

Interviewers: Austin Roop & Colden Smith
Interviewee: Catherine Bartels
Modern US History
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Oral History of Hinckley Residents - Transcription

Colden: When did your family move to Hinckley?

Catherine: Around 1864. We had a farm in Pierce Township that had been in our family since then. I think they immigrated to Philadelphia with somebody they knew. They probably moved around somewhere south of here for a little bit which I imagine was because everybody knew somebody or family members were somewhere that gave them the idea where to go. I think they bought a hundred acres first then another eighty acres. Then they would buy more so that farm ended up being a bigger farm. The abstracts I have of the farm which have been passed on show the farm was never sold and was the original land grant from the president of the United States.

Austin: Can you describe your experience growing up in Hinckley?

Catherine: Well I grew up on a farm on the edge of town on south Sycamore Street. Its rather unusual to be on a farm but in town so I always thought I had the best of both worlds. Kids in the country didn't have transportation to get to town, so it was little bit more of a pain for them.

Colden: Can you describe any public events that Hinckley used to hold?

Catherine: They used to have a carnival down at Pioneer Park. There was a big parade that ended at the park and a small carnival.

Austin: Can you describe life growing up on the farm?

Catherine: You just have a lot of freedom and your family's around a lot cause they're working on the farm. I love that sense of freedom and being outdoors a lot.

Colden: What chores did you do on the farm?

Catherine: Typically I would be tapped to help with pulling the hay up into the barn during the summer. I would drive the tractor that pulled the rope through the barn to lift the hay my dad had loaded on a big fork. I would also get tapped to help pull weeds in the soybean field which was my least favorite job, but it was something you had to do.

Austin: Can you describe your experience going through HBR's schools?

Catherine: I attended the old white school where my grandmother had actually gone to school. It's no long standing but there is a bell where it was. All the grades were in that school at one time. I went there through third grade and then finished elementary

school at the old high school. It is also not there but has been replaced by the current elementary school building. Hinckley and Big Rock had separate elementary schools and classes were not combined until high school. So that was the first time we got to know kids from the other town.

Colden: Which activities/clubs were you involved in?

Catherine: In high school I was involved in as many things as I could. I enjoyed being a part of the fabric of the school so I was a cheerleader and in poms for a year. The Title Nine law was not passed until my Junior year so there wasn't funding for girls sports before that. It was a big equalizer when all of a sudden there were teams for girls. Prior to that they had the girls athletic association which would do fun things but not very athletic. I was co editor of the yearbook for the last two years which was really fun. I used to take photos, crop the photos and plan all the pages.

Austin: What were the early years of women's sports like at HBR?

Catherine: They had to spend equally money on woman's sports and men's sports and activities so there was a real rally to get teams together like a volleyball team and a basketball team. I played softball in the summers but that was through the Lions Club sponsored girls softball. There was little league and baseball in school but there wasn't a softball team so I would say volleyball and basketball were the first few things I remember.

Colden: What distinguishes Hinckley schools today from the time you were a student?

Catherine: We couldn't wear pants so we had to sit-in at school. The principle's daughter participated in it cause everyone was protesting. During the Vietnam War everything was more turbulent and big changes like that for women and feminism; kinda fighting back on things. Our protest was successful and eventually we were able to wear pants to school.

Austin: What made you choose Illinois State University?

Catherine: Well it was kind of a journey. I went to Waubensee for one year cause I wasn't sure where I wanted to go. Then I went to Iowa for a semester. When some friends were going to transfer as juniors to Illinois I did too. That it was a good match cause I wanted to have a business degree.

Colden: Can you tell us about your career and what got you started?

Catherine: Well I got started taking a job out of college at Prudential Insurance in Oakbrook. During college I would work at Marshall Field department store in Fox Valley during Christmas and summers. I liked that so I got a part-time job at Lord and Taylor

because I was kind of bored at the insurance company and thought I would make extra money. I liked this a lot more and found they had a training program. So I stopped working after probably two years at the insurance company and started my career in retail.

Austin: What are some memories you have of Hinckley as a community?

Catherine: My job had me moving around the country and I didn't get back to Hinckley very often. I don't know everybody anymore because of this gap. People now look really familiar but I have to elbow my friend Ardith and say should I know them? They look like their parents when I was young but because they have aged they look really different.

Colden: Are there any events/traditions that Hinckley no longer does that you'd like to see brought back?

Catherine: There was rummage sale that was always a big deal. I don't know if it was the Woman's Club that sponsored it but it was like having a garage sale in the Community Building. That was always a big deal to everyone to walk through and see what they could get. When we had the carnival that was fun too.

Austin: Can you describe the work you have done for the Hinckley Historical Society?

Catherine: The first thing I really worked on was because Bob, who is our president, asked me to do. We owned the whole building but were using only part of it for the museum. We wanted to break through a wall and expand. Bob asked if I would oversee the construction so I did then I ended up kind of overseeing the remodel of the building.

Colden: What was the process like to get the mural on Sycamore street done?

Catherine: There was some grant money that the village received and then they put out a request for proposals for a muralist to design something. My friend Ardith got me involved in working with the person, Danielle Casali, selected to design a mural. She visited the historical museum so she could get a sense of what were those things that would be meaningful enough to tell a story. She is very talented and had done a small public mural in Geneva. Ours was her first big one, even bigger than the one in Dekalb.

She was really great to watch her work as she went through the museum to see things like the buildings and pioneer days that all have meaning. The wheat was the first crop grown here. The school art class worked on the basketball that represents the Globetrotters' first game and the map represents the community where the name Squaw Grove originated. Then she had to teach a group of us how to cut the glass and

assemble the pieces. None of us were mosaic muralists but we are now because she taught us how to do that. The plan was for people to come to a workshop for one night so they could say they worked on the mural. Then Covid hit and we had to stop the activity. We were afraid the project would now take a long time to get this done if we didn't figure out how to work on it. A small group moved the work into my garage, and we had screens put on the door so there was ventilation and we wore masks. When that was done we had the mosaic installation which was another learning experience. We had to figure out how to attach the art to the wall. We carried pieces up on lifts and drilled holes to secure them. We had a big festival with a band and dedicated the mural when it was complete.

Colden: How do you spend your free time now?

Catherine: I have two horses. As a little girl I liked horses and liked to read books about them, like Marquerite Henry's Misty of Chincoteague. An author who lived in Wayne Illinois was writing about the ponies of Chincoteague on the coastal islands of Virginia and the hundredth anniversary of the Chincoteague Pony Swim. Because I had read about it when I was small it was kind of on my bucket list to go there. I used to ride before I had kids but then I stopped because I had children and had a work life and there wasn't really time for riding. When I retired, I said I'm going to buy a horse so it's never too late to follow something you want to do and I couldn't be happier that I did. So I went to see the Chincoteague Pony swim and as I was watching the celebration and then the auction, I told myself I wouldn't bring one back. But I did anyway and I bought my "Misty".

Austin: What are you most proud of in your life?

Catherine: My kids, my family, and that we have experiences in living in different places. I like that they look at their lives and realize the good part of moving around a lot affects their points of view and decision-making as adults.