term in Congress. He was instrumental in having what was first known as the House of Correction, or the Refuge, a home for way-ward girls built west of our village which is



today known at the State Training School. And he also was responsible for the establishment of one of the Rochester newspapers. Off hand I can not give you that name. It is also supposed that <sup>WHILE WAS</sup> he in a saloon along the canal bank heard a young lad, an Irish boy off one of the canal boats going through sing, realized he had a very beautiful voice and was responsible for putting Charles Chauncey Olcott on the stage and giving him a chance at his long career as an Irish tenor soloist in this country. Today - - he had three children, two daughters and a son. I am wrong in saying that. E. Kirk Hart had two sons and three daughters. The daughters all married and moved away from here. The two sons continued in Albion and in my child-hood the younger son owned the house on the south east corner of Main and East Avenue and the older son, Charles E. Hart, lived in this almost mansion. In the beginning it had a low stone wall along the street. It had a very beautiful fountain in the front yard; a little boy and girl under an umbrella. It was really a beautiful thing and most unusual. There was a big carriage house in the back yard there and the whole property ran through to Liberty Street. And I can't quite picture it now or know why but I know that there was a low wind-mill in that back yard in my early child-hood.

And then of course you get down to the Park Street corners and I believe it was in 1895 that George Pullman, whose father had come here as a cabinet maker, came back from his success at building sleeping cars in Chicago and built the Pullman Church as a memorial to his parents. If you haven't seen it it would be wise to go into the entrance of that church someday and see the very handsome bas-reliefs of his parents that are in the entrance way of that church. My Grandmother Hart had the conviction of being a Universalist. But the Harts had been early Presbyterians in fact it was the first Joseph Hart who was one of the founders of what is now the Barre Center Presbyterian Church. And when the

Village of Albion came about in 1824 he and his wife removed their allegiance from Barre Center and were among the founders of the present Presbyterian Church in Albion. My Grandmother Hart felt that her daughters, the grand-children of these Presbyterians, should be brought up in the Presbyterian faith. And at that time the Universalist Church in Childs seldom had a pastor so she took her daughters to the Albion Presbyterian Church and brought them into the fold of that church. But when the Pullman Church was organized in Albion, Grandmother was one of the organizing group in that church. And on the day of its dedication which was 31st of January 1895, the day that my parents were married, it was said that she spent the day at the dedicatory services of the church and then came back to her home where there was a 3 o'clock formal wedding that evening. And many of the people had a good laugh about that, because of her being able to accomplish both in the same day. Grandmother Hart was the first chairman of the Board of Trustees at the Pullman Church.

Across from the Pullman Church, one of our fine architects in this area had built the brick house which is today the Rectory for St. Joseph's Church. And then coming north into the block across from the Court House Square we have the little Episcopal Church in our history was founded and was the first Presbyterian Church in the village. And in 1846 when the Presbyterians had out grown it and the Episcopalians had bought a lot on the north side of East State Street but had no money with which to build a building. A swap was made, the Presbyterians taking over the building site and the Episcopalians having a church. The Presbyterians built what is now the Chapel of the present Presbyterian Church. It once had a belfry on it and was a real church. If you go inside now, or rather from the outside, if you look you will see that the windows on the side of that building extend over two stories.

And when it was no longer used as the church a floor was put in half way across those windows making it a two story building. I believe there was always a basement kitchen and dining room in the early days. Those have been moved now to the ground floor.

The building which is now the Swan Library was the home of one of the Burrows family, the early Burrows who came into this community.

And on the south west corner of State and Main there was another brick house, always painted yellow as I remember it, which had belonged to a druggist, a Mr. Burrell whose daughter was Keziah. And it was the first time I ever met that name and it intrigued me as a youngster. Going north the Baptists had had a church. Their first church was north of the Burrows home but it had been razed before I can remember it and the present Baptist edifice had been built.

But there was a low brick house a bit farther north, south of what is now the Cooper home, and in front of that was a little brick Greek Revival type building which had been a lawyer's office. I remember it as a milliner's shop. Across from that there was a long, low two story white wooden building which was a hotel in my earliest childhood days.

