

Metuchen-Edison Historical Society
P.O. Box 61, Metuchen NJ, www.metuchen-edisonhistsoc.org

Interview of Dr. Myra Biggs
8-18-00
by Walter Stochel Jr.

Dr. Myra Biggs was a teacher and a principal at Oak Tree School, and a principal at Lincoln School in Edison. She lived at what is now the corner of Marion St. and Plainfield Rd. On 8-18-00 Walter Stochel interviewed her about the Oak Tree Pond, and the neighborhood. She was 98 years old when she was interviewed.

When asked if the pond was there when she taught at Oak Tree School Dr. Biggs replied:

“We would take the kids skating at the pond. I would bring my skates to school, and before lunch go out on the pond to see if the ice was strong enough, and then we would let the kids skate.”

1924 the pond was there then. Moved in 1924

Oak Tree was the terminal moraine. This was from the glacier, and it left ponds all over this area.

I bought the old abandoned schoolhouse. We dug the cellar by hand, and used the stone to build the foundation for the addition, and the chimneys and the steps.

There was another pond down where the Bruderers lived. Down on Plainfield Rd. where Stephenville is. Lindenthal was a big engineer, and had an estate there that sat back from the road about 500’-600’. Mr. Lindenthal worked in NY and would walk to the Metuchen Train Station. The Bruderers did housework and garden work for Lindenthal.

I lived there for 56 years. When they renamed the street Marion St. they should have named it “B” Street. Because Biggs, Beck, Burke, and Bashew lived on the street, and they had all boys.

I remember the railroad, the “Black Diamond” ran through here. Bidney was the man who worked at the station and lived there. He had both legs amputated by a train that ran over him. His son was Bobby Bidney and went to Oak Tree School.

I still hear from Mr. Needham, whose wife was Alice Needham. (They lived near the Marconnier Church)

The Campbell house was not a big house when they bought it. They also owned 45 acres where the Tavern was. Catholic School may have been part of it. (Possibly Bishop Ahr HS land.)

Rachel Kelly lived there and died in 1925.

Campbells owned Orange Groves in Florida.
They built a sun porch on the pond side of the house. And a 3-car garage in the back.

After the Campbell died people got into the house and destroyed it.

Gail Campbell's father was a Tennessee doctor. Gail smoked cigarettes, and one day I went over to see her, and notice that she was using a good Japanese dish as an ashtray. A few days later, she came over and gave 3 of these dishes to me because she said I liked them.

The next day Gail slipped in the bathtub and died.
Gails father in law died in Waycross Ga.

Rachel Kelly was old and deaf and had to use one of those horns to hear.

When I first moved there the road was not straight. They cut the road through around 1929.

They used to raise squash on that part of the property and they would go to the slaughterhouse to get blood for the garden.

I paid 3,000 for the rest of the triangle that was cut off from the rest of the property.

Campbell used to cart guinea hens up here from Florida.

Charlie Grigg and his wife did domestic work for the Campbell's.
Charlie Clausen was a caretaker of the property when the Campbell's went to Florida.
His wife had Alzheimer's. (Charlie & Mary Clausen lived at 2116 Oak Tree Rd.)

We used to play baseball on the Campbell Farm. The Bd. Of Ed. wanted to buy that piece for a ball field, but the Campbell's would not sell.
So the Board cut down the hill behind the school for the ball field. John Anderson, Bd of Ed. Secretary did the digging and removal of dirt.
There was another small pond on the other side of the school. It was smaller and did not freeze as much as the bigger pond.

She was told she would never be made the principal because she was a woman.
She remembers when a child was hit by a bus down by Henry St.

Swales was the Mayor part of the time, and Anderson was tied in with them.

A school wagon went down Grove Ave. Suydam ran the wagon. This is when the kid got run over. Eugenia Berta lived on Grove Ave. She was a Poncerolli, Virginia was her sister, and she has since died. (Mrs. Berta's house is on Grove, near Anita.)

John Jarema had the brains and did not want to use them. I gave him what he deserved.
His parents transferred him to Clara Barton.

