



# Orleans County Historical Association

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1897-1988



# Orleans County Historical Association

## INTERVIEW

Mr. Carl P. Helenbolt  
Burt, New York  
(formerly of Medina, N.Y.)



Interviewed by  
Helen M. McAllister  
Arden R. McAllister  
February 21, 1978

H Carl Pratt Helenbolt (born 1897)  
Mc Helen/Arden McAllister



# 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.

Carl P. Hesterbolt

Signed

Feb. 21, 1978

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Heleen M. W. Allister

INTERVIEWER

Feb. 21, 1978

Date

H I was born October 15, 1897 in Medina. I think I was born at home. My father's name was LeValley Helenbolt. My mother's maiden name was Eva Leona Pratt.

Mc Did you have brothers and sisters?

H As I understand, the first child born was a boy and I guess he just lived 2-3 days. My sister Marian was about two years and five months older than I was... My father was born and brought up on a farm. He came to town, I presume, just before we were born. He worked, I believe, as a meat cutter somewhere on the street here. Then they got two or three people together: George Bowen, S.A.Cook and Don Biglow and they formed the corporation of S.A.Cook and Company.

Mc Your father was in on that?

H He worked for them. He was the first man employed. They started in a little building. I think it was near the Swett Iron Works and is torn down now, on Glenwood Avenue on the west side of the street.

Mc That's where the S.A.Cook Company started?

H It started in a little building. He built a couple of work benches in the work shop. He was hired as an all-around helper you might say. Shortly thereafter, they came over on East Center Street, just west of Oak Orchard Creek, and put up a partial building. As I understand, most of it was an old foundry. That was the main part of the S.A.Cook plant on East Center Street to start with. "Down in the hole" they always called it. In 1914 they built what is now a building that has withstood all the others because they were wooden buildings and this is a brick building in that part of what was the plant, was the power house. They developed power part of the year when the water was in the canal. ... I might be wrong so I don't like to say, but 1912 was when that little power house was put in there and they developed 500 horse power. In the summertime when the canal was operating, there was a spill-way, and that's where they developed their power. Then across the road from that was a little wooden mill, and they developed power and that all came from Oak Orchard Creek that way. See? Mr. S.P. Blood had the mill opposite the City Hall on the east side of

Main Street. Then it dropped down and Cook and Company bought what is ... I think it is just a blank piece of property... on Orient Street; on the east side there was a shoe factory. This is on the north side of the railroad.

Mc A shoe factory in Medina?

H Right here in Medina! And they developed some power right there. That stream ran right across Orient Street and dropped there about fifty feet and then it came over to that mill in a race-way. Then it went over to Cook's and sometimes the mill would want it and then they could bring water out of the canal (not the Orient Street plant but run this little feed-mill) with water coming out of the canal in canal days. Cooks got the spill from the Power Company.

Mc Who ran the shoe company?

H That's before I ever heard much about it, but they said there was a shoe plant in there. Of course, Mahar plant with the brick buildings south of the railroad on the east side, there was a frame plant, what they called their frame work.

Mc Where was your father's farm?

H At that time he bought from Webb a 98 acre farm on the Ridge Road, east of Oak Orchard on the Ridge, south side. That farm was mostly fruit. ... We had peaches, pears, cherries, quinces and apples. That farm was the one that I went on when I had the trouble (illness) and had to get out of working.

Mc You really have good memories about that place?

H Well, yes I di, but I never lived on it. I lived in Medina but I used to go back and forth. They had a man that worked by the year. His name was Fleet Caufield. He and his wife were with me for several years. I lived in Medina where we built on 415 Catherine Street.

Mc How old would you have been when your father moved into Medina?

H He moved in when he started with Cook and Company. That was started on what we called "Gulf Street", Rock Street, north of the canal along in, well, when they first started, I would say it was probably around in the time of my birth, 1895-1897.

I think my father was in Medina then because I think he worked for a meat market here, temporarily. He came in before 1895.

Mc Where did you start school?

H I started in the kindergarten at old Central School that fronted on Catherine Street, where Pearl Street butts into Catherine Street.