The village itself, the buildings, are very much as I remember them. But when you get to the canal bridge I remember distinctly when the canal was widened the last time and the present Lift Bridge was installed. Before that we had had a narrow two lane bridge in the middle of which there was a strange iron ball and when the bridge needed to be opened, it was not raised but was turned or as the expression was "Swung". There was a man who swung the bridge and he came out with a heavy wooden stick that had a metal on the end of it that fitted into this ball and by walking round and round he turned that bridge so

The DAR had been organized in the community some four years before and the women of that organization met in private homes for their monthly meetings. A woman who had grown up in Albion, was a native of Orleans County, Emma Reed had married and gone to Utica, New York as the wife of a dentist, a Mr. Nelson. He had died and she had Albion ties, relatives in this area, was very much interested in DAR, had a great quantity of the treasures that her family had cherished from the time and before they had come into Orleans County and she felt that those keep-sakes, mementoes, should come back into the County. So she broached this young organization and said: "If I bought a house and made it habitable as a club house would you take care of a small museum in which I would place my treasures?" And so the deal was made. And it was in 1929, I believe, that the present DAR House was dedicated. Mrs. Webster didn't live too long after that. She had high hopes of doing more for the organization. In the meantime she married a boy-hood sweet-heart from Albion who had gone to Long Island to live, a Mr. Webster. They came back and bought a summer home farther west on the ridge. Today it is a private dwelling home right next to a little Quaker Cemetery. I think that's the easiest way I can describe it for you.

The DAR has continued. It has increased its museum a bit, it still occupies the second floor of the building, it is with difficulty that the organization has been able to keep up the property, this past year of 1979 they did find that they could afford to re-decorate the club rooms on the first floor and we're happy to say that at the moment the property is in very good shape. It is an organization that does not, in this vicinity, attract young people as it does in the south which is rather too bad but perhaps even the south is changing now that so many more women are going into business and there are two workers in a family.

I have seen that whole area back of the DAR House developed in my life-time. Linwood Avenue is all built up within my

time.

My Grandparents Billings came in, left the farm, about 1908 and came into the village and because Grandfather had always driven by way of Caroline Street in his horse and buggy and he was a daily visitor in the village they bought the old house on the north east corner of Caroline and Ingersoll Street. I had been, I believe, a two family house, it is today a two family house but my grandparents occupied it as one family. And it was there that my grandfather died in 1913 and Grandmother continued to live there until the early 1930s. Her only daughter lived in Indianapolis, Indiana and Grandmother used to go there and spend her winters with my aunt. And then for the very last years it seemed too much for her to go back and forth, spring and fall, and so she continued to live in Indianapolis until 1939 when she passed away in June, having survived her daughter by three years. Grandmother was approaching her 94th birthday had she been able to live until the September following her death.

Grandfather, of course had been a farmer all his life on the Ridge. He had been one of the first to go into fruit and had one of the first peach orchards I remember. And some of the juiciest and most delicious peaches I ever ate came off that farm.

And that reminds me of another story. My father used to tell me about the Billings Peach, a white peach. And he said that a man had come across Lake Ontario from Canada, someone who was escaping the law and had beached somewhere at the end of the Kent Road. Had walked up with these White Peaches in his pocket, that's what he'd had to eat on his trip across the lake, and he gave some of the peach stones to Grandfather Billings' older brother, Harlow, who was living to the east of our farm. And so the Billings Peach was developed there. We know

nothing about it. It's nothing that has ever been sold commercially but it was interesting.

And then it might be interesting to know that the corners of the Kent Road and the Ridge Road, Route 104 today, was known as East Gaines. And in my child-hood there was still a grocery store.

## SIDE THREE - Tape two, Side One

It has been said that our roads and streets have changed a bit and that has set me to thinking. When I was a youngster there wasn't a paved street in the Village of Albion.

The Lift Bridge at Main Street over the canal hadn't yet been built. There has been a new high bridge on Brown Street put in perhaps 50 - 55 years ago. But back at Main Street it used to be that we had what was called a Swing Bridge. That meant that it was a two lane bridge with a funny round iron knob about in the middle of it and when a boat approached, and the canal boats were then pulled by mules and the tow-path was in use, the bridgeman came out and did what we called "Swing the Bridge". He brought a long pole with some sort of an iron on the end of it that fitted into the iron in the center of the bridge and then he walked round and round until the bridge had turned to be parallel with the canal. And the boats at that time had to be narrow enough that they would go either one side or the other side of the bridge as it was there in the middle of things.

And that made me think too that as a youngster we never went to Batavia the way we do today, following 98 as it is. Some of you have heard the expression Old 98, I'm sure, or the Oak Orchard Road, which it is; and south of Barre Center the road branches to the left as well as the road that goes straight ahead and it was always the left fork that we took at that point. It seems round-about to us today but it is a higher road than the present 98 and therefore they followed the old Indian Trail. And the land where we

now have Muck Land along Route 98 was swamp and heavily forested. It wasn't until I was perhaps 15 - 18 years old that a New York company came in, built barracks over on Old 98 and started in - - - they bought up that land and started in the draining and clearing of that swampy area. And anyone who's driven through knows that there are drainage ditches through there. Those were all made by that company and then the road was dried out enough so that everyone began to go straight ahead through Barre and on beyond to Elba and so to Batavia.

