

## HISTORY OF BREEDSVILLE - AS I SAW IT

By Leonard Lee

[Tape 1]

My name is Leonard Lee. I live at 269 North Pine Street in Breedsville, Michigan. My wife is Lettie (Royal) Lee. We both have lived in this vicinity all of our lives.

Well, we have had a starting point, but I'm going to back up a little bit. Shortly before the Civil War, there was a man by the name of Charles Jarman, My Grandfather. He had a large family and lived in London. He was one who helped lay the first telegraph cable across the Atlantic Ocean. This did not work. He also, a few years later, helped lay the first successful cable across the Atlantic Ocean, but not in time for the tail-end of the Civil War. The Battle of New Orleans was fought after the end of the war was officially signed, because they had no communications between here and Europe. As I said before, Charles had a large family and four of them eventually lived in Breedsville. We'll come to that in a little bit. One of these was his next to youngest, Florence Jarman who was now Florence Lee, my mother.

There was a man by the name of William Lee who lived in a little town outside of London. He, too, had a large family. I'm just going to mention two. There was Sid. Sidney went to Sydney, Australia and lived there the rest of his life. We met his wife and daughter a few times; The other was Fred G. Lee. He said, "No, I don't want Australia, I want the United States." So, he came to the United States, went back and forth several times so he could see his family. He could travel free because he could tend horses. He liked horses, he was a blacksmith and an artisan in many, many facts.

Well, anyway, he had a Sunday School teacher, Sarah Jarman. The Sunday School teacher was the older of the four I told you about that landed in Breedsville. Pa, Fred Lee, came over and had a shop out west. Pa was in business in Chicago for quite a number of years, mostly horse shoeing. While he was in Chicago, he met his old Sunday School teacher again. All of them came over for the Chicago World's Fair, about 1895. Of course, we have to say number one because we've had another Chicago World's Fair since then. In seeing his old Sunday School

teacher, he met his old Sunday School teacher's younger sister, Florence. Things happened and they got married. They lived in Chicago for awhile and they had three children in Chicago.

Then Mother said, "I don't like this small apartment." It wasn't small but it seemed small to her. So, they moved to a house. Ah, they actually had a tree in the yard. That was better. "But, oh, I sure wish I had a place where I could have a garden." Pa, Fred G. Lee, said he was going to get a shop somewhere in this Midwest that would be a nice place to raise a family in a small town. He went through anyplace where there was a blacksmith shop anywhere within a couple hundred miles of Chicago. He came to Breedsville. He said, "Ah, this is the town. This is the town for me." They had just built the new school. It wasn't quite finished yet in 1903. That's the big red school. We've got a picture of it somewhere, I'm sure. It was a two-story four room school. This town was really going. Not only that, but they had just put in the two new bridges across the Black River, one right next to the blacksmith's shop. Fred said, "That's what I've got my eye on, of course, is the blacksmith's shop." He looked over the town. There were four Doctors and the town also had a very active Methodist Church. There were sawmills, grist mills and many, many businesses. We'll go into that a little more later. He said, "This town is growing. This is where I want to raise my kids." And so, he made the deal. He bought the blacksmith shop from Charlie Adams. There was a big department store where the filling station and the log cabin is. That lot was a big department store. I don't know the history of it, but it's not there anymore.

Charlie Adams also had a brother, Frank, that lived in Breedsville. He lived east of the business section on the South Side of the Street. Pa made the deal. He paid \$400.00 in cash for the shop, not including the tools. He had all his own tools. Charlie said, "Suppose I leave some of my tools here. Maybe they'll pay their rent for just sittin' here, and you use them when you want them." There were a few of them Pa could use that he didn't have duplicates of. He had made arrangements to buy the second house west of the church. In 1904 he moved out here. He brought all of his furniture and his family out. Here he comes, and they had already sold the house that they were to move into. They had a good friend who lived right there across the street in fact, Harry Forbes. He said, we'll take you in for tonight, then we'll figure out something. Shortly, they bought the house at 18 River Street, and they lived there the rest of their life. I have had a lot of people who are not acquainted with the location say that it's such a

nice little house. The construction of the building is called a cottage and gives the appearance of being small but can be large. There are three large rooms in that house. At the time they moved in, there were 10 rooms. The house was built, we'll say, about 100 years ago. We had a wonderful life there. There were five of us kids. Mother had many flowers and a garden.

