

Orleans County Historical Association

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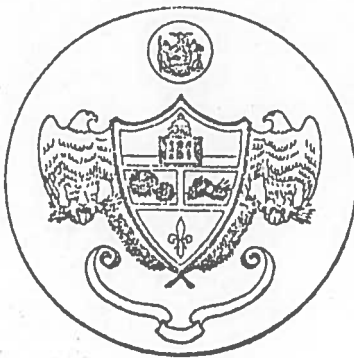
Thomas Corner, father

Livina House Corner, mother

Mabel, Lula, Inez: sisters

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plus many others



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.

Genevieve A. Gotts

Signed

Sept 17, 1980

Date

Understood and agreed to:

Ethel M. Willis

INTERVIEWER

Sept. 17th 1980

Date

For the Orleans County Historical Association, Miss Ethel Willis of Medina, N.Y. is interviewing Mrs. Pearle Gotts at Mrs. Gott's home on the Bates Road, Medina, N.Y.

W Mrs. Gotts, would you please identify yourself.

G I was born April 20, 1890 in Beamsville, Ontario, Canada. My mother went over there for me to be born because there was no hospital in Medina at that time. She only stayed three weeks but never-the-less I had to get my naturalization papers out when World War I was on or I could not cross the border. Father's name was Thomas Corner. He didn't have a middle name. Mother's name was Livina House.

W Did you have brothers and sisters?

G Three sisters, no brothers. Mabel married Spencer Kenward; Lula married Wilson Fox and lives here on the Bates Road next to me; Inez married William Hickey from Medina. (NOTE: See Wilson Fox transcript).

W Are any of your sisters still living?

G Just Lula and I. Inez died last year.

W Where did you go to school?

G On Bates Road until the 8th grade; then I went about a year in Medina. They didn't have typing and shorthand in those days, in school, so I quit school and went to Business School for a year. It was a privately run school in Albion. After graduating from the business school, I worked in the New York Cannery Office on Olney Street, off East Center Street.

W How long did you work at the New York Cannery?

G Seventeen years. In 1909 I married Harry Gotts. He died in 1943.

W Where else have you worked?

G After getting through at the office I started in business on Main Street in Medina.

W You have never worked for anyone else?

G Previous to my marriage, I worked in the S.A. Cook office on East Center Street in Medina.