Mc Did you go all the way thru school here in Medina?

H Went to the old high school on South Academy Street. We lived at 504 South Academy Street and that's where we lived until he (father) bought the YMCA property on the corner of West Center and Catherine Street; the old house there.

Mc About your schooling: what did you do for lunch time? Did you go home?

H Yes, I went home because it was only a few feet away.

Mc You started in kindergarten? I didn't know they had kindergarten at that time.

H Yes, we had a Miss Baker.

Mc Did you go all day, or just half days?

H I think we went all day but I wouldn't want to say for sure.

Mc What about the sports activities? Were they anything like they are today?

H No. I can remember the high school boys used to come out there and used to throw a weight, shot-put, for distance. Locally they practiced on the school grounds. I could see them playing football out there. The two schools took the whole block, when I was very small. ... In the wintertime they let us exercise in the Armory. We had no YMCA or any buildings whatsoever for years.... We used to go in the Armory and run the hurdles; the 220, 440, the 880, around the main floor. They'd put temporary stakes... they'd just have a rope around so you'd have to keep inside the rope. Many a track-meet was in there.

Mc You were in track?

H I was not very good at track. I used to high-jump some, but never pole-vaulted. Dean Hinckley and Duane Fink were the pole-vaulters back then. They were older but they could really pole-vault!

Mc Did they do that inside, or outside?



H There was a time I guess, they used to do that inside but most of it was done outside, right beside the old High School.

Mc What year did you graduate from Medina High School?

H 1916.

Mc Did you have schooling other than that?

H No. I took commercial subjects, all that I could in high school; commercial law and commercial arithmetic.

Mc Who was your teacher?

H If I remember rightly, Miss Haight was our teacher. She was a very large person, and I think she taught some of the commercial subjects; and we had a Miss Smith that taught some.

Mc Who was the principal at that time?

H Paul R. Merriman, as I recall.

Mc You have told me that during the summertime when you were still in school, you worked helping to construct the Cook buildings?

H My dad was there at the Cook plant and I went out and carried the water for the men to drink, at the building when they built the S.A.Cook factory on East Avenue, the brick factory in 1912. They had brick-layers, carpenters, roustabouts you might say, and they'd all be quite thirsty. It was all in the summertime of course. I didn't work there in the winter.

Mc You carried a pail of water with just one dipper for all the men? They didn't worry about germs!

H No. That was probably more sanitary than some of the things they operate today. (laughter).

Mc Was it after you had graduated that you got a job with the Rowley Lumber?

H I started out and worked there as a book-keeper and I was there until, I think, it was late 1919. "S.G." Rowley they called him, and he was on his death-bed. Harry come out and told me that his Dad died, which of course they expected with his condition and his age, and they were going to sell the yard. He says, "We are telling you ahead of time so you can look around with a really good recommend and get a job somewhere else." So then I went and hired out to what is now the FMC and was then the Niagara Sprayer, in Middleport, as a book-keeper.

- I worked there until 1921, married at that time.
- Mc ... What was your wife's maiden name and how did you meet her?
- H Mildred Althea Stebbins, from Lockport. ...
- Mc Did you meet at a dance or the church or where?
- H Well, Merrit Brown's wife was a sister of her mother, and they used to come down to Merrit Brown's. We were distant relatives of Merrit Brown thru my Dad's mother. I'd known Mildred since I was a little kid. ... We were married in 1921. It was a home wedding, in Lockport. She lived in Lockport. She was a book-keeper and an accountant at Harrison Radiator. Harrison Radiator had just begin to "move" (grow), so she had a very good job!
- Mc Did she keep her job after you were married?
- H They begged her to keep it but she said, "No. We are going to live in Middleport." She wouldn't want to be running back and forth, so she gave it up.
- Mc What about transportation at that time? Would that have played a part in that decision?
- H Well, we had a car when we were married. Of course my Dad had a car from about 1907, a two-cylinder Buick. I can remember that "chucg-chucg"! (laughter). So, we had a car there for years.
- Mc So, you were married in 1921 and you were working at Niagara Sprayer. How long did you work there?
- H I had worked there, it seems, since around 1920 and then I had what they called the flu... no... I guess I developed the flu after we were married, in 1922. I had to get out of there because they said that too much poison, and of course I expected that that was my end because...
- Mc Now was this the flu, or was this tuberculosis?
- H Well, this turned into tuberculosis, and I suppose the flu set in there. I then had to give up my job at Niagara Sprayer. My Dad had this farm on the Ridge. I went there and farmed it for eight years, back and forth. That is, I didn't live on the farm.
- Mc You were very sick with tuberculosis and the flu. How did the