I had said there were four sisters from London. One of them was my mother. Across the street was my mother's youngest sister, Marie Kitchen and her husband Harry. He was a very successful auto dealer in Chicago. He was selling electric automobiles. But, something happened. Henry Ford made the Model T and they were easier to maintain. Kitchen went out of business and lost everything he had. But, he had something because he did buy a house here in Breedsville. They tore the old house down and built a new one. Today, there are two concrete flower pots out in front. I made those myself.

Then there was Charlie Buck. His wife Sarah was my Dad's Sunday School teacher back in England. Then there was another sister, Kate Carter. She had three children. One of those children, Mabel is whose funeral we're going to tomorrow. There's one more left. But anyway they bought the house right next to Charles Buck. She didn't stay very long. She was subject to asthma all of her life and she couldn't take the atmosphere in Breedsville. There are certain sections of outlying Chicago she could, so she didn't keep the house. That house is gone now with a house trailer in place of it. The trailer is set back further than the house was.

I was about four years old. I looked out the window and the folks told me about it. The window was exactly 36 inches from the floor and I had to stand on tip-toe to look out. I've compared with a number of kids and it comes out somewhere near four years old. So, that would be about 1911. There were solid logs, one city block square, 12 feet high, except for one building. They were mammoth logs. Folks were so concerned and upset. I didn't know it had happened until years after, but, there was a young man. Barkhouse was the owner of the sawmill here. That house is still here behind the oil storage place. All the storage is underground with thousands of gallons of capacity, now empty. Anyway, he was one of the very well-to-do men in town. His son wanted to catch up at the mill on something. So, he did some sawing during the noon hour. They found him afterwards where the saw had cut him in two, left shoulders to right thigh. They

didn't tell me anything about it at all. That sawmill never ran again. I saw for weeks and weeks these big supplies of logs loaded on the flat cars and hauled away. That was one big drop in Breedsville's prosperity, shall I say.

My sister was five years older than me. She got acquainted with a young lady who did housework for Andrew Gaynor, next to us. She was engaged to Barkhouse's son. My sister was upset for her dear friend. The whole town was upset. I didn't know why. There was one big chunk of Breedsville history gone.

We had a nice house, as good as any in town, but we weren't rich. We were happy. We had three stoves. One was in the kitchen, a 15 foot square room. There was one in the dining room and one in the living room. The only time we built a fire in the one in the living room was when we had company, or big celebrations, Christmas celebrations, etc. Otherwise we didn't heat that north room at all. We had the usual things other people had; kerosene lamps, etc. We had one thing no one else had in town to my knowledge. There was a large cistern underneath. In other words a large pound tank about 4 feet across and 5 feet deep made of mortar and bricks. The water came off the roof and down in there. We had a hand pump for nice soft water right into the kitchen sink. Of course, that wasn't for drinking water. We had all the water we wanted. We went down to the end of the sidewalk, go on the south side of Gaynors house and down the hill, and there was a spring. It's not there now. Right after Pa came, he and Any Gaynor made a deal. Pa says, "If I can use the spring, I'll keep it up." Gaynor thought that was wonderful. So, we had a real pathway all the way down. We only had to carry water a thousand feet or so. Most of this section of town got their drinking water from that spring.

Of course, we had a little house out back. Everybody had to have one of those. This little house had double walls, as solidly built as any home. It had three holes; on the seat there was always a Grand Rapids Press or a Sears Roebuck catalogue. Everybody had a little pot under the bed, and a slop jar where you poured them into and carried them out the little house. Later, they got modern plumbing all the way through and got rid of the little back house.

Sid Smith and his wife, Lila, lived across the tracks to the west in the second house on the right.

That house is still there. His wife's sister, Daisy Sibole also lived there. Daisy was the one important to me. She was my first school teacher. I had her as a beginner and in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grades. One of the best teachers anywhere, she loved the kids and she made us learn. "If you chew gum once more, I'm going to take a piece of string, tie the string to the ceiling, put the gum on the end of the string and you are going to stand up in front of the room all afternoon and chew that gum." That's what she told us. I never saw her do it, though. She did make some of stand in the corner.