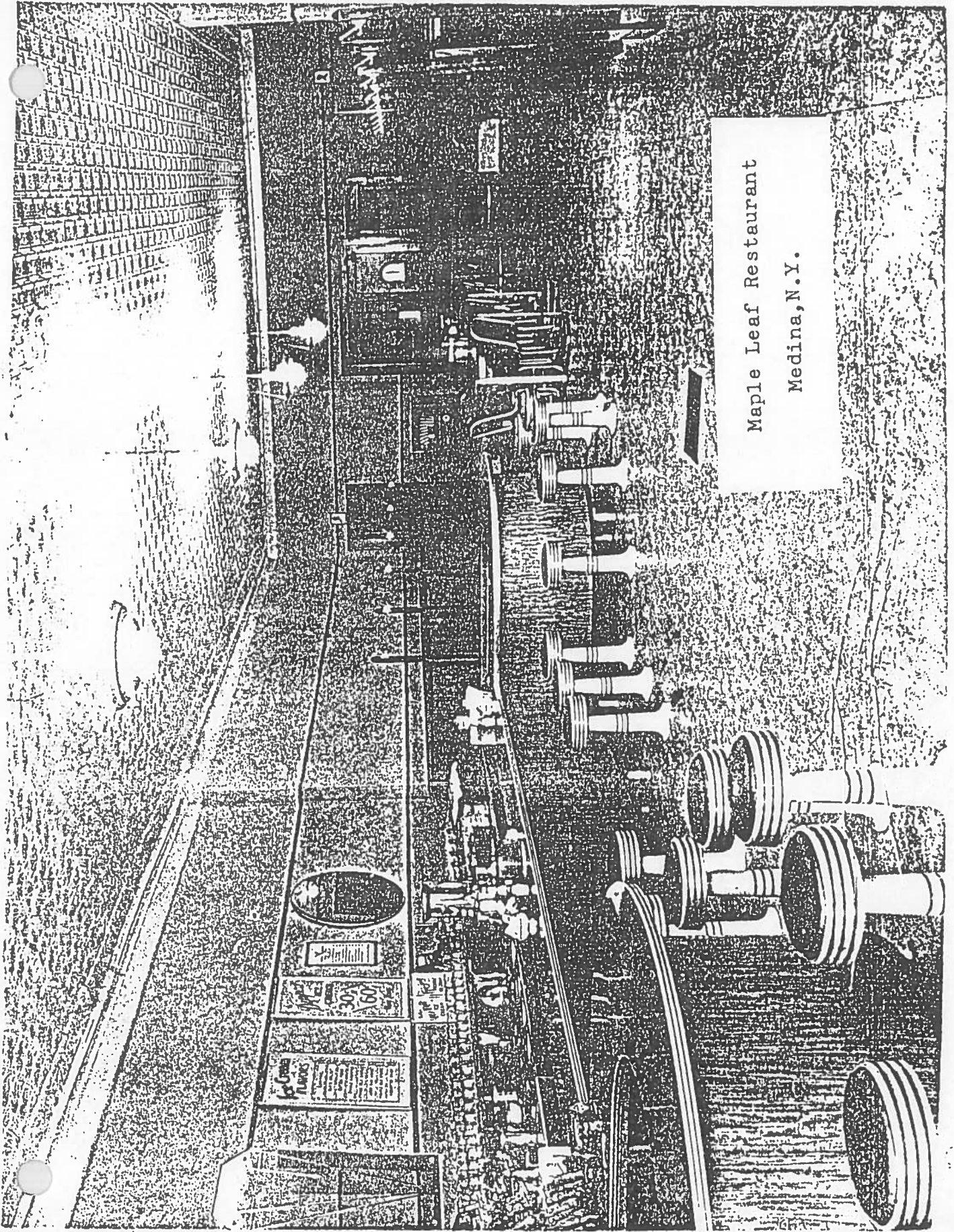
- W You started in business for yourself in what year?
- G 1932. I started in business in the store where Western Auto is now and later years moved down where the Goodwin Pharmacy is. (Main Street, near East Center Street).
- W Your business was a restaurant?
- G A restaurant and a soda bar. It was called the Maple Leaf.
- W I remember going there to eat years ago. How many and what people worked for you? Who were they?
- G Belle Fearby worked for me 17 years. She was a cook. Two of her daughters also worked for me, in the kitchen. Mildred Brege and her mother, Mrs. Cross, worked in the kitchen. And out in the store I had -- well, all the young people that ever grew up in Medina. Including Irlivere Brege and Bernard Dujenski, Maynard Kenward, and Jim Jennings and Marian Helenbolt. Marian Helenbolt was with me 12 years.
- W Until the time that you sold out the business?
- G Yes. I am trying to remember who else.
- W You did pretty well to remember that many!!

One thing that I remember about eating in your restaurant was that during the Depression you had a 35¢ lunch that was complete with soup and a generous slice of your excellent pie! I remember that! Did n't you tell me that you used to have turkey dinners for 35¢ ?

- G A complete turkey dinner, including soup and dessert. All for 35¢.
- W I remember Blanche Nester used to come in every day for lunch, and her sister Bess Stewart who worked at Gould's Flower Store came in.
- G All the businessmen in town came in. They formed a Breakfast Club and they called it the Maple Leaf Breakfast Club. One morning when it was very, very hot weather they picked up the table and the table cloths and the coffee percolators, and all their food and went out on the sidewalk and had breakfast! Mr. Waters, from the local newspaper, came up and took their picture.

