

MARY SCHELL

Interview by Connie Schmelzle  
January 18, 1995

TOPICS:

Municipal Water  
Recreation  
Shopping  
Land Development  
Commuting  
Automobile Industry

Transcription by John W. Weigel  
January 10 - 13, 2001

Q: Mary Schell, what...what year did you and your husband move into Madison Heights?

A: 1942.

Q: Uh huh. Now where...where did you...where did you move...?

A: We bought three lots. This...this one here and the next one beside it...

Q: Give the address.

A: ...and then behind us.

Q: Give the address.

A: Pardon?

Q: Give the address.

A: The address? Well, it...it probably was the same address that we have now, only it was Royal Oak Township then.

Q: Uh huh. On Berrington.

A: On Berrington.

Q: Uh huh.

A: On 27392 Berrington.

Q: Uh huh. And what was here? This was...what was here when...when you moved here?

A: Nothing.

Q: [Laughter]

A: There was a little building on the one lot that he spent one winter in it. With...you know, they weren't fussy at that time. You had to go get your own water and do your own water [inaudible]

Q: Where did you go get your water from?

A: Way over on the next street.

Q: Ah.

A: Though evidently the city water had come so far...oh it probably was a well. Because the city water was down a block from here.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And so when we moved in, the city eventually came down this way, but there were only three houses, I think, that were hooked up to city water.

Q: I see. So how...you...you had to go get your water. Uh huh.

A: Yeah. We did. Well, we went...on the next street there was a well.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Or we could go down to the corner where the city water was.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Until...I don't know how long it was. Prob'ly the following year, I think, the city came to one house on the next street. And they hooked us up.

Q: Oh.

A: To...to theirs.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And so actually, as far as I know, we're still hooked up down the street.

Q: Down there.

A: With the city water.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So as these houses got built, why then they...they came right on down...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...to the corner here.

Q: I'll bet that made it easier.

A: Oh that...that sure was. It wasn't too bad, because we lived on the farm before this, see?

Q: Uh huh.

A: So we were...we had well water. So this was...you know, we were used to something like this anyway.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But it didn't take too long before we got the city water.

Q: Mmhmm. And what about schools? What schools were here? Did you have kids going to school?

A: Yes, we had three of 'em.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: One of 'em was just a year and a half old so he wasn't going, but the others...

Q: What...what were their names?

A: Art...

Q: Mmhmm.

A: ...Tom and Jo...er, Tom and Ray.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: And so they were prob'ly five and half and six and a half, and seven and a half. They were close together in age, and they went down here to Edison.

Q: Mmhmm. And where was that located at the time?

A: Oh, that's on...I believe it's Hampden.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: And it's still there...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...as far as that goes.

Q: What did you do for entertainment?

A: Well the first thing we did was join the church, St. Mary Magdalene.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: And that's over on Nine Mile Road and John R.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And we went to that church until...oh...maybe it was...probably...prob'ly sixteen years we went there, until St. Dennis got built here. So this was closer, 'til we went to there and...But I took part in the kids' schooling. You know, they had the teachers meet once, and we met once a month and that part was real nice.

Q: Uh huh. What other churches did they have around here in Madison Heights? Do you remember when you came here?

A: Well, I...I don't...right off hand I don't, because, you know, we were Catholics, so the first thing we did was...

Q: Yeah.

A: ...find a Catholic church to go to.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And I'm sure that there were others, but not like there is now.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Uh huh.

Q: Yeah.

A: But as far as entertainment, why...because on this street there were only a couple houses on the other side, and three on this side, we knew 'em just like you would...we know them...knew them better than probably do our own neighbors now.

Q: Uh huh. Yeah. Sure.

A: But...but then we had friends too. My...where my husband was working, you know, we had friends and...so most of our entertainment was...either had company over and played cards...And so it seems like every week we did something like that.

Q: Uh huh. What about goin' to the movies? Where...did you go to the movies?

A: Royal Oak.

Q: You went to the Royal Oak Theater?

A: Yeah. Mmhmm.

