

Mary Robb Schwer Taped 9/16/75 by Carol Adams and Katherine Trimble

Mrs. Schwer lives at 3517 W. 95th St. , Evergreen Park.

Interviewer: Mrs. Schwere where were you born?

Mary: Evergreen Park, right here in this house 3517 W. 95th St.

Int: What church do you go to?

Mary: United Methodist Church of Evergreen Park. It used to be just the Methodist Church and then they called it the First Methodist church and now its the United Methodist church.

Int: Where did you go to school?

Mary: The public school here in Evergreen Park. I have a picture of it here. It was built in 1875. On the same site there at 95th and Sawyer. They eventually knocked it down and built the new one.

Where did you go to high school?

Mary: I didn't go.

Int: Did your family own other property around the blacksmith shop.

Mary: He didn't own it but we farmed it. He owned the home-
stead here and the blacksmith shop.

Int: Did your father get a lot of transient business or was it mostly from the local truck farmers.

Mary: Well they came from all around--Oak Lawn and all--be-
cause he was the only blacksmith shop around here. Until Mr.
Hoffman started a shop in Oak Lawn.

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Int: Did your father originally have a blacksmith shop in Oak Lawn?

Mary: Not my father but his father, my grandfather. It was around the vicinity of 87th and Cicero.

Int: And what was his name?

Mary: James Robb.

Int: When did your father start the shop here in Evergreen Park?

Mary: Let's see, I was born here and so was my sister Lula. It would have to be 1890.

What was 95th St. like in those days?

Mary: It was a mud road with ditches on both sides. In the summer we used to have a raft and go floating in the ditches. And in the winter we ice-skated in them.

Int: Did you use a lot of the food from the garden for your table?

Mary: Oh yes. They didn't have any canned goods in those years. We did our own canning. Like carrots, we would put them in dirt in a bushel basket and we would have carrots and beets all winter. We raised our own potatoes. No matter how small they were we used them. Cooked them with the skins on.

Int: Did you have any fruit trees?

Mary: No.

Int: You bought your fruit then?

Mary: Yes.

Int: Did the boys go hunting?

Mary: Oh, yes. We ate rabbit and pheasant, My brother Jim up until the time he died he had a blind where he could go hunting.

Int: What about fishing was there anyplace around here where they could go fishing?

Mary: Well. They used to go west past Oak Lawn to what they called the feeder. They used to catch bull heads.

Int: Were there other things you did for amusement when you were younger?

Mary: Well my brothers all belonged to baseball teams. We always went to the games. And I was raised very religious. And all the games were on Sunday and we really kept the Sabbath. I was allowed to go to the games and I never felt that I did anything wrong. There was always a big rivalry between Oak Lawn and Evergreen Park. (Mrs. Schwer showed us a picture of the Evergreen Park team ready for a game in 1908.) Our greatest game of the year was always with Oak Lawn.

(She also showed us a picture of the grammar school she attended at 95th St. and Sawyer that was later torn down and the new junior high school was built. We have pictures in the Evergreen Park 75th Anniversary book.)

Mrs. Schwer: It was a wonderful school for that time. It was erected in 1875. Because they were farmers and they made their kids work. There was a man by the name of Dean that my mother talked about.

He worked very hard to get that school built.

We used to catch crabs in the ditches along 95th st. and it was really wonderful living next door to the blacksmith shop and my father was a wonderful shoer of horses. I remember being raised with an iron pot next to the stove with creoline in it that was used for the horses. Some of the horses were very wild. It was a heavy job. When I sat in school I could hear my father's anvil and it used to make me proud.

Int: Many blacksmiths used to branch out to be wheelrights. Did your father ever do this?

Mary: Oh, yes. He set tires and we had to help him. Our job was to pour the water when he hit that big sledge hammer so the wooden rims of the wheels wouldn't catch on fire. We had to know our stuff or we could get hit with that hammer. And I remember having to turn the bellows to make the fire.

Int: Were any of his sons Blacksmiths?

Mary: Oh, yes my brother Jim. My father broke his leg and he couldn't shoe horses any more and my brother Jim became blacksmith. Then when horses and teamsters were out my brother made truck bodies. He also made cisterns. Then later on he became a lather and was president of the union so I'm going to held my sister-in-law fill out one of your forms for him.

My mothers family were about the third settlers in Evergreen Park. Overton was their name. My Mother's nephew went to work for the Robbs and the Robb boys used to ask if there were any girls at home and he said but his Aunt had three girls so my father came to visit and was introduced to my mother who used to work downtown. They commuted on the Grand Trunk.

Int: Where did the Overtons come from?