- W I remember that Paul Parsons and Gerald Houseman and Joe Brundage used to eat there.
- G Yes, and Leo Collins and George Bronson too.
- W D. W. Wilson used to eat there.
- G Yes, and Craig Ross and Vince Cardone. I'm just trying to think of the Breakfast Club at that time.
- W Miss Stella Biglow used to eat there, at lunch, didn't she?
- G She never missed a day I don't think. And she always took lunch out for George Carpenter.
- W George Carpenter, her very faithful chauffeur and servant. Yes, and Mrs. Luther used to eat there sometimes, didn't she?
- G Mrs. Luther always ate there for her dinner at night.
- W Did Miss Biglow come in for dinner at night too?
- G No, usually at noon.
- W What interesting things can you remember about your restaurant Mrs. Gotts?
- G Oh, there were so many things. The young High School kids in those days, you know, they would flock in after the dances.
- W And they called it "The Leaf".
- G Yes, and they'd come in and well, they'd have the best time! They'd laugh and tee-hee and just have a crazy time. They loved it and I loved to have them because they never did a thing out of order in my place. But across the street at the Mayflower (Restaurant) they'd steal the sugar bowls and take them out in the street, and throw them in the street and they did all sorts of things; carved up their initials. They were forever putting them out of the place. I never had to do that.
- W Well, you had good rapport with the boys and girls. I think the secret of getting along with teenage boys and girls -- I worked with them for many years in the church-- and I think that the secret of it is to love them! And they know it.
- G Yes, they know. Different boys, for instance Joe Brundage, years afterwards I'd meet them, you know, and they'd tell me what a grand time they used to have at the Maple Leaf! Another person that you would see in there was Bev Smith's wife: Bea Smith. Every noon.

- W Later on, during World War II, you changed your operation to a Cafeteria, didn't you?
- G Yes. It was difficult to get help and so I switched over to a cafeteria, which was an expense to do. But when you couldn't get the help, you just had to do the best thing you could. I operated like that until I closed in 1962. Thirty years on Main Street.
- W I'm sure you've taught your nephew, Maynard Kenward, a lot about what he knows about cooking, and so forth.
- G His mother taught him the most. Maynard used to wait on table. And Jim Jennings.
- W Jim went into the Service and was wounded wasn't he?
- G Yes, he went into the Service. They drafted him of course. Jim had had his ankle broken and it had been set, but it wasn't healed. They took him anyway and Dr. MacDonnel was very much put out that they took Jim into the Service, on account of his leg. His ankle had been broken several times and he said it was just like a wash-board. They took him anyway and they kept him in Fort Niagara for, I guess, almost two years. Jim got disgusted. They kept debating amongst the officials whether they'd discharge him or send him overseas. Jim told them, "I don't care what you do, but get me out of Fort Niagara!" So, they sent him overseas! On D-Day he was dunked in the strait there. They had that battle, you know, and he was in the water six hours! That did something to that ankle and before he was sent home and discharged from the Service, he had to have that leg amputated below the knee. He has walked with an artificial leg all these years. He is living on Beach Drive (Medina). He suffers all the time. He's a pharmacist. That is why they took him in the Army because they needed him. He met a young man in some of the hospitals while over on this side, after he got home, and the guy recognized him. Jim asked him, "How come you recognized me?" And he said, "Well you wore a moccasin on one foot all through the Army." That's how he recognized him! Jim works in a pharmacy down in Rochester, in Greece, I think. Goes back and forth every day. He drives one week and then another guy drives. You know, they share .



Maple Leaf Restaurant
Medina, N.Y.