And of course what we call Quaker Hill now is greatly cut down. Before I can remember it I'm sure the road went over the top of that hill without any gouging down in as it is today. And of course 98, the Old 98, was the Indian Trail which these first settlers into this area followed when they came to Batavia first to stake out a claim for land, then came over to their land and they were following the trail that the Indians had used when they came in the spring to fish at the mouth of Oak Orchard Creek.

And that isn't the road that we know today either because their road wound around hitting high spots, wound around through Gaines and on down past the left fork of the road or turn that would take you into Waterport and going straight on you finally make a turn to the left onto what is known as Park Avenue. But if you went straight ahead across the field you can still see remains of something of a dug-out road at one time and that was the "Fording Place" in Oak Orchard Creek and everybody drove or rode their horses through without need of a bridge at that time.

Then coming back into Albion. As I said before they were all dirt streets. I am old enough to remember when East and West Avenue and all of Main Street was paved for the first time and it was paved with brick. That was the hard surface that was put on and it was



a slow tedious job of seeing that done and it was not very practical because the bricks gave way and it had been a highly expensive thing.

Going back up South Main Street. If you stop and think there is the large brick house on the left hand side of the street going south where Dr. Antoine Nassar now lives and the older, much older brick house of Federal design on the right hand side. Today their lawns cut down considerably to the level of the street. Originally the road went over the top of that rise and it was the Hart Family that lived on the left hand side, owned that land, and that was known to the whole community as Hart's Hill. And people went up on the hill to see Mr. Hart.

It was said at the time they put in the brick pavement that in digging down and widening the road they found remains of an old hollowed-out logs which had been the first surface water ditches of that area. The first sewage system, you might say, in the Village of Albion.

And when it comes to side-walks. I'm so old that I can remember that there were a few around the Court House Square and in other parts of the village that were slabs of sand-stone which were used for side-walks. But aside from that they were wooden side-walks here in the village and that meant that there was - - - well it's like a railroad, there were heavy boards on either side and cross-boards, with a bit of space in between for the water to run down through to dry them out. And they were wonderful for women to wheel their baby carriages over. In fact there was one on East Avenue for a number of years that one woman with an English perambulator always brought her children because she didn't have to jiggle the carriage. That way the baby got all the jouncing it needed. And I

learned to roller skate on Platt Street where there was a wooden side-walk and one day I became quite daring and thought I could go to the railroad track. And I got up a little bit too much steam and went a bit too fast and then when I came to the railroad ties and rails I collapsed on the track and it really rather frightened me because I thought there might have been a train coming. There were no signals at Platt Street at that time.

And perhaps that's another thing. That the railroad crossings on Main Street and at Clinton Street, we had to have a flag-man 24 hours a day. And there were little round or square houses where they might seek refuge out of the cold or the wind when they were not busy flagging down the passengers to let the trains go through.

And of course there were many more trains in that time. Albion had about six trains a day each way. And so it was nice to get the 7:20 or the 9:10 or the 11:20 or the 12:30 and so on through the day in to Rochester. And you could come back equally comfortably at the hour you were to choose.

It wasn't until perhaps 1915 that an Englishman, John Boyles, - - going back to side-walks - - brought his art of laying concrete walks into the village. And today some of the walks that are standing up the best and have shown the least wear and tear have his name stamped in the corner of a block. Perhaps at one end, perhaps at each end of the side-walk.

And people used to spend their afternoons, Sunday afternoon especially, strolling. And so at village expense a concrete side-walk was built all the way from the edge of the village to Mt. Albion. And as a child living on East Avenue I was very much accustomed to seeing whole families stroll by and we always knew that they were taking a walk to the cemetery which was quite the proper thing to do at

that time.

That walk is completely wiped out in places now. In fact probably half of the walk is gone. And people wonder why in the world it was ever placed there but it really served a very important need for its day.

In other parts of the village side-walks were layed and every land owner had to provide the walk in front of his own home and keep it shoveled in the winter time and his lawn mowed in the summer time and expected to sweep that side-walk once in a while so that it was kept in quite respectable condition.

Perhaps I should have said when I was talking about the Indian Trail coming - - the first road of the settlers that in low spots farmers or anyone who wished could put logs in the road to build it up. It came to be called a Log Road or a Plank Road. And they had the right to put a Toll Booth at one end and collect a small toll for the privilege of driving over this road and not taking the chance of having their wagon wheels mired in quicksand or in soft mud.