Mary: Let's see Grandpa Overton was born in Yorkshire, England. He came with his wife Mary Ann and the baby and it took six weeks on the boat. He left his wife in New York and went to Detroit to get work. Then his wife followed. My mother was born in Washington, D. C. in Civil War time. Grandpa Overton didn't have to go in the army because he was machinist. But my mother told a story about those days that she had heard from her mother. There were fifty soldiers, Northerners, in her home. They were exhausted and were asleep upstairs. She happened to mention to one of them that she would have done the same for a Southerner and one of the soldiers commented that he would do it with a bayonet. She was just being Christian. In fact she came to Evergreen Park and started the first Sunday school at the Methodist church here in 1884.

There were only about three houses out here when my mother's people came. They had a farm about 87th and Kedzie and most of those houses have been torn down now. This house (3517 W. 95th St.) had the first four rooms built at about Kedzie and 87 and was moved here next to my fathers blacksmith shop in 1890 then rooms were added.

My father remebers when they put the Wabash through and they got very little for their land. He had a brother James Robb who disappeared. He was last seen walking down the Wabash tracks.

Most of the Robbs, including my father are burried in Mout Greenwood Cemetery. My brother George Robb and John Robb aren't. George is buried with his wife in Fairmont. (Note: Her brother George Robb was a carpenter contractor and built many homes in Oak Lawn and Evergreen Park in the 20's and 30's.)

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My brother James Robb was Evergreen Park Village President for two terms. My husband Charles Schwer was trustee for six years. And my father was on the first village board in 1893. That's when the village was first incorporated. In those days you had to be dead if you didn't vote. They were very civic minded. And finally the village kept growing and growing and the Robb's became a thing of the past.

The Dutch had a large group out here with all the truck farms but they aren't a majority today.

Our Methodist church was like the Community church of Evergreen Park it was the only one out here for many years. There weren't Catholic churches or Lutheran churches. My husband went around with Rev. Sommers from St. John's Lutheran church in Beverly Hills and the Lutherans met for five years in the school house. Then the Lutherans built their church right next to our house. And the funerals used to affect you so in those days with the church being so close. So I decided when they held a funeral, I'd put my baby in the buggy and go over to my mothers. It wound up that the first funeral that was held at the Lutheran church was my husband's and the first wedding performed there was my daughter Lulu 's which was quite an honor. I raised all my children Lutheran out of respect for my husband but I hold the longest continuous membership in the Methodist church. My kids all say that Mom's a Methodist 'till she dies. Eventually the Methodist bought the Lutheran church and they wanted my property for parking so I sold them my home. I didn't think they'd tear it down. My husband built it and we lived there forty years.

My Mother, too, was very active in the Methodist church. She always said that the doors of the church should never be closed. And even when times were hard she would take coal to the church so that it would be warm for the children because they were important and were the future light of the world. The doors of the new church are in her memory. She had the least but she gave the most.

Int: Did you use the Grand Trunk to go downtown for recreation?

Mary: Not so much for recreation because there were no trains at night. But we used it for work, the train left at 6:45 in the morning. It returned at 6:45 at night so it was a long day. But there were plush seats and it was quite nice. I worked until I got married. We also had a bus from 71st and Western that used to bring people to Evergreen Park and to the cemeteries.

My mother used to love to go to Orchestra Hall especially for any programs that were about the Scotch. She was more Scotch than my father. When we went downtown then we had to go on the I.C. and walk to Evergreen Park from Vincennes and 95th St. We didn't mind. We were young and thought nothing of it.

I can remember when there were no automobiles and my cousin Sam Overton, who was fairly wealthy, came onetime in a car and took us for a ride. You know how Oak Lawn lake kind of twists around. Well my cousin wasn't too familiar with it and he practically drove right in it. I have a lovely picture of the lake from way back.

My husband's people were German Lutheran but my father's were Scotch and they arrived wearing their kilts and everyone laughed at them. But my father said they didn't laugh for long because they knew how to fight. My father used to love to talk about his childhood days in Oak Lawn. My father was a trustee of the Evergreen Park Village board and an honorary trustee of the Methodist church. He was six years old when he came to America. They lived in Oak Lawn and then in Blue Island for a time and didn't move to Evergreen Park 'till he married my mother.

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My father was only a boy when the Chicago fire happened and he tells about climbing on a building at Western and 95th St. and saw the fire. We had some relatives named MacKenzie that lived in the city and my father said that he went to help him move some good things from his house in case it caught fire. There were some good Scotch woolen blankets that they rescued from the building. And the building finally caught fire. Grandpa Overton, my mother's father had a machine shop that was destroyed in the fire .

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