Daisy Sibole and her sister Delia operated the first telephone office in Breedsville in about 1913. This was in the second house south of Howard Street on the East side of the street on North Main Street. This was a cabinet about the size of a refrigerator sitting in Delias's living room. No service after 10 at night unless extreme emergency.

After a number of years the Breedsville Telephone Company bought the house that had been Kate Carter's, next to Charlie Buck's. Erwin Amick was chief operator, and his wife was an operator. My sister Florence Lee was also an operator.

Andy Gaynor and his wife never had any children. They could have adopted, but they didn't. Right down on the main corner is the Gaynor building, Gaynor Store. It's now a vacant lot. I always call it the band lot because that's where the band played on Memorial Day. According to the history books, when that was put in it was called the Big Brick Block. It was primarily a grocery store but included needle and thread, yard goods and a 1,000 other things. It was a large building with an upstairs. The history book says that this was going to be one of the big additions to the village of Breedsville. There were two different lodges. Later, they held their meetings up there. I was never up there. I was in the basement. It covered just as much area as the big store did. Just once I walked the full length of that basement and it was divided into four or five separate rooms. Each one of them had a butcher's block and all the cutting tools for meat. The whole basement had been a huge meat market. It wasn't used as far as I can remember.

In 1925, a lot of things happened. Andy Gaynor had passed away before that. His wife was operating the store. She was getting elderly, but not incapacitated by a long way. About

February, the store burned in the night. We did have a fire department we could call on, which they did. It came from Bangor. It came through the usual roads which were dirt roads, not gravel, or hard-top like today, but dirt. It took them forever to get here. They couldn't have done anything. It was just too far gone. The fire took place at 2:00 in the morning or so. Mrs. Gaynor said she was pretty sure it was arson. She said there were so many people owing her money. All of them were good for it. But, she said someone didn't want to pay their bills. Another thought she had was that someone pulled up to the back door and just moved out a tremendous amount of stock. She said afterwards that a tremendous number of people came in and paid all their bills. In that sense she was happy. I was in about the 11th grade when it took place. We in our English class had one day for current events. I don't think a report could be any more current than mine was. I saw this happening about noon - Report 1 O'clock. I went home that day and they were digging the safe out from under everything. When they got it out, the safe was supposed to be absolutely air tight. But it was not. When they dug it out, there was a little wisp of smoke coming from the inside of the safe. So it wasn't air tight. Everyone in town was interested in seeing what happened. Someone went down to the river bank and got some shear clay and they sealed the door up tight. When that burned, all the bills were damaged. There was a certain amount of cash which was taken to the bank. They called in the expert from Washington, or something, and they took each bill and recorded the number on that bill. Then they took a sharp tool to pry that bill off which turned to ashes and went to the next bill. As far as cash was concerned, she didn't lose what was in the safe. But, there was one other thing that was lost in the safe. That was a map of the cemetery. All records previous to 1925 were gone as far as the cemetery was concerned. You can go by the tombstones you can see. Also many people kept the deeds to their property and Insurance papers, etc. in his safe.

The first settlers were 27 people who lived in three log cabins in 1835. There is no sign of these dwellings today. There's a great big beautiful house up there now, but I don't know the gentlemen's name. I'm wondering how the old timers in 1835 got up there. There was a man who came from New York State. He built a half of a log cabin. Then he, and a total of 27 people came to Breedsville. You can imagine beginning in October and building three log cabins. They didn't waste too much time before winter closed in. That was the start of the town, right up there on the hill. There was one death. One lady died between October and December

31. I'm interested in knowing, but I don't know for sure whether she's buried in the Breedsville Cemetery. I've heard that the first person who died was buried in the cemetery off of CR 681 between Bangor and Hartford; the one on the northwest corner. The stone is not there.

The railroad was put through in 1870. It went through Breedsville and Bangor. Another railroad, not in any way connected to the other, went through Grand Junction and South Haven to Kalamazoo. It went through the same year. That's the one that is going to be the Kal-Haven Trail.

I don't know the date, but this whole section was acquired as a package by a lawyer in Bangor. His name was Lynn Lewis. This was told to me by my Dad. I never heard it anywhere else. Mr. Lewis divided it up into lots. The biggest lot was quite a number of acres, about five, more or less. Everybody wanted that lot. The way they did it was you bought a lot, but you didn't know which lot. Down in Andy Gaynor's store they had a drawing. Everybody that bought a lot was there. They didn't know which was theirs until they drew one out of the box. Lynn Lewis was his name. Maybe you can get more records somewhere but that's all I know. Dubsy was the one who owned that big lot when I was a kid. I won't say she was the one who drew it, but that's who did live there. I don't remember who lives there now, but there are blueberries. The house there now is not the original house. Hedinger(?) did live there one week when we were kids.