doctors take care of you? ...

H Well, I had several hemorrhages in over a few weeks and finally started to get along. I slept outdoors in the summer in a screened-in porch. In the winter I had plenty of air but I didn't sleep outdoors. Anyway, I got over it, built my health up and got to be quite strong, and got rid of the hemorrhages.

Mc You didn't have to go to the hospital?

H Never was in the hospital for it.

Mc Then you worked on the fruit farm?

H Mostly fruit: apples, pears, prunes, cherries and a few quince.

Mc Were you able to make a living and support your family, your wife during this time, or did she have to return to work?

H No, she never went back to work. We did very well with the farm.

Mc How did you sell your fruit?

H Of course the cherries went to the processor. The apples we packed in barrels and bushel baskets. Peaches we packed in bushel baskets and shipped 'em right out.

Mc How did you ship them? On the train, canal boat or what?

H They went mostly by rail, in refrigerator cars.

Mc Where did you send them?

H Well we usually sold some peaches to the Dye Cold Storage. That storage is there now, on the south side of the railroad tracks, the west side of Main Street in Medina; that big building. Of course the other storage, at that time was the Rowley Storage, on the other side of the tracks. Later they built what they called the Reed Storage, up at the west end of town. That storage is there now; in fact that is part of Fisher Price. We had three cold storages here at that time.

Mc You had one hired man? Then you and the hired man did all this work?

H Yes. Well you see, we did it with machinery and the hand trimming of trees, of course. When it came to picking the fruit, cherries especially, we paid by the pound. We'd have 25-30 pickers come in and pick. They would usually be just local people. Mostly just farm boys and girls.

- Mc When did you work in the bean house?
- H I didn't work in the bean house. I was in partnership with Charlie Jackson, from Middleport. The plant was called J.J.Jackson and Son. The plant is partially there now but I guess it is just standing there.
- Mc Why did you leave the farm?
- H Due to the fact that my health had been recovered and I thought it best to get into something that had a better outlook. We handled all kinds of farm produce.
- Mc This was with Mr. Jackson?
- H This was Charles D. Jackson, under the name of J.J.Jackson and Son, in Middleport. We handled dry, edible beans. We used to clean them, machine them and have 25-30 girls, women hand-picking them off the machine; sorting them out. After the beans would come in the rough, you'd process them that way. Then put them up in 50, mostly 100 pound bags and ship them to brokers, somewhat. We used to ship a lot of the beans to Brockport, to the A & P (Atlantic and Pacific: grocery store), who'd put 'em up in cans.
- Mc What kind of beans were they?
- H Mostly pea-beans, red kidneys, and yellow-eyes (they called them).
- Mc They were grown locally?
- H Grown locally. A lot of farmers had 5-25 acres of beans put in every year; an annual crop.
- Mc They don't do that around here anymore, do they?
- H Not too much. I'm not sure whether the A&P handles them anymore or not. They used to process them in Brockport and can them there. ...
- Mc How did you dry the beans?
- H The beans were usually what we called "dry beans". In other words, when they made their full growth, they would dry on the vines. Then if they didn't get quite dry or had weather conditions that couldn't be dried on the stalk, they would cut them and thresh them. Mostly, in those days, they had to have threshing machines because they didn't have the combines like we have today. So, they'd be threshed; set your thresher

on the farm and be operated right there. The farmer would thrash his beans and cart them somewhere. We bought a lot of them. Oakfield Haxon and Son bought some there.

(end of side one of tape).