## SIDE FOUR - Tape Two, Side Two

When it comes to the early schools in the Village of Albion, of course there were nothing but grade schools. No high schools because they were not demanded by the public.

The very first school was - - - the old people of New England would have called a "Dame School" because it was kept by a woman in her own home and she could watch over these children as she was doing her housework.

In time Albion had four schools. There was one built of sand-stone on Bailey Avenue which we know as West Avenue today and that still stands on the north side of the street almost across from the Ames Plaza.

Another was on the corner of Clarendon and East State Street and the last I knew there was still a Mill Stone set back in the yard of the house there that marked the spot where that school used to be.

Of course they were one-room schools and all facilities were outside for many, many years.

There was a third school down on Caroline Street, somewhere east of Ingersoll Street.

Then in time the brick building at the south west corner of Platt and Park Street was built and that became a school where children were gathered from two or three of these districts. And by that time high school education or higher education had come into vogue but it was still privately controlled.

And there was what was known as a Boy's Academy which today is the site of the Office Building of our Public School system between East and West Academy Street.

That building was built the first year I entered school

in Albion. And the school children - - - by that time of course it had become the old building that the present gray stone structure followed was a brick building and that had been the Boy's Academy which in time was taken over by the Village of Albion when high school public education became mandatory.

For the girls there had been Phipps Seminary, a privately owned girl's school, on what is now the Court House Square and that building, or school rather, attracted girls from as far away as Alabama and Georgia and some from the Mid-West came here. It was both a Boarding and a Day School and because their boarding facilities were rather limited some of the girls lived in private homes. Boarded in private homes here in the village. And then there was another woman who maintained in her home a Day School for Girls. At the moment, not having looked it up, I can't think of her name.

But when the High School became a Public High School then both boys and girls were accepted in the same school.

The building where I began which is now the about to be abandoned American Legion Building was known as the Central School. And at the time I began school all the children on the east side of Main Street went there for the first three or four grades.

And then the building that was built the year I started school was large enough to house not only the High School but what they called a "Preparatory Department" of two rooms I believe, where the children who came in from the rural country schools could sort of catch up on what they needed and then be ready to enter High School in one or two years. And all of the grades from 5 through 8 were held in that building or met in that building.

A funny thing or perhaps I should say a peculiar happened. By that time it had become mandatory for a teacher to have a witness if there was a whipping in school. And there was one boy, when I was in the fourth grade, who was a incorrigible or seemingly so and on one occasion because I was over-size in every way for my age, I was invited to take the place of the adult to be the witness to the whipping. And he happened to be my next door neighbor and he thought it was the funniest thing. He certainly got no help from that whipping because he was so amused that the fact that I was witnessing it and I was so embarrassed I didn't know what to do.

The day I entered the big building between the Academy Streets I had met with another fifth grade girl and we went over together like babes-in-the-wood and it seemed so big and we felt so strange and we didn't see a person we knew and we didn't know where to go and we had heard that there was a 5A and a 5B Room. We knew there were to be two fifth grades. And the first person that we recognized was the Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Carmer. And so we must have rushed up to him and said: "Where is 5B ?" And of course we didn't know that that was a non-permitted expression in his life. There was no A and B fifth grade ! They were just the same. And so he personally escorted us to a fifth grade and the teacher standing in the door was instructed that we were two of her new pupils. There wasn't a person in that room we knew. They were all strange children to us and we didn't dare say anything and so for my fifth and sixth grades I was isolated from all the youngsters I had grown up with through the other grades. They thought it was hilariously funny and I came to make very good friends, life long friends, in the new fifth grade. But for the first week or two it was pretty hard.

And then our school, I believe I'm right in saying that children could leave school and have working papers at 14, at that time. So that the school was considerably decreased in size when it got to the seventh grade and so there was only one seventh grade and one eighth grade. And at that time we had a very excellent and superior eighth grade teacher. The kind of a teacher of whom we were all scared to death. But she could prod us through and those of us who had special ability or seemed to get along a little faster than others were permitted to take Algebra, straight Algebra at that time, or - - and even sometimes Latin when we were in eighth grade to get started toward High School.

That was when I first came to know Miss Sadie Britton, who at this moment is still a resident of Albion.

Miss Britton graduated from Cornell after three and a half years of college and came home in mid-year to teach math in Albion High School. I thought she was one of the most beautiful people I had ever seen, with her red hair and her great vivacity and wearing, as I remember it, a very much of a swing style coat in plaids of green and blue - - green and brown. I can see her walking out of the front door of that school and thinking how beautiful she was. Today she's something like 87 or 88 years old but still has much of the vivacity of her youth.