Eleanor France lived near Pumptown Corner Restaurant. I made her work, and she became the best in the class.

I was principal for 10 years at Lincoln School. Should not give kids Ritalin. Wigglers.
I told the teachers if the kid is too restless send him to the office. I would make them

pick up papers on the lawn or do something. Did you ever sit at a desk for 8 hours? Imagine how hard is it for a kid full of energy. Need more recess and phys ed. so they can burn off the energy.

Social promotion is crazy.

Eddie Layborn lived on Henry St. Mr. Ritter was bad with the kids.

Are you dealing with any politicians? If so watch them, they lie like a Persian rug.

I had a brother Walter who died in 1951, and had a sister. I'm 98 years old, blood pressure good; only take vitamins, no drugs.

Additional Interview with Dr. Biggs in September 2000.

Oak Tree School was named for what was there. The Oak Tree. Rachel Kelly told me that the tree there was a planted tree.

An itinerate preacher started Oak Tree School. (*Bethune Duncan???*)
There is a picture of the school with the school and the teacher.

They were allowed to build the school there on the Kelly property, and it went back to the Kelly's when the school moved.

Summer 1925 we moved into the old school house. Miss Kelly had a horn that you had to talk into for her to hear.

Miss Kelly told Campbell to sell me the property 6'-8' from behind the house.

When the speeds increased on the roads they had to do something about the road. That's when Oak Tree Rd. was cut through the property. After that, Campbell sold the rest of the triangle to us. We bought part of the lot for a garage.

People who had hot dog stands, and gas stations wanted to buy the property.

On Marion St. she called it "B" street for names of the people on the street. Originally owned by Hudson.

Pond was dug by the glacier. She move here in 1925 and the pond was there.
There was also a pond on the Van Court place. (West of Lehigh Valley RR)

There was also a pond east on Oak Tree Rd. where the Hunt Club was.
(*Metuchen Rod & Gun Club*)

There was a pond by Lindenthal's house, Albert Bruderer lived there.
The large rock in front of the house is granite, and was left there by the glacier.

Bought some of the rocks on the house on the Plainfield Rd. side of the property.

When the brook from the Oak Tree Pond got full it ran past Hudson's place.

Lindenthal owned up to Marion St.

Archembalds bought Hudson's after Lindenthal died ???

Spears house on the other side of Plainfield Rd.

Williams lived down by Pumptown, and he started the 5 & 10. *(He was a buyer for Woolworth's, and owned the Roselawn estate)*

"Big Inch" pipeline from Corpus Christie Texas to the port came through that area. Stephenville Parkway is divided because of the pipeline.

There is another pipeline down by the bridge (no longer existing) on Plainfield Rd. *(Tidewater pipeline)*. A bulldozer hit it and it sprayed oil.

Lived in Oak Tree From 1925-1980.

At Woodbrook there was a "black wax" pond. Full of black sticky muck. Other relics and bones of animals were found there.

Rose Miller sent her articles about Oak Tree School and how it looked in 1924. 6 rooms and an auditorium. Then 8 rooms, then a basement. Then the Annex, then the addition. *(1949)*

There was a one room school house in Menlo Park. Mrs. Swackhammer was out of Oak Tree School, later she was flooded out in Galveston Texas. Miss Purcell was also at Menlo.

In 1925 the old Oak Tree Schoolhouse was a mess. All one room with a vestibule. 2 doors, one for boys, and one for girls. She built the house around the school house.

There was no water, had to get the water up at Campbells. No bathroom. Kerosene lamps and stove. Later a coal stove.

I started as principal at below salary scale of \$1,100 per year. When you got the degree, I was off the salary scale.

I was the only Dr. in the School system. The next Dr. was Dr. Kresky. Jan Miller was also a Dr.

Jerry Young has 420 students, 6 assistants, and secretary. His salary is \$105,000. All he has to do is deal with parents. I made \$1,700 at Oak Tree School with more kids.

I also did the secretary work at night for an extra \$200 per year.

Supplies, like pens, and ink blotters had to be