Q: Uh huh. Now how did you get there? What streets did you take to get there?

A: Well...well, we went right down to Eleven Mile Road...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...and took Eleven Mile...

Q: I see.

A: ...Road right into Royal Oak.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And I did most of my shopping there because we didn't have any big shopping centers here.

Q: Uh huh.

A: We did have a store right on Eleven Mile Road.

Q: Oh.

A: Miss Turaney owned it and had everything in it.

Q: Oh.

A: I meant as far as fruit and vegetables and meats.

Q: Uh huh.

A: You know, you didn't...you could get all that right there.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So in bread...it maybe would be where I wanted to do big shopping, I'd go out to Royal Oak.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: But otherwise I could get my shopping done right here.

Q: And how long...how long was that store there? Do you remember?

A: Oh goodness, it was there for a good many years.

Q: Was it there when you came here?

A: Yes. Uh huh.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Mr. Rainey had it for...oh...prob'ly twenty, thirty years. I think the building is still there, but he's retired.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: They changed it to something else...

Q: Mmhmm.

A: ...when the supermarkets began to come in.

Q: And then when did they start building like some of the roads and things around here, and more...more houses, do you remember?

A: Well, it would be, let's see, my oldest son is in his fifties, and probably he would be in his twenties when he went into carpentry. So actually, this is when he started with...started this subdivision north of us.

Q: I see.

A: He worked on some of those houses north of us and then east of us.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Because there weren't any...

Q: So it's about the '60s, early '60s?

A: Let's see, he'd be twenty in...he's in his fifties now...oh it would be thirty years ago.

Q: Mmhmm.

- A: And before then, why then Berrington began to fill in with houses...
- Q: Mmhmm.
- A: ...by the lot that way.
- Q: Mmhmm.
- A: But it's the same way with...there was no sewer, and of course we had 'lectricity, though.
- Q: Uh huh.
- A: I think that was the only thing we had when we came here, and it didn't take long for us to get the water. Prob'ly in a year's time we got the water.
- Q: Oh. That's not bad.
- A: It...it didn't take long.
- Q: Uh huh.
- A: But it prob'ly only went down to the second block 'cause there weren't any houses north of us.
- Q: Uh huh.
- A: Not on this street anyway.
- Q: Mmhmm. And then...um...what...what about...getting back to the schools, now, um...when they finished Edison, where did they go to school?
- A: They went to Wilkison [sic]...
- Q: Uh huh.
- A: ...on John R
- Q: Mmhmm.
- A: And just south of Eleven Mile Road.
- Q: Mmhmm.
- A: And they...they finished...they went to high school there.



Q: Mmhmm.

A: The four boys. Three of 'em graduated from there, and the last one graduated a year or two later when the new school got built on Eleven Mile Road.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Because, as population grew, they...they...the...their high school was turned to a junior high school.

Q: Right. Uh huh.

A: So now they have the four years over on Eleven Mile Road.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: And then from there, why their college would be Wayne University.

Q: Uh huh.

A: That would be the closest one. We...I...I...I don't think we had the community ones around at that time.

Q: No. Do you remember anything when you first came here, like who the mayor was or Royal Oak or anything around?

A: You know, I...

Q: City government?

A: ...on account of my age, it seems like I...if I had stopped to think, you know, I...I could come up with 'em. It was the same way with the teachers.

Q: Yeah. That's okay.

A: When you...when you were saying this Mr. Wilkison [sic] was...I know him. He was a teacher at the high school. And...and then...oh, Mr. Bryan was a teacher at Edison.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And...so...and it was really something, because Mr. Wilkison [sic] at one time was a teacher down when we lived up north.

Q: Oh.

A: So when we came down here, why...

Q: That's interesting.

A: Uh huh.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And one of the teachers at the high school, I her had her in high school in Caro.

Q: Oh you did?

A: So...then a couple of our boys had her...

Q: Oh.

A: ...down here.

Q: Uh huh. Oh that's interesting.

A: So she was really interested to know. Then she had me, and then to think that she had couple of my boys...

Q: Yeah.

[tape turned off and on]

Q: The police station.