Mc You still had an interest in the bean house?

H No. You see, we dissolved partnership in 1956. Mr. Jackson's father died and Mr. Jackson died shortly after we had dissolved partnership. Since then the place has been used, I believe, by someone who has ground a little feed there, for stock and so forth. ... No one uses that home for processing beans like we used to. We were in partnership for 26 years. I went there about 1930 and we dissolved you might say just about 1956.

Mc What did you do after you left the farm?

H Well, I was on the road, calling on farmers for Mr. Resseguie for a couple of years.

Mc What do you mean, "call on farmers"? Were you a salesman?

H No. Talking about farming, and getting a few orders, you know, for something they might want: fertilizer or seed or something. I was a salesman for Resseguie. He was in Middleport. I drove my own car.

Mc I'd like to know something about your house. You have told me something about the house on the corner of West Center and Catherine Streets in Medina.

H It was what you would call the old McCormick property. I believe the YMCA willed it, or whether they obtained it from someone, but they wanted to sell it. He bought it and, you might say, renovated all thru. Then we moved in.

Mc Was there a "Y" in Medina at that time?

H At one time, as I remember, way before my time, but I think they had a room up over one of the stores along where the Knights of Columbus are. I think they just had exercising in those days. But that was before my time. They always had the intention, I believe, to build a YMCA. But it never materialized. We had a man who was the community secretary for that purpose you might say. I think his name was Gilbert Roehige. I may be wrong in the spelling. ... He had charge of the boys and girls, mostly boys. The office was right west of the Newell Shirt

factory in an old house that stood there. I believe it was a two-family house. We had the west side of that house. That was the secretary's office, you might say.

Mc Your father bought this house, fixed it up and you moved there?

H I lived there for awhile and then we were married and we built this home. That is the first place north of that house, on Catherine Street.

Mc Do you remember who built that house?

H John Lindkey.

Mc ...

H When we were married we had a car, one of those runabout Fords. That was way back in '20-'21. I used to go back and forth to Lockport in that to see my girl, you might say! (laughter).

Mc Did you drive in the winter?

H Not much in those days. Of course we did some but nothing like now. You didn't have the equipment to plow the roads. They did it some, but it wasn't very safe to go very far.

Mc Not many gas stations either, were there?

H No!

Mc Do you have children; a son?

H Just one, a son. He was born the 18th of July 1924: Kenneth Stebbins Helenbolt. Stebbins is his mother's maiden name. He is a surgeon, a urologist and lives in Grand Forks, North Dakota. He has four children.

Mc About when did you move into your new home?

H We lived in Middleport after we were married, temporarily. Then we built this home and I'd say we went in there in 1924. I think we moved there just before our son was born. ... I haven't done too much of anything the last few years. You see, I'm 80 years old! (Mr. Helenbolt now addresses Mr. McAllister who has just recently entered the room): I told your wife that they were going to bury me in 1922 with T.B. (laughter).

Mc You fooled them! Who was your doctor, do you remember?

H I think we used to have Doctor Maynard and one from Buffalo. I've forgotten his name. He came down and pronounced me a "T.B. man".

Mc You've always been active in the church? Have you always

been in the Medina Presbyterian Church?

H Yes. I went there all my life, you might say. Been a member there. I've been an Elder there for years. Of course I'm not active now. I think I was made an Elder there in 1920.

Mc How has the church changed over the years, or has it?

H Well, not too much. I don't think we've changed too much. I would say it's probably going along about an even keel.

Mc Who was the minister of this Presbyterian Church when you joined?

H When I first joined, his name was, I believe, Rev. Ellinwood.

Mc Have you belonged to fraternal organizations: Masons, Elks?

H I belonged to the Masons and the Odd Fellows; both of them here (in Medina). I joined the Masons when I was 21, so you see that's pretty near 60 years ago.

Mc Are you still active?

H Well, I do get there once in awhile; not too often. The Odd Fellows, I think I joined in 1918, just before I joined the Masons.

Mc What was the purpose of the Odd Fellows Organization?