- W You were telling me the other about two women who came into your restaurant and never were very agreeable. I won't ask you to tell me their names, but tell me about the ten-cent-butter-deal.
- G During World War II of course we had to use ration stamps to get meat and butter and lard and sugar. And these two ladies, both school teachers, always had to have extra waiting on, and extra everything. Because we couldn't get meat and some other articles, you know they weren't plentiful at all and we could not get them, so we tried to ration them. All my customers, except those two, gave me their food (ration) stamps. These two ladies would not give me a stamp and so I passed a ruling to the waitresses that anybody that didn't have rolls, could not have butter. The two ladies had just a ten cent dish of baked beans for their lunch, and then they wanted butter. The waitress told them that they couldn't have it and they were very, very, very put out! Got up and left, and they never came in again.
- W And oh, how you missed them!! (laughter)
- G I didn't even miss them! I was glad (for the incident) because anyone *who* would be like that...
- W Oh I know. It made it hard for the waitresses, and that made friction all down the line. I don't know why some people want to be like that. I don't know what satisfaction they get!
- G I don't know either. It's just as easy to be pleasant as it is to be grumpy.
- W Sure it is, and that's why the difference between the Mayflower and the Maple Leaf: one was grumpy and the other was pleasant.... Do you want to tell me anything more about your restaurant? You were there for thirty years. When the Maple Leaf Restaurant went out of business, did you retire?
- G I hoped to retire and that is why I quit. I was home only a few weeks when the Half Moon (family restaurant at Ridgeway) was looking for a short-order-cook. One of their employees

coaxed me into going down there. I went down there for two weeks, and I stayed twelve years!

- W A long, long two weeks! (laughter). That meant that you were in the restaurant business all together 42 years? Thirty in your own restaurant, and twelve at the Half Moon?
- G Forty-two years, yes.
- W Well, you certainly know about the restaurant business!

You have had some other interests too. Tell me about them.

- G In 1945 I decided I'd raise Pug Dogs, just for a hobby.
- W They weren't a very well known breed of dog at that time.
- G There were very, very few of them. I started raising Pug Dogs and I continued that for 30 years.
- W You raised a lot of dogs in 30 years!
- G Oh I raised a lot of dogs, good dogs.
- W You used to show them, didn't you?
- G Yes. I travelled all over by plane and by car, everywhere. I attended all the big Dog Shows in New York City, Chicago and Detroit; all over. I got just dozens and dozens and dozens of trophies and awards and blue ribbons and what-have-you.
- W I remember one little Pug Dog that used to be in your restaurant sometimes. I can't remember what you called him but he was an awfully nice dog. You must have met some interesting people when you were travelling around like that?
- G I did! I met interesting people, Pug Breeders. Pugs, you know, originated from England. During the years I raised them, I imported five dogs from England. I met the Duke and Dutchess of Windsor in New York (City) at a Dog Show. They had two Pugs. Oh yes, I met some real interesting people.

Then I went into the raising of race horses from 1958 to 1968. Then I quit racing because it wasn't very profitable.

- W What breed of horses did you raise?
- G Thoroughbreds. They raced with the sulky, you know. I still own three horses but I don't race them anymore.

W Didn't you used to ride a lot?

G Yes. In 1945 I started a Riding Academy because there was no gas and people took to riding horse-back. I had the south lot at my brother-in-laws (Wilson Fox). I rented that of him for life-lease on it. I had it bull-dozed down and fenced off and a track put around there. And that one year I had riding horses.

W You rented them out?

G Yes. It was a lot of fun but a lot of work. A lot of work! I couldn't do it myself and so I had to hire too much help. So, I quit after only one year.

W I remember one night I was driving down the Maple Ridge Road and you and a group of people on horseback were at the end of the Bates Road, waiting for me to drive by.

G I rode horseback myself until I was 76 years old.

W You did? Well good for you!! You don't let age stop you at anything, do you!

G No. Age was no barrier. I attribute my longevity to the active life that I live. I did everything! Building over houses, renting them, and, oh, just everything! I don't know why I got into things like that.

W Just to have something to do, I suppose.

Tell me about the houses that you bought and renovated.

G I started in during the Depression. Nobody had any money and I happened to have a little saved up so I decided I'd buy a house and remodel it. I bought the first house through Charles Slack, the elder Slack, and it was the Doctor James house on West Avenue. It was a very well built brick house. I built it over into three apartments, and that got me going. From there on, I bought different ones. I bought three houses on East Center Street that were owned by Mr. Sly. I remodeled those and sold them. Then I sold the brick James house, with the cupola on it.

W Where the Beckers lived at one time?

G Yes. It's on the corner of Oak Orchard and West Avenue.

W Didn't you own the Weld house on the corner of West Center and West Avenue, across from the Baptist Church?