A: The police station would be on John R.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Now they've moved over on Thirteen Mile Road, I think.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: So th...that was fine. And as far as roads, of course, it took a long time before we got any paved streets here or anything.

Q: Uh huh. Hmm. What...what did you like about, when you moved here?

A: Well, the one thing I liked about it, I was used to eighty acres.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Of farm.

Q: Right.

A: So when my husband saw these lots, and he was going to build his own house, why I didn't mind it in particular, because I was used to open land. And wouldn't really have wanted to go in a place where the houses...

Q: Mmhmm. Right.

A: ...were side by side.

Q: Uh huh.

A: I wouldn't even let 'em sell the house, their lot next door. Not until three, four...a little while ago, my son built a house on it.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But I did, as time went by, when I look back now, I liked things because the kids could walk to school...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...to grade school. They could walk to their high school.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: And that part, as I got used to the town...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...I...I suppose a lot of people wouldn't think it was a town, but I...I did.

Q: Uh huh. And what about your family? Did you miss your family and everything?

A: Yes, we did, because my folks and his folks lived 'bout ninety miles from here.

Q: What...what city did you come from?

A: From...my add...ours was Kingst...our was Kingston. My folks was Caro.

Q: Uh huh.

A: I meant we were kinda in-between, and we only had a mile from one parent, and two miles from the other parent.

Q: How did you meet your husband?

A: He was...he was teaching the country school.

Q: Oh.

A: And my...my brothers and sister went to school there. And of course when we moved out there, the neighbors, you know, always want to know the people that move in.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: They had to come and see you, and he was more the age of my two older brothers.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So at first I thought it was...he was comin' over to see my brothers. Course he prob'ly did, to see the whole family.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But this was how I met him.

Q: [Laughter]. And then how long were you married before you came here?

A: We were married in...oh...eight...eight year...oh may...prob'ly nine years.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Prob'ly nine years.

Q: So you got settled into married life...

A: Yes.

Q: before you moved here.

A: Yeah. Uh huh.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Yeah.

Q: And...um...so I suppose moving here, too, it was...like doctors and hospitals, it was a lot easier, too, when the kids got sick, right?

A: Ri...yeah, our doctor would be Royal Oak.

Q: Uh huh.

A: He'd be in Royal Oak. And then when we needed a...a hospital, it was St. Joseph's, just this side of Pontiac.

Q: Oh. Uh huh.

A: Because we didn't have one in Royal Oak.

Q: Right.

A: But this is where the doctor would be, in Royal Oak.

Q: Beaumont's really grown, hasn't it?

A: Oh yes.

Q: [Laughter].

A: And then, well this was at...we went to St. Joe's for a good ma...good many years, I meant for different things, until Beaumont got built.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And then our doctor died in...

Q: Who was your doctor, do you know?

A: Yeah. Dr. Deutsch.

Q: Oh.

A: Dr. Deutsch in Royal Oak.

Q: Uh huh.

A: He's a well-known doctor. We had him for, prob'ly, twenty-five years.

Q: Uh huh.

A: At least that long we had him.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Then when he died, why Beaumont was built, and my son knew a...a man that knew the doctor right here from Beaumont. And so when...when we needed help, why we got a doctor from Boy...Beaumont and this is where we've gone to Beaumont since.

Q: Mmhmm. Mmhmm.

A: So that would be, oh let's see, been going to Beaumont now since...prob'ly ten years.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But up to then, you know, we'd gone to St. Joseph's. That's where Dr. Deutsch took his pa...parenting...patients.

Q: Uh huh.

A: [Inaudible]

[tape turned off and on]

A: [Inaudible] especially on this side...

Q: Mmhmm.

A: ...when it rained...

Q: Mmhmm.

A: ...it was deep, you know, so the water could run in.

Q: Yeah.

A: It run into the ditch.

Q: Yeah. 'Cause the roads weren't finished. Uh huh.

A: And in the winter time...when the winter time came on, it would get iced over.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So the boys put their ice skates on.

Q: Oh.