We had some other interesting teachers at that time and it is interesting to note that Mr. Carmer had a faculty for selecting people of ability. Today we seldom know of one of our teachers going on to posts of responsibility and authority in other schools but it was quite the common thing at that time that after two or three years his men teachers especially went on to executive posts

of considerable ability. And because I haven't been thinking this out - - off the hat I think of Harry Carpenter, who taught math here, who became - - - who wrote an Elementary Text Book in Science that was used until quite recently and may still be used in many public schools. He went on to teach in the Rochester School System and worked there, I believe, until his death.

I think of another one who was there in my day. Another Science teacher, Mr. Courier, who went on to teach at Penn State. He probably is retired from there by now. Another one who made his name was an Ag teacher we had, Ed Babcock, who was the founder of the present G.L.F.

It might be interesting that there were various ways that we could attract rural teachers - - - rural pupils rather into our school. They could "Basket Board" which meant that they brought staples like eggs and milk, canned fruit, vegetables and lived in a private family for the week; going home Friday afternoon. Of course if you were lucky enough to have a horse and buggy you could drive in for the day and there were such things as Livery Stables, like our parking lots today, but under cover where people could have their horse boarded and cared for while they were doing other things.

Then the pupils could come in by Trolley and then came both from the east and from the west.

The third way was by one horse drawn bus that came in from the Five Corners area. The school that is now the old - - - it's a cobblestone home just north of Five Corners on Route 279.



SIDE FIVE - Tape three, side one

## — Who was James Little? —

This is Katharine Billings speaking.

Some 25 or more years ago, looking over old family papers, I came upon a will dated 1839. It was signed by one James Little, a name unknown to me. The contents of the will fascinated me. In part it read: "I give, devise and bequeath unto the American Bible Society, the American Anti-Slavery Society, and the Society for the Education of Pious Young Men of Color, share and share alike the proceeds from the sale of a certain tract of land in Eaton County, Michigan." 80 acres to be exact. Named as executors were Lansing Bailey and Thomas A. Fanning, prominent Albion citizens of that era.

I turned to my mother, Kittie Hart Billings, asking: "Who was James Little?" In substance this is the story she told.

When her grandfather, Deacon Joseph Hart, pioneered in Barre in 1812, along with his four sons, ranging in age from 11 to .5, he brought a black boy, James Little. The boy, a slave, was given Deacon Hart as part of his wife's dowry. My great-grandfather, not believing in slavery, accepted the boy, granting him his freedom. He was brought up as a member of the Hart Family. When the Hart boys went to school, he went too, learning to read and write and perhaps a little bit more. Coming of age, he moved to Michigan where the three Hart daughters had settled. And, of course, Michigan was Free Territory.

A few years later, Mother and I visited her cousin, Charles Hart, son of my grandfather's younger brother, Samuel Hart, in Adrian, Michigan. In all the conversation about the family, I mentioned Jim Little and his will. Charles' response was: "There was nothing to will. He died broke and Father paid his funeral expenses." I didn't think of Jim Little for years. About four years ago a friend, knowing my interest in local history, showed me a pamphlet dated 1891 and listing all the principals, teachers and graduates of the old Albion Academy. The last couple of

pages were devoted to reminiscences. There, one man wrote, and I quote: "Poor Jim Little, the black boy, and how he struggled to keep up with the class." I feel Jim was too old to have attended Albion Academy but at least one of those early scholars remembered him.

Recently I went through a scrapbook compiled by my Grandmother Hart. There, a clipping caught my eye, undated, but bearing this caption: "A Reminiscence Of Slavery". Let me read it:

"An old black colored man, named James Little, arrived at the home of S.E. Hart, from Lansing, yesterday afternoon. The old gentleman is in the neighborhood of 100 years old and in his child-hood was a slave of Mr. Hart's grandfather in the state of New York. Later, upon his master's death, he was transferred to Mr. Hart's father who gave him the same privileges and education which Mr. Hart and his brothers received and when he arrived at the age of 21, his liberty was given to him, together with a piece of land in Michigan in the vicinity of Lansing. Mr. Hart had not seen the old gentleman in 50 years."

If Jim Little came with the Harts in 1812 and attended the early schools, I should say that Albion schools have always been integrated; a statement which few, if any other, Western New York villages could agree.

The stories may not exactly jibe, but in essential facts they tally.

.....  
(end of taped interview)  
.....

This interview was conducted by Marjorie Radzinski, Albion, N.Y.  
The transcription was done by Lysbeth Hoffman, Waterport, N.Y.