H Well, they have some benefit. They had their Home for the Elderly. They operate one in Lockport now. The Masons, of course, are along that line. Their Home is in Utica. The Odd Fellows meet at the Masonic Temple. I don't know as they are too active but I know they do have, once in awhile, a call for this or that, the other. I belonged to both of them for a few years.

Mc What about politics? Have you ever been involved in politics?

H No. Never sat in any office.

Mc What about the school. Have you ever been on the Board?

H No. I've been an Elder of the church for about 60 years.

Mc What do you remember about the Depression? You were in Medina when the Depression hit, and the banks closed. What do you remember about that?

H Well, I don't remember too much because we weren't mixed up in it and we were in business in Middleport. We got along because we used Lockport banks. So it worked out pretty good for us. Things were down but it didn't affect us like it did



a lot of people that were dependent on certain things.

Mc Do you remember the Kelly House on East Center Street?

H I remember that there was that old building of wooden frame construction.

Mc What do you remember about the canal? Do you remember any sports on the canal, such as swimming?

H I never went swimming there. I never learned to swim really. They used to do a lot of swimming at the old sand hole, or whatever they called it. It was west of Medina a little ways.

About going into the canal business, Cook and Company profited on that. ... There's a culvert adjacent to the canal. Then the one he built, the one at Waterport. I was in the Rowley Lumber yard and we furnished most of the cement for the dam at Waterport.

Mc How did Cook and Co. benefit from the canal?

H I'm not sure about it now, but there was a spillway north of that old factory down there. You see, that factory used to cover that space and there was a spill-way there. The water, of course, was controlled by the State. But when they could get it and there was water in the canal, they used to let it drop there, south, on the south wall back of that plant. Then it went over a spill-way there and then down into a flu where there was a well-wheel. They developed 500 horse-power at that plant right there, when they could get the water. Well, you see, this stream come down Oak Orchard, and at one time there was a mill at Shelby that used the water coming over a small wheel there. It come down into Medina. Just before it reached Medina there was an old ice house up here. They used to use that dam there to cut the ice in the winter and fill it and put sawdust and shavings in there. Then they would peddle the ice around town. That was before they ever made ice. Well, then you see, the water come down and it cut across Main Street, way up the south end, and it came down in an open race-way back of those houses on the west side of Main Street. When it got to about where the Medina Storage is, south of the RR tracks, it went under the railroad, about where the City Hall is. It went across and S.P. Blood run a small mill



where he made a little flour, I guess, and he ground feed. Then you see, back of that it dropped quite a few feet. Where he got power for water wheel went along north side of the railroad, and when it got down to Orient Street there was a spill-way there where they developed horse-power. Part of that went down into what is now Oak Orchard Creek. Part of it went around a race-way probably ten feet wide, under that old mill. They used it and then, you see, that was just under the roadway and that water would run. If they took water out of the canal sometimes they could get water to go over to Cooks into their power plant, and sometimes the mill would want water and they couldn't get it from Shelby in the summer because there wouldn't be any water running. Maybe in the fall or spring they would get water by juggling (water) there between Cook and Company and the mill. It was Duckwitz and Heinz that owned the mill on East Center. So you see, that was a valuable piece of property, getting that water when you could use it. That building is still there. I don't know whether Niagara Mowhak used that but they still left that brick building in there. That was a 500 horsepower development right in there.

Mc What do you remember about Prohibition?

H I don't remember much about it. I never was a drinker so, you know, it never bothered me or the family.

Mc What about the wars; were you ever in the services?

H I was in the Student's Army Training Corp, because I started in and went to the University of Michigan. The first thing we did was to start drilling. This was in 1918 and of course, World War I was over with shortly, so we were just discharged. That was about it. ... There were some people from around here that volunteered. One boy from Middleport, LaVern Kenyon. Now, he was out there, and there were some others.

Mc Where exactly did you go?

H Ann Arbor, Michigan. After this was over with, I got out. I didn't really care about going thru a 4-5 year course at the University of Michigan, so I just came back. We were only there, as I remember, for about six months. Then I went back into the lumber yard. That was in 1918.