A: And they could go right from the front of the house, you know, clear down.

Q: Oh. Uh huh.

A: And then north of us, that was all vacant.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And tha...that was one part I liked, because you have three or four boys from a year and a half to seven and a half...

Q: [Laughter]

A: ...and I was used to eighty acres, so it was nice. 'Cause they could go out this way.

Q: Uh huh.

A: I didn't have to worry about them.

Q: Uh huh. Where did they usually play? North? When they went north in the summer time?

A: Oh could...they could...they could go quite a ways, because there wasn't any houses built, prob'ly clear to...to a...oh half mile down.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Course I didn't have them go that far, 'cause I had to keep an eye on 'em, you know.

Q: Yeah.

A: [I want to?]. . .and when they started to build...begin building houses there, I checked to make sure that there wasn't...where they built a house, it had a basement, to make sure that they didn't fall in.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Before I let 'em go. But at least they had...and they had...and I think they have such close friends because their friends were all right in this block.

Q: Oh.

A: These five houses.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And it seems like it was always that same bunch.

Q: Do you remember any of their names?

A: Oh yeah, they were the...there was the Snyders...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...and the Masons...

Q: Uh huh.

A: and the Pickards and the Counts.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Those were the people that lived...I can remember their names because those were the kids that...and then of course I was acquainted with the parents too.

Q: Sure. Uh huh.

[tape turned off and on]

A: I...once I got used to being off the farm...

Q: Mmhmm.

A: ...I got interested in...because with the boys, I couldn't go on to...I finished high school up north.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And I planned on going to college at that time, but I got married and had my kids, so I didn't go. So when my husband worked afternoons, I quite...I would take acc...an accounting course in the evening, or...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...something that I...

Q: From...from Detroit?

A: Well, it was usually one of the high schools.



Q: Uh huh.

A: That they, you know, the evening high school.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: And I wasn't really working for credits, but I...I was just picking up something that I liked to do.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And tha...that way, when boys were old enough to be left alone...

Q: Mmhmm. And you enjoyed that?

A: Oh yes, I enjoyed...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...that.

Q: Do you remember any of your teachers?

A: No, not the...not my evening teachers, I didn't remember them.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Uh huh.

Q: Remember any classmates or anything?

A: No, because my...my main classmates was, you know, when I was going to high school.

Q: Uh huh.

A: In Caro. That's where I went to high school.

Q: Did you ever...did you ever go to work or use...?

A: I...I started...I went to work during the war, when they were hiring women.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And the boys were already in high school.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Oh prob'ly they were old enough to be by the...course they'd be in school too.

Q: Right.

A: I usually worked days and my husband worked afternoons.

Q: Oh. Uh huh.

A: And of course they'd be in school. This is before they finished high school, but they were way up there.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: The three of 'em were in high school, and John was over at Edison yet.

Q: Where did you work?

A: And I worked at Dodge's.

Q: Oh. Uh huh. And how...

A: In Hamtramck place...

Q: Right.

A: ...right on...right on the Motor Line.

Q: Uh huh. And how did you get there? You took a...

A: I go. I drove.

Q: Oh you drove?

A: Yeah.

Q: Oh.

A: There was a while there...

Q: Well that was unusual in that day, wasn't it?

A: Well, my...we...my husband [be?] mechanically. You know, at that time the boys were getting' to the point where they had wanted to drive.

Q: Yeah. [Laughter].

A: [Inaudible] we just never bought a new car. We bought a used one and keep it runnin'.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But I remember the one...one time when I worked, the one year I worked, there was a young boy...young man that lived right near me.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: So I rode with him.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Then I didn't mostly...I didn't want the responsibility, 'cause it was over in Hamtramck there on Conant.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: And to drive and park the car and that and when I couldn't get a ride with someone else, I preferred that then when I didn't, why I could drive.

Q: Uh huh.

A: So we usually had two cars.

Q: Oh. Well did...did a lot of women, during that time, did they drive? Or was that unusual?

A: I think some of 'em did, but not like they do now.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Because I learned to drive before we moved up here.

Q: Oh. Uh huh.