- G Yes. In later years I bought that home of Mrs. Weld, the Acer home on the corner of West Center and West Avenue, and I remodeled that into six apartments. Then I sold that to the Shell Oil Company. That property was zoned for downtown. I had several options: the New York Telephone Company wanted an option on it, and Loblaw (grocery store). I gave them options every time. I didn't want to sell it. Then the Shell Oil Company wanted an option and I put the price so high that I didn't think they would take it, and they took me up on it!! ... The Shell Oil Company built it over into a (gas) station and they operated it for two or three years and then it was sold to the Liberty National Bank. That is their Drive-In Bank now.
- W You have changed the face of Medina considerably, haven't you! In more ways than one.
- G Yes.
- W You were active in the Baptist Church, were you not?
- G Yes. I joined the Baptist Church in 1913. I guess I never missed a Sunday. There was a Prayer Meeting in those days, you know. They don't have that now. I've been a member of the King's Daughter's Class for 67 years and during that time I have held the office of Treasurer for 65 years!
- W Oh my word! That's a record!
- G I was on the Board of Trustees for about six years. I've just been into everything.
- W You must have been on the Board at the same time as my brother Robert Willis?
- G Oh yes. I remember him very well. He lives in Florida now, doesn't he?
- W Yes he (and his wife Thelma) live in Florida. He comes up during the summer. He still owns a cottage just west of Shadigee and he comes up for a couple of months during the summertime. He can't wait to get back home.
- G I also bought a cottage at Lake Ontario during the Depression when nobody had any money. I bought the Roland Clark cottage. Mr. Clark used to be in the Central Bank (Medina). The cottage was right in Shadigee. As you drive into Shadigee, you would

turn west and it was about the 4th or 5th cottage down. My mother was an invalid for seven or eight years and I couldn't go to the cottage and enjoy it because I had to come home and get her up every morning at 6:30. The cottage was more work than it was pleasure for me, so I sold it.

W You said that you met the Duke and Dutchess of Windsor when you were in New York (City). Would you like to tell me your impression of them?

G Yes. They came to New York to purchase some Pug Dogs. They already owned two. When the Duke and Dutchess entered the room, you could hear a pin drop! They were so popular. I met both of them, and she was very handsome and very gracious. A very lovely person.

W Did you like him too?

G Oh yes! I was struck on the both of them. You know the British don't like them at all. My Canadian friends just thought I was awful, being so fond of the Duke and Dutchess.

W But you found them to be charming?

G Yes, they were very charming, the both of them.

W Do you have relatives now living in Canada?

G Very distant relatives. Some of my father's people were over there. I don't know how my Dad happened to come over here. I think he was born in Canada.

W What was your father's work?

G Over here he worked on a farm for years, and then he worked in the Central Foundry. I don't know who owned that.

W Albert Tucker and his sister, Jean.

What did your husband do? What was his business?

G Harry was a carpenter and a mechanic. He worked for the H. J. Heinz for a few years but he didn't like it there. Then he went over to New York Cannery and was working there when he died.

W Is that where you met your husband?

G In those days they had dances and house parties. That's where I met him.

- W Now about the horses. Did you train your horses or did you have somebody to train them?
- G No, I trained one winter out on the track here. Oh, it was an awful cold winter! I wore insulated underwear and boots and what-have-you. People wouldn't believe it was me out there on the track.
- W In the sulky?
- G Yes. I was driving this one horse all this time and you had to put 300 slow miles on a horse to start with and then gradually get them up into going fast.
- W You had to "break them in" like you used to have to "break in a car"? Only at a slower pace?
- G Yes, they had to be broken in slow. People used to drive back to the barn because they didn't believe that it was me out there in that cold weather!
- W But you were enjoying it I'll bet.
- G Oh I enjoyed it immensely! And I enjoyed horseback riding more than anything I think I ever did.
- W You never drove professionally, did you?
- G No. You have to have a license to drive professionally and it is quite a job to get a license. At that time I was getting along in years so I had to slow down a bit. I was in my 70s.
- W After working 42 years in a restaurant you had to slow down a little bit. Well that's too bad to have to slow down in your 70s, but it's very interesting to have horses. I am afraid of horses you know. I'm deathly afraid of horses!
- G One of my sisters is also deathly afraid of horses.... A man was going out to Ohio to buy a car load of horses. I said, "Bring me back one that everybody else is scared to death of, but I don't want to get killed on it. But bring me back one that everyone else is scared to death of", Which he did! I would get on that horse and I'd ride up to my sister's and she'd scream and run for the house, scared to death!! She was frightened of horses.
- W We never lived on a farm but we used to go occasionally to visit my grandmother and grandfather on the farm. I suppose