Grover Page says there was a stave factory. A stave is a section of a barrel. They just made staves for barrels. What happened to it, I don't know. It wasn't there in my memory. It's a vacant lot now.

Landstrom did not live in Breedsville. He lived north of it. They came from Chicago. That's the big brick house north of Breedsville; a mile, mile and a half or so. The old red one that's almost completely covered up with bushes. They had two daughters and a son. The son lived in what was the telephone office at one time. His name was Roy. I'm going to talk about one of the daughters. On River Street there's a big house. It's perfectly square with a little addition on the back side. That was built in 1863, I believe. It had a cupola on the top of it. Grover Page and the descendant of that Landstrom, Gerda Page, lived there in 1913. Grover Page is one of the

historic men of Breedsville. He was just a good, steady guy to have around. He wasn't destitute. He raised a nice family. He lived right next door to us. He had a tremendous lot of history. I wish I had taped it. One was the history of the house. He had a journal of the man that lived in the house. I know where the journal is, and it's obtainable. I don't know his name, but he was a carpenter, and built the house in 1863. They wanted to move in, but they couldn't. They had to wait for a whole month. They plastered the house. The plaster they used at that time took weeks to dry. The journal is in the Historical Museum.

I taught at the Ackley school. I had 33 kids with 30 seats. We had an extra table and chairs so we had places for them all. I enjoyed every minute of my teaching there. That included the beginners all the way through the 8th grade. I had the power to say, "Yes, you did pass the 8th grade, or no, you didn't pass the 8th grade." They didn't have to take county exams then. They did when I was a kid. There was a comparatively modern coal furnace. The air came in the bottom of the furnace, was heated, and came up. There was a pipe over at one side probably eight inches or so from the floor. As the hot air came in, the cold air went out this pipe that you can still see on the west side of the building. John Ackley was the man I know. He was an old man. The school may have been named after William Ackley who is buried in Breedsville Cemetery, but I don't know. I don't know where John is buried.

I had a wonderful working relationship with the school board. They said, "what do you think of that little podium up front?" I said, "it was the biggest nuisance that was ever in the school." They said, "Would you like it out?" So I had the three school board members went down there, free, for nothing, and did the work. We took it out and leveled the floor right straight across. We used the old material as much as we could, but we had to spend an extra \$3.50, and that came out of the school treasury. I drove my Model T Ford to school. I went to school here in Breedsville, in the red-brick school from kindergarten through high school.

There was an old man who died here in Breedsville. He wasn't born here, but he died a little bit ago. I believe I can say for sure that I'm the oldest person in Breedsville who was born in Breedsville. One fellow said, "Whether you like it or not, Leonard, you are the Breedsville historian." I do know some things, but I don't know it all.

I also taught Sheldon School. You go to North Lake, go across the railroad track and keep on going until you find the Sheldon School. It's now a woodworking shop. There's a school way south of here, just outside of Van Buren County. Somebody got hold of it and they said, "Yes, you can have the building, some financial arrangement, but you must keep the outside looking exactly the way it was." So it was rebuilt as a home, but the exterior looks exactly like the school house was at that time.

I don't remember the name of it.

I want to tell you a little more about this house. I stand corrected on when I said there were four sisters including my mother in Breedsville. There were only four that bought property in Breedsville. You know in every family there's one that's a born manager. Mother's older sister, Carrie, came out to visit very often. She saw the beautiful mulberry trees and she said, "We've got to get those and can them." So we took every sheet and tablecloth there was in the house, spread them out, got the kids to shake the bushes, and they all came down on the sheets. Then all they had to do is bring them together and pour it out. But, what about the stains? It was years before those stains came out. Carrie wasn't a country girl. She was the oldest born right in London.