A: In fact, my husband, who had taught me how to drive...

Q: [Laughter]

A: ...because my folks only had the one car...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...and it had to do for...

Q: Everybody.

A: For everybody. And it wasn't a new car at that. It had to go to the ten miles to the grocery store and stuff like this...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...'cause we didn't have one near. But...but when my husband was teaching, of course, he had one.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And then his dad finally had one. Before then, they, you know, they only had one car too.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But he was a great hand to teach anybody that wanted to drive.

Q: Well that's great.

A: So when I came here, well I was...I had...I had already known how to drive. But I was a little leery.

Q: [Laughter]

A: You know, because out there...you kn...you know there's hardly any traffic.

Q: Right.

A: Uh huh. But...

Q: How long did you work at Dodge?

A: Almost...almost ten years.

Q: Oh, that long! That's...

A: I didn't get credit for ten years, because they would...like when we were laid off.

Q: Uh huh.

A: You know, for change of model.

Q: Right.

A: And...but like I said, the three boys were in high school, and they could...they could start dinner for me and help me with my housework and stuff. And that's mainly why I went to work. I heard they were hiring women, and...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...and it wasn't heavy work. You know, it was puttin' parts on movers.

Q: Oh. Uh huh.

A: As the motors went by.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And so after...after the war was over, why...and the boys were already more or less on their own, so we didn't...the extra money helped because I was working while they were...one of 'em was goin' to trade school, one of 'em was goin' to Wayne...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...and the other one started Wayne, so it gave us the extra money.

Q: Uh huh. That's where I graduated from. Wayne.

A: Oh [inaudible]

Q: Yeah. Yeah. It's a good school.

A: Yeah. Well, our second boy got his degree from Wayne.

Q: Uh huh.

A: It was in mechanical engineering.

Q: Oh. Yeah, that's a good...it's a good reputation...

A: Uh huh.

Q: ...in mechanical engineering. Yeah.

A: And...yeah. Oldest went to Lawrence Tech. He went into...he was going more to carpentry.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: But then our third one went into Wayne and our fourth one went into Wayne.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: But the one of them got a degree. One of 'em went two years, and one of 'em...one of 'em went three and a half years.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: But that's one thing I liked about it, as I begin to live in Madison Heights. I begin to think that school was available.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Because if you live way out in the country, that means you have to send 'em...

Q: Out.

A: Out. They have to live in dorms or in apartments.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And that...that part was nice.

Q: Mmhmm. And maybe also like the police and fire protection also is...what about that? Livin' in the city?

A: Well, actually, before we moved here we never worried about that.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Where we were.

Q: Uh huh.

A: You know, we...there wasn't the problems that they have now.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: They might have some problems out in the country now that they didn't have before.

Q: Uh huh.

A: Seems like at that time we didn't bother clos...oh even here when we just moved, I can remember not locking the door. The side door.

Q: Mmhmm.

A: Because as they boys begin teenagers and schooling, why different ones came in different times. We just most of the time that the back door wasn't locked.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But you couldn't do that now I don't think.

Q: No. [Laughter]

[tape turned off and on]

A: Well, I...I'm real pleased with Madison Heights. It seems like we were the first ones to have recycling.

Q: Uh huh.

A: And we, you know, we were...even got a [inaudible] they told us how well we have done.

Q: Uh huh.

A: It just seem we were...I think we were the first ones to start on the recycling.

Q: Uh huh.

A: But I think everything that we did came to Madison Heights. I...I been real pleased with the way they've done things. And even now...

Q: Uh huh.

A: ...I'm real pleased with our mayor and...and the way they're doing things.

Q: Right. I agree. Yeah.

A: Yeah.

Q: I think we live in a progressive city.

A: Yes, we have...we have...that part. Uh huh.

Q: Mmhhh. Well, thank you very much for your time.

[taped turned off and on]

Q: Thank you very much Mary. This is Mary Schell, January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1995...

[taped turned off and on]

Q: ...and her address is 27392 Berrington. And this is Connie Schmelzle.

END OF INTERVIEW