my mother told me not to get too close to the horses and the cows. Therefore I have always been afraid of them. They seem so big!

G I think the reason I was not afraid of horses was that my father trained work horses. He worked in the quarry up here for Delbert McCormick, who operated that quarry. Father drove the horses and then he used to "break" horses for different people. Of course we were out around the barn all the time and we got used to horses and liked them. Once you have race horses, it gets in your blood.

W Did your horses win many races?

G Oh yes. I had a good horse, a mare (Clever's Best), and she won and won and won for me! I had paid a terrific price for her. Those days it wasn't much. It was \$9,000.00. Today, a good race horse runs about \$150,000.00, so she wasn't expensive then, but I thought she was!

W That was a lot of money in those days!

G Clever's Best raced until she got lame. Of course their limbs are frail and they go lame. Then I used her for a brood mare and I raised eight or ten good colts. I sold one, it was an especially good one. I had it partially broke and I sold him for \$9,000.00.

W That's as much as you paid for her when you got her!

G As much as I paid for the mare when I bought her, so I didn't lose any money on my horses, or on my dogs. I raised good dogs and I got good prices for them.

W They were all pedigreed?

G Yes, they were all pedigreed dogs.

W How much would you get, just for fun, for a good pedigreed dog

G Well, I used to sell the poorer quality ones for sixty dollars That's a puppy. Then I would get \$75.00 and there on up. I sold an older dog to a lady in Florida one time for \$500.00 and I sold any number of them for \$250.00 and \$300.00 and \$400.00.

W A pedigree makes a lot of difference?

G Yes. Not only the pedigree but if they were good Show Dogs. I raised dogs just to show. I had them imported from England

11/1



August 1945

Pearle Gotts
horse: Clever's Best
Ruth Hickey Vosteen (center)
Anna Mae Fox

Pearle Gotts, Ruth Hickey Vosteen, Anna Mae Fox
August 1945

for that reason. That little black one over there (photo) was imported. I paid \$300.00 for him, plus the transportation over here, by boat.... The first dog I had brought over here was by boat but the rest of them all came by plane.

W When you take your dogs on a plane, you have to have them confined don't you?

G Yes. When you take them on a plane you have to have a carrying crate. I shipped dogs all over. I shipped them into Canada. Oh, an awful lot of dogs into Canada. The veterinarian over there got so he could tell my Pug Dogs. One day a lady took her dogs to him and set them up on his table and he says, "I bet I know where you bought that dog". And she says, "I bet you don't". He says, "In the states". She says, "How do you know?" He says, "I can tell every dog that the Blue Star Kennel raised". I raised the dogs for quality, not quantity.'

W Good show dogs. Did most people buy your dogs for Show Dogs?

G Yes, most of the dogs I sold were for Show.

W Did they make good pets as well?

G Oh yes! Marvelous pets!

W They certainly are homely things! They look as if they had run into a wall with their faces and pushed them in.

G Like you say, they look like they had hit the wall. I was at a Dog Show one day and a guy came along and looked at my dogs. He says, "What did he do, run into the side of the barn?" (laughter).

W A Boston Bull dog looks like that too, doesn't it?

G A lot of people take the Pug Dog for Bull Dogs, but they are separate breed completely.

W Ella Acer always used to have a little Bull Dogs. I don't know whether they were English Bull Dogs or Boston Bull Dogs but she always had a little Bull Dog. I remember how that dog would bark if you went to the door. It would continue to bark and growl until she said that it was alright. Then the dog would just stand close to her. Well trained little dogs they were.



Pug Dog and Judge, at a Dog Show

- W Do you have anything else that you would like to tell me about, Mrs. Gotts?
- G Let's go back to the Depression years, from 1930 and on. It was much worse then than it is now during this recession. My husband worked for 25¢ an hour and they would work forty hours a week.
- W Yes, I remember that it was 25¢ an hour. I worked at the Bignall Company (NOTE: See Ethel Willis transcript). at that time. One of the men, his name was Fred Puckelwaldt, was a molder and he worked piece work. When he got up to earning fifty dollars a week, everybody had a big to-do over it. It was so unusual. Now they get that for one day.
- G Yes. During the Depression, when I owned the store (Maple Leaf Restaurant) there were tramps. We called them transient people. They would stop to the store for something to eat and I used to feed them all. One of my girls (worker) said, "Mrs. Gotts, you better quit feeding those tramps. They got your place marked." And I said, Well don't you know that we are our brother's keeper, and how do I know but what some of them might be some of my brothers?" And so from then on when they'd see a tramp come in, they would call, "Mrs. Gotts, here's one of your brothers!" There were poor families around town that -- well, they just didn't have food. Welfare did not take care of them like they do now.
- W Oh no, there wasn't any Welfare.
- G My niece (Anna Mae Fox) knew all the poor families in town because she taught school. There was a family who lived on what was called the Jackson Farm. It is where Bob Waters bought and remodeled. That beautiful home up there.
- W Just up West Center Street Extension?
- G Yes. There was a family lived there and the man was sick. They had a raft of kids, and she (niece) and I took bushels of food. She took stuff from the farm: potatoes and vegetables and all that. I took pork loins and gallons of milk, and bread, and what-have-you to those people. You never saw such happy children as there was that day! Then, when I had the

store (restaurant) the children used to come in there and they'd sit down to the counter and ask for a glass of water. I knew they didn't want water; it was ice cream they were looking for. I'd go up to them and say, "Can I help you?" They'd say, "No". And I'd say, "Now this is the day we are giving ice cream away", and I'd give them a dish of ice cream. They didn't go out and tell the others either. Somehow I don't know why. That's the way it was during the Depression.

W Today's generation doesn't have any idea whatever about what that Depression was like.

G This (recession) is nothing compared to the Depression. Well, it wasn't during the Depression but it was while I had the store a man and his wife, separated, they had six children. He took three and she took three. He stayed in Medina and she went to Batavia to live with her three. These three kids came into my store and got acquainted with me somehow --

W That wasn't very hard to do!

G No. Harry and I never had any children, so I just sort of, you know, looked after some of the other kids around town. There were two boys and a girl and they followed me around like puppy dogs. And the oldest boy, they were only about nine or ten and twelve when they were hanging around the store. (Eventually) the oldest boy got married and went to Florida to live, and when he came back from Florida to visit, he would look me up. He never forgot what I did for him.

W Well of course not!

G I used to take him and a bunch of other kids to Dog Shows and Horse Shows with me. Oh, they had the time of their lives!

W Did you show your horses as well as race them?

G No. I showed the dogs but I did not show horses. But the kids would come down and ride horseback and they were just thrilled to death, you know, to do it, for free.

There was another poor family that lived in one of my

apartments and they had a raft of kids. I used to take them to Dog Shows and, oh, they got a big kick out of that!

W Well I am sure they would! That would be a real treat!

G So, I've had a lot of fun in my life!

W You sure have had a lot of fun and you have done an awful lot of good Pearle. An awful lot of good!

Mrs. Gotts, you have made a big contribution to this community and I am so glad that we had the opportunity to make this recording. I'm sure it will prove interesting to many people.

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(end of taped interview)

Transcribed by Lysbeth Hoffman of Waterport, N.Y.

Interview and checking was done by Miss Ethel Willis, Medina.

Editing and final typong was completed by Helen McAllister
of Medina, N.Y.

Photos courtesy of Mrs. P. Gotts.