We took care of a lot of the expenses for the funeral, etc. for my mother, at the last. Eventually this house came into my possession. Of course, as soon as it came into my possession it became my wife's and mine. That's just the way we do things. I did quite a lot of improving on the house, but I just didn't have enough income. Eventually, I sold it my son Fred. So, it did belong to Fred G. Lee, and now it belongs to Fred G. Lee, only there's another generation in between. He's in the process of fixing it up. Fred was married to Carol Overton, and they split. Then Fred got married again and his second wife had a lot of children. They've got two boys. One lives in one half of the house, and the second is in the other half. They've got the house completely separated, both of them complete apartments. One is completely done up. The other has the necessities but needs some finishing on the walls and so on. They don't have kids. They're Tim and Mike Betz. Fred G. Lee bought the house in 1904 and our Fred finished paying for it this summer. The mulberry tree is still there.

The maple trees were planted up and down Breedsville in about 1871, because the Agricultural Department in 1871-2 gave away maple trees. That's why they are all dying. They're over 100 years old and they've had it. They are now giving away maple trees again, or very cheaply, a handful for \$2-\$3. More discussion on old trees in Breedsville.

Jerusalem is 2,600 feet elevation and Breedsville is 662 feet above sea level. Can you imagine only 662 feet for the water to flow downhill all the way to the Atlantic Ocean?

In 1918, we had a preacher by the name of O.F. Bullman. He preached in Bangor Church and Breedsville Methodist Church. He didn't have a car. The Ladies Aid of Bangor bought him a car. He says, "I don't want a car. I'm not going to use it." He walked the track from Bangor to Breedsville. They had their church in the morning and we had our church in the afternoon. We're talking about the northeast corner of the main corner down here. That was just a nice grassy knoll. It was next to Charlie Adams' house. Today it's Wade Hampton's house. It was a nice grassy knoll from the house all the way down to the sidewalk. It's still the same sidewalk, it hasn't been changed. One day, they said, "This is too hot to have church inside on a hot day like this." So, they took the organ and put it down on the bottom end of the grassy knoll. The congregation sat up above, the organ was played, and he used his hands to hold his bible and notes and so on. That was the summer of 1918. He was just dearly beloved by everybody. Bangor was the church and we were the little one. We were the big one as far as we were concerned. This spot is where the filing station is now. Before the church, there was a department store that had burned down.

There was another department store where the little grocery is now. History says it caught fire and every structure from there to the east was burned. Everything on the south side of the building was lost. The post office was moved according to Grover Page. The building next to it was the drug store. It's vacant now. That was also moved. These two buildings were moved from the east of town to their present location. I have an 1863 map of Breedsville where the population was 262. The same year, the Breedsville newspaper said the population was 600. You'll have to take your pick. I think it's closer to the 262.

East of the drug store, there were several buildings. There's one that remains now. That's the barbershop. It's next to the tavern, with grass between the two buildings. Jim Seliga had the barber shop. Then, east of the drug store there was one or two buildings. One of them was a cigar store. I don't mean a place that sold cigars. It was a place that made cigars. It was Blue Banner or something like that. He actually made them by hand. It was a one-man operation. It was called the cigar factory, and was a small building. It was owned by Mr. George Schemenauer. I'm pretty sure it was Blue Banner, though. I have one of the cigar boxes around. That building is completely gone now. I can't tell you the date, but he did have the drug store as a tavern. Then he wanted to modernize and they didn't want to spend that amount of money on it, so they just built another one next to it.

Across Mill Road there is a gray stone building. Lettie's uncle did operate it as a meat market. His name was Harry Royal. Charles Nelson acquired it from Harry Royal. They were getting elderly. They had a son who operated it. Well, it burned, and he re-built it. That was a very prosperous nice-going business. He would sell meat, of course, but he wouldn't only do that. Eventually he had a farm out a ways and he would buy young stock and butcher them. Then he would bring them in. He had a big rack on one side and he would hang them up there to drip, let's say. It was a spot filled with sawdust. Then he had a place to put them and he would tie a tag on the hoof. Then he'd take it down to the express and send it to Chicago to a meat dealer there. No refrigeration, no nothing, he just shipped it. No wrappings. Frank Nelson was also our mailman. The mailman, you would think, is the man who brings you the mail. Well, he didn't. He took the mail from the post office and took it to the train, and also took it from the train to the post office. His son, Dwight Nelson operated the butcher shop for awhile. Then he didn't want to run it anymore, so it just closed up. Wade Hampton owns the building now. He's been here a tremendously long time.

[end of tape 1]