Mc Do you remember the prisoner's barracks up near the Heinz plant, during WW II? Did they have German prisoners there?

H They had something going on but I don't know enough about it to mention it you might say.

Mc What about the circus or fairs?

H Usually there was a circus performance here about once a year. The man that usually came here was Andrew Downy. They used to call it "Andrew Downy and McFee." ... He was the original.

Mc Where did they hold the circus?

H Quite often up there on the corner of Guinn and Oak Orchard. That brick house wasn't in there then. Sometimes they had the tent right in there. A little later on, they had it over on the ball-ground. But they did hold it right on that corner.

Mc Has the Medina Athletic field always been just that?

H Well, in my time it has but I don't know just how they acquired it or how it started. As long as I can remember it was principally used for baseball. They used to have inter-play in the summer. Medina always used to have a team back in those years and they'd bring teams in here. We had about the best ball diamond there was around the state!

Mc Do you remember the fairs; where they were?

H In Albion. Yes. As I remember there was no fair around here except you had to go to Lockport, Albion or Batavia. Of course you could go to one in Buffalo. ...

Mc How do you feel about medical care today? Do you think it is adequate?

H Well, of course I have never been into it in any particular way other than when I had to use the services. I always had plenty of service. I don't know too much about it other than that my son is connected out there.

Mc Of course you wife was very ill.

H She had malignancy, and they had quite a time with that. She was confined for some time. Her home was in Lockport so she was in Lockport Memorial Hospital, and she died there.

Mc Do you feel that medical care, for the most part, has improved over the years?

- H Oh yes. The first hospital here, that I remember, was when we lived at 504 South Academy Street, right across the road. The house is still standing there. It was a holding house; they used it for a hospital, for minor operations.
- Mc ... What was the name of this "holding house-hospital" ?
- H I think it started out as the Mary Louise House. That was on South Academy, the second house on the south side, west of Ann Street.
- Mc When we were talking earlier, you said something about the house where Dr. Blanchet now lives?
- H That is next to Inez Reynolds' house and was built by Harry Rowley. Harry Rowley and his Dad were the ones that had the S.G.Rowley Lumber Company. The ones I worked for when I first started out. Dr. Blanchet's house is stucco-covered.
- Mc Let's see, would you have been around when the Armory first came into being?
- H Well, I was pretty small so I'm not just sure. It was built around the 1900s and we used to go over there, back before they had any signs of things inside for boys or girls, why they let us go in there sometimes and practice and run around, play basketball. Not much; they were pretty conservative in those days. They didn't want to get that dirtied up and have to do a lot of cleaning. But we did use it for awhile.
- Mc It is my understanding that they used to have very fancy dances held there.
- H They did! About three or four times a year in the winter time, you'd have 250-300 couple in there. Very nice dances.
- Mc Did you go to any of the dances held there?
- H Oh yeah! We used to go to some. They had an orchestra usually. Usually they'd put them on the north end there, and have the dance on Friday night.
- Mc Who would sponsor that, or be apt to have a dance there? A club or a church or ?
- H I would have no way of knowing but I would think that probably that it was all done under the supervision of the fellows that ... ran the building. ...
- Mc What is going to happen to the Armory now? Have you any ideas about what they could do to save the building?

H No I don't but it's too bad to ever let it be torn down! Seems as tho it should be used for something, but just what, I don't know.

Mc ... Medina's Main Steet has changed a lot over the years!

H Oh yes. Of course when you go back to before they even had the pavement down, that was a pretty dirty place you might say. In the summertime when the wind blew, with the horse-drawn vehicles and one thing and another, we got quite a lot of dirt around. When they paved it, why that cleaned it up a lot. Of course, I suppose it could have been a lot better. ...

\* \* \* \* \*

Mr. Helenbolt has stated that his wife drew up the plans for their home at 415 Catherine Street in Medina, as well as the home in which he is presently living, near Olcott.

Mr. Helenbolt also stated that the Oral History Project of interviewing is a most worthwhile project and feels that we are doing a magnificent job!

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The above interview was transcribed, edited and typed by Helen M. McAllister, Medina, New York.