

Let Us Remember  
ORAL HISTORY  
of  
RUTH TUTTLE

As transcribed by  
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*Preface : The Tuttle family dates back to the earliest settlers of Commerce Township. Ruth D. Champe was too young to remember when her family moved from Detroit to settle in Walled Lake. Her father, Raymond Champe, was a horticulturalist. The family spent winters in St. Petersburg, Florida, and summers in Michigan.*

*This is a word for word transcription from an audiocassette recording taped on Thursday, February 17, 2005. My words are italicized. For readability, most of the small voice pauses and Background inaudible words have been omitted.*

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*Tell us about the Historical Society.*

The Historical Society was started years ago in Commerce Township by Glenn Ruggles and me. These ladies all owned Stonecrest. What was the name of that Society? Anyway they got so old they couldn't take care of it. So I call one of them up and I said, they were going to give it to the City, and I said how about thinking about giving it to the Historical Society and so it worked. We got it for a dollar. What was that Society, there. Anyway there is a plague on the front of Stonecrest about that Society. That was back in 1980, I think. We've had it since then.

*What prompted you and Glenn to start the Historical Society?*

Well, he knew that the Tuttle were an old family here you know. And I had a lot of old antique furnishings and things. He got my brother and he would go out and do oral histories of those in town. That's the way we found out that the park over there in Novi, that they were going to develop, was an Indian burial ground. They can't develop it. It used to be the Walled Lake Park, yah. That was good. That was one good thing that came out of the tapes. Charlene has got the tape in her desk about the burial. See, the Parks family is an old family here-- real old family. I taped them, Louise Downing, Louise Parks. Parks was her maiden name. She told me that her grandfather owned that. It was his farm. That they used to bury Indian children in it. She said that her grandfather, I guess, dug up a little papoose one time. They were furious about it, you know, so, anyway.

*Is there a marker over there?*

No I don't think so. See I'd been working with the people from Novi Historical Society to preserve that, you know. They didn't want it developed either. 'Cause that belongs to Novi, that part of the lake.

*What prompted you to develop the Historical District?*

Well, we had a City Manager, that was a crook and I was on City Council, then. This lady, she had a shop downtown. Her name was Marge Reader. Of course, I'm up north in the summer, you know. Well, I came home from up north one time and I saw her and she said, you should go up to City Hall and see what they are going to do to your street. Well he had talked to Council into demolishing this street and putting condominiums on it. So that is what prompted me. This is the oldest little street, the oldest in town, you know.

*Now is that Historical District any part of the Commerce Village Historical District?*

No that's separate, that's separate. See this Historical District is scattered. It is not one house after another. A lot of these houses on this street are in the District and there there's houses on the other side of East Lake Drive, too. It is scattered.

*What would you see about that. We have people on the Board the Historical Commission?*

Nobody ever meets. They've never met. *Is it secure, is it designated that these houses. . .?*

Oh yah, The City Council passed the ordinance, you know, adopted the ordinance.

*So they can 't be demolished?*

They are not supposed to be. Course this is an old old house itself I'll get you a picture of this house. This is a pre- Civil War house. There is a horse and buggy, see right there.

*Now do you know any of these people?*

Oh, I think this was Rollin's father--I don't know who this is -- either one of his aunts. One aunt lived in this house, too.

*That is a beautiful picture. And all of this part here was then added on?*

I think about the turn of the century they added the living room part there and the other side. He was in the Civil War.

*Rollin's Grandfather?*

His name was Joseph Tuttle.

*Did he have any brothers?*

Who?

*Rollin.*

Ya, brother, Doug. He just died this last summer.

*Anybody live in Detroit, at all?*

No. My family came from Detroit. I was born in Detroit.

*What was your maiden name?*

Champe.

*Tell us about you. Your childhood. You said you came from Detroit?*

Well we came out from Detroit, yah. And then my Dad settled out here. My Dad was a horticulturist. He raised flowers. You can see some of his beautiful flowers, there. And I lived in Florida, too. I grew up winters in Florida in, St. Petersburg. I went to school. I had most of my schooling in Florida. But I went to school sometimes here, too. I had a wonderful life, really. I was on the high school swimming team in Florida, St Petersburg.

*You 're still quite a swimmer, aren 't you?*

Ya, I still swim, uh huh, I love to swim. Course, we go up to Bear Lake every summer, you know, we have that business up there. That lake is so beautiful. Bud keeps threatening to come up there all the time.

*And he will.*

Yah.

*He took me there one time.*

Did he?

*Yah, we stopped and visited. Beautiful lake, beautiful.*

Yah.

*Do you still have that old cook stove out?*

Oh, yah, I cook, I still cook on that. Yah, I make pancakes on that in the morning sometimes, barbecue chicken on it. Oh, is that chicken good barbecued on it—mmmm.

*How many cottages do you have up there?*

We have live right now. We had seven. But, we gave some to our kids.

*Do they come up quite often?*

Well, they all have their own beautiful places up there now. They don't have cottages anymore. They all and Janice has, a place over on Lake Michigan. And huh, she'll get my cottage up there sometime when I go on, you know. I'd like to go back and visit because that was a beautiful place. It is a beautiful place you should come up sometime.

*Are you going up this summer?*

Hopefully, if I'm still around. We'll count on it then. I might go up this weekend, Bob just told me, his wife is down—he just got back from Florida—His wife is staying down in Florida with their daughter for three weeks. She teaches school down in St. Petersburg, and um, if he goes up this weekend, I'll go up 'cause I have a church I started, and a, so I'd like to get back and visit them this winter. I go there every summer in the summer I'm up there.

*Wonderful -- does it have a Pastor?*

Oh, yah, it is a beautiful big log church.

*Let's talk about Stonecrest for a minute.*

Stonecrest was owned by a family named Pascal for years. It was their summer home. In fact, I stayed there one summer with my friend, Barbara Stuart--she was a Pascal—when my family were in Florida. Then Charlie, um, oh, he lived up the street, here.

*Riffenburg?*

No, he used to be in the Methodist Church choir. I can't think of his name, anyway, his family lived there too and he's the one who named it Stonecrest. They named it Stonecrest.

*Well when was that? About, probably about, ah?*

I don't know just how long ago, but –

*If you acquired it in the 1980s it must have been before that time?*

Oh, I think it was before that time, yah. Charlie Hutton. Charlie Hutton. Yah. Different families lived in it. Then I think it was a store at one time, too. That is just what I've heard, you know. But, I knew what it was like because I lived in it myself, one summer when this English family lived there.

*Now, when the Society ladies you talked about, when they took that over they were taking care of it, did they rent it out as a hall?*

Yah, right away.

*So the Society, the Historical Society just kept on doing that?*

Yah, we rented it out. Mary Weborg used to rent it. Of course, she died this last year, you know. But, I then rented it for several years. I think Charlene is renting it now.

*Tell us about—I remember a Florence Roach, I believe?*

Yah, she lived next door.

*Yes. She rented it because I know back in 1973, I rented it. She must have been in charge of it at the time?*

She was part of that Society that deeded it to us. She lived next door here.

*So it wasn't the Historical Society's at the time, in '73'?*

No.

*So when did the Historical Society actually come about. Was that before 1980?*

Yah, we would meet in Commerce.

*About how many people did you have that wanted to be part of it?*

I don't remember really. Some are on the mailing list yet. Of course, we split with Glenn Ruggles, you know. Yah.

*What are some of your ideas maybe that you have—what is the vision for the Historical Society? What would you like to see it be? Some of the members have fallen off?*

Yah, I would just like to see more members come and more supportive members. Because I think it is a precious old building. 1860 you know.

*What do you remember about the Foster—Mr. and Mrs. Foster?*

Well, she was my Sunday School teacher, all my life, Ruth Foster. She was Ruth Bradley then. She married Foster later in life, you know.

*What was his first name, do you remember?*

Luel.

*Luel.*

She was a lovely person.

*That is what I've heard say. I didn't meet her personally.*

She was lovely, lovely person. She was done here to lunch one day with a group of my friends and I still have a tea cloth she left here.

*She was born and raised here?*

Oh, yah. You see that was an underground railroad, her house.

*Did she ever talk about the stories?*

No she didn't, but um, who was it that I taped that told about that. Oh, she died a couple of years ago. She lived on Pontiac Trail, out there, I can't think of her name. She said when she was a little girl, Mr. Bradley took her over and showed her where the black people used to put them in, you know. Charlene's got that on the tape.

*I'll have to hear that some day. Tell us about when you moved out here. Did you come as a bride?*

No I don't remember moving out here, I was too little. My folks moved out here from Detroit.

*When did you meet Rollin?*

I've known him all my life. I never dreamed I'd ever marry him.

*Who was your best friend?*

Who was my best friend? Jean Harris. She died too. Did you know Jean?

*Yes, I met her. She always wore a hat didn't she?*

She was adorable. She always looked exquisite. Then there was Barbara Stuart, too. She was good friend of mine.

*What do you remember, about Marty, about Martha?*

I remember she always looked nice and I remember her coming up to Stonecrest one time to a meeting and she had this long fur coat on. She looked pretty elegant. Yep, Marty had a good sense of humor, too, didn't she? I remember going, seeing —Bob was on ball team and Bud and (your husband was on the team, too) —

*Buddy?*

I used to go to the games and I'd hear Marty at the games. Wally was a catcher, I remember that. Yep, did Wally ever marry?

*He did, he did. Unfortunately, twenty years later, he divorced. He bought the house.*

Oh did he? So he lives in the house. Oh, that is good.

*We didn't want it to go out of the family.*

Marty was a great collector?

*Oh, tremendous. I think if I'd let him, Bud would have had all of her collections. Tell us about Jean Harris, your best friend.*

Well, Jean came from Jackson, originally, and she met Art when she was working in Detroit on a blind date. Of course, their son, Jamie -- do you know Jamie Harris -- well, he's quite big in politics in Washington, you know. I took Jamie to kindergarten and my son, Richard. I started them in kindergarten. I'll have to tell you about my grandson, John, too. My grandson John was an intern in the White House last year. Take this off and I'll show you his picture.

Look it there. Oh, that doesn't look like Bob.

It is Bob.

*But, that's his boy, oh my goodness, has he grown, wow.*

He's a big tall boy.

There's President Bush. I bet that was quite an honor wasn't it?

Yah.

*That 's good, that 's very good. Bob I think looks like you and a little bit Rollin, too.*

Now this is where I swam in Florida. See this is a pier in Florida. I used to go to a dancing school in a place there. On 4th of July, I swam all around here and around here. I was on a city swimming team.

*That 's beautiful. That is so nice there.*

This is a plaque I got from Commerce Township 'cause I chaired their historical sesquicentennial committee.

*You were very active in the community, weren't you. That's nice. It is good that they recognized you, Ruth.*

Ya, that is nice. Now, this is the history of my family, the Champes. This was a fellow, I've got a bigger picture in the living room like that. John Champe, he almost captured Benedict Arnold. This is an article from the Saturday Evening Post about him.

*This looks like a family tree?*

It is. An artist friend of mine set this up for me. This is a family tree of how we are related.

*Oh, is that wonderful. Look at that. You have got John Champe, Nathaniel Champe, then it goes to William Champe.*

There's two William Champes.

*A Raymond.*

Raymond is my father and then there's Jack, Harry and me.

*Oh, I see, Raymond John, Ruth. Oh, is Dortehea your middle name? And Henry George.*

That's Harry.

*When were you born Ruth?*

When was I born? I'm not telling. I'll tell you what my mother says: I'm as old as my soul and as young as my spirit.

*Ha, ha. I like that, I like that.*

What was I going to tell you about him? Oh, George Washington sent him on that mission, pretending to desert to the British army to capture Benedict Arnold and they almost had him caught. He got on Arnold's ship out in the Atlantic, you know. And then his ship sailed to South Carolina that night, so he had to leave Arnold's ship, sneak off of there and get back. Washington took him out of the army because he said, if the British ever caught him again, they'd kill him.

*That 's incredible isn't it? That is so neat. And that is one of your relatives. That was John.*

That was my great, great, great grandfather.

*There, look at that. That 's beautiful. That is a nice heirloom and your artist friend did that?*

Ya, she lives over in Commerce.

*You have been quite a bit instrumental in the City, haven't you?*

I was on City Council for awhile.

*That's right you were. How many years were you on City Council?*

Five and half.

*What was your experience? Was that a good experience for you?*

Ya, I wanted to get rid of the City Manager and I got rid of him too. He was a crook. He was the one who wanted to make this street all condominiums.

*How do you feel about Walled Lake now?*

Well, it is history. You know, I mean it is my past.

It's changing a lot, though, in Walled Lake, isn't it?

No change is all over, you know. But what you are saying your roots are still here? Our history is still here?

Ya, ya. That's good, that's good. Look at Detroit, too. Detroit used to be a beautiful city and look at it now. Everything changes.

*What would you like to see done to the Foster Farmhouse.*

I'd like to see it finished. I think we should paint it. We should get it painted it this spring. I think it's sad that the DDA was going to take it over and they didn't take it. Everything is kind of up in the air, now. Don't you think? But, I think there are a lot of people still sticking in there.

*They are, they are. That is a good thing.*

See, I would go to those meetings, but they come so early at night and I have to go to dialysis three days a week so I don't get home until about 7:00 at night. But Janice, I guess, she missed the last meeting. Janice is a good worker, too, you know it? Very good. She gets things done.

*If you had a word of advice for young people coming up, what would you like tell 'em?*

Is to be decent. Be decent. Raise a decent family, you know. That is a lot said right there. Ya I'm proud of all my family. Nobody drinks. One daughter-in-law smokes, that's all. That's something to be proud of-- to be proud of your children. Ya, they've all turned out very well.

*What else would like to tell our community people in Walled Lake. How would like to be remembered, if you had a chance to write your own remembrance?*

That I just saved some of the roots of the community, that's all.