

10/28/1975

Mrs. Lettie Kennedy Harnew

Interviewed by Katherine Trimble and  
Carol Adams

Int: Where were you born?

Lettie: Pekin, Nebraska which is extinct now. It was just a post office, a small store and a school. My father and mother went out there when my oldest brother was a baby. He went out to prove a claim. Let's see my brother was born in 1878 and he was still a babe in arms when they went out there. We returned when I was about six and I was born in 1888.

Int: Did you come back to this area then?

Lettie: No, in about 1894 we came to Missouri, near Catsville, Missouri. And we lived there for about two years. That would bring us back to Worth, Ill. in 1896.

Int: May we have your maiden name?

Lettie: Lettie Charlotte Kennedy.

Int: Is "Lettie" short for something?

Lettie: Yes, Leticia. But even as a child I was Lettie and always have been.

Int: How long were you in Worth?

Lettie: Well, let's see. I was graduated from the Worth School in 1902. You should have my father's name. It was Daniel Thomas Kennedy. His father was James Kennedy and Nora Kennedy was his mother.

Int: James and Nora stayed in this area didn't they? It was your Mother and Father that went to Nebraska?

Lettie: We're getting the cart before the horse. My grandparents farmed here from the time my father was three years old. He was actually born on a river boat docked at Cincinnati, Ohio. His parents were on their way from Ireland.

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Lettie: He was Scotch Irish

Int: Getting back to you Mrs. Harnew. You said you went to the Worth School. Did that school serve a large area in those days?

Lettie: Not actually. I started school in Palos because my <sup>grand-</sup>father's farm was just over the line in Palos Township. But the school in Palos Park was so far to walk for us that my father went to the board, the school board in Worth and asked if we couldn't go to the Worth school because it was so much closer. We had to cross the Sag to get to the Palos school. And it wasn't just the canal as it is today it was a bog. We had two and a half miles to walk to and from each day. It was five miles each day.

Int: Was the Worth school then located where it is today at 111th and Oak Park Ave.?

Lettie: Yes it was. That was district 127. I suppose I've started this all wrong. My grandfather, my father's father was killed in the civil war and all her family came from the East. My grandmother's family came from New York state. An after my grandfather was killed she came to Chicago with her two young children my mother and a brother. It gets a little vague here. My grandmother married again when my Mother was about 12. The only Grandfather I knew was my Grandmother's second husband. My daughter keeps telling me to write the history of my family because my history is more interesting than the Harnew history. But it took me so long just to get the Harnew History done that I never have gotten around to the Kennedys.

Int: Was your family Catholic?

Lettie: My mother wasn't but my father was although not very seriously. My grandfather helped build that church of the Sag. St. James of the Sag.

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Lettie: When the church was finished all those who had helped build it were given a plot. So my grandfather and grandmother and two aunts that died are all buried out there. You remember Father Geraghty don't you?

1.

Int: Only when he came to Oak Lawn.

Lettie: My aunt's and my fathers people many of them lived and worked in Chicago but they are buried out here.

Int: Mrs. Tucker, Ethel Piper said she went to the Worth school at the same time. Is she older than you are?

Lettie: No, I am older than she is. I was 87 last month. I think Ethel is about 85. And Mrs. Schultz is younger even because she's 83.

Int: After you graduated from Worth School in 1902 what did you do?

Lettie: I went to Englewood High for about a year and a half and then my father couldn't afford to send me any more. And my brother went to work on the canal. I had to ride the wagon home from Worth because my father got a job at a big factory in Chicago Ridge that made slot machines and we moved to Chicago Ridge so that's actually where I grew up. I was going into my second year at Englewood and my brother said he would pay my way if my father wanted to send me. It was rather hard in those days to ride the train and pay the carfare and buy the books and everything so I went to Chicago Business College in the Loop and went to work for a steel company that had their headquarters in Pittsburg and was a secretary. The transportation was good and I also worked for a time at the yards for Swift and Company. I had to take the train and then the el and change at 65 for a train into the yards. After that I went down to the loop and worked for the Carbon Steel Company until I got married.

1. Father geraghty is the founding pastor of St. Gerald's church in Oak Lawn.

Int: Was your husband the tax collector in Worth Township before you married him?

Lettie: Oh, yes, he went around in a horse and buggy and collected from the farmers.

Int: Your husbands name was William?  
2.

Lettie: Yes. William. We were married in 1911.

Int: Was it the Aulwurm's that built this house.

Lettie: Yes it was.

Int: Wasn't there another house on Austin Avenue.

Lettie; Yes there was.

Int: Was it a bigger house than this one? (9624 S. Mason Ave.)

Lettie: No, it wasn't. They were about the same size. My husband had the farmhouse but that wasn't the original farm house that was right out here. She gestured to the south end of the property.) But that burned down. Then they built the house that faced on Austin Ave. None of the streets were through in those days. Even when we built here on Mason.

Int: Do you know if John Schultz had a coal company in Oak Lawn.?

Lettie: I think they did and Larsen's had a coal company and Larsen's sold to Beatty where the lumber yard stands today.

Int: After Schultz's coal company wasn't there a pickle factory there?

Lettie: Yes. But you see I don't know that much about early Oak Lawn because I didn't move here until I married and I was 23 then. I didn't start learning about Oak Lawn until I started going around with my future husband.

Int: How many children did you have?

Lettie: I have a daughter and twin boys.

Int: Were there twins in the Harnew family?

Lettie: Yes on both sides. My grandfather was a twin. Then Ellen, you know, Will's oldest sister had twins. They usually skip a generation but my grandniece, my brother's grandchildren. She was a twin and she had twins.

Int: Then you moved into this house in 1911 when you married.

Lettie: Yes and I have been here ever since.

Int: Did your husband farm?

Lettie: Oh, yes. This was a farm when I first came to it. We had two 80 acre sections and then we rented about 300 acres more. This whole area from Central to Austin and south of 95th St. was Will's grandfather's. When his father married he gave his father this one 80 acre plot then he later bought another 80 acres so he had 160 acres here. So that really belonged to his father and the rest of it belonged to the grandfather.

Int: Remember yesterday when we were talking about the Wallenstra's and the Van Howe's farming where Christ hospital is now. Correct me if I'm wrong: the farmers didn't own the ground they rented that and owned the buildings wasn't that the arrangement?

Lettie: Yes sometimes.

Int: Wasn't there a Tibstra involved in farming the Christ Hospital area?

Lettie: Yes let's see there were the Rock's, the Van Howe's, I don't remember and here west of us they were all truck farmers. Holland people but there were also a lot of Germans around here too.

Int: When we were out in Blue Island I was surprised to find that one of the first organizations that was founded was a German Methodist church.

I always thought that most Germans were either Lutheran or Catholic.

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Lettie: Well out in Worth there was a Methodist church and a lot of the Hollanders went to that church because there wasn't any other one around. And there were people from Palos Park that I knew as a child when I went to that Methodist church.

Int: Do you remember the public school that was on the northwest corner of 95th and Cicero.?

Lettie: No, my children all went to 122. There was just the one school at 95th and Ridgeland where the Simmons school is today.

Int: What was the name of it then?

Lettie: It was just 122. There was just one teacher and my daughter graduated and went on to Englewood High School and then to Chicago Normal.

Int: Did she go to Englewood on the train?

Lettie: Part of the time she did, when she first started.

Int: Your daughter is a teacher then?

Lettie: She teaches in one of the Mt. Greenwood schools. She has always taught in Chicago. Well no she didn't always teach there. She taught for a time at a one room school in what today would be Crestwood. That was her first job while she was waiting for an assignment.

Int: Getting back to when you went to school. How many grades were in your room.

Lettie: Eight. All in one room. You know what my daughter said to me the other day. When I had 64 children I didn't have as much trouble as I do today with 29.

Int: Mrs. Tucker told us that you helped her with her mathematics.

Lettie: Yes she told me that but I had forgotten. I can remember when I was in eighth grade they had a rough school there in Worth and they brought

in this teacher from the East who was lame. He was strict disciplinarian. He would let me teach the kindergarteners and the first grade. I always loved that and I wanted to be a teacher.

Int: Do you remember the teacher's name?

Lettie: Smizer. His brother was a principal at a school in Skokie for a good many years and they named a school after him. At the Cook Avenue school the first teachers were the Covington's and then the Simmons'. Then the Simmons' came to 122 when they had the two rooms. No they were here when there was still only one room.

Int: Did your husband serve on the village board?

Lettie: Oh no we weren't even in Oak Lawn until many years later. We lived in unincorporated Worth Township. But he did serve on the 122 School Board. He was on that board long before we were married. The Harnew school was named after the family. My husband and his father.

Int: But your husband was the Township tax collector.

Lettie: Oh yes. We had the office right here in the house and had about ten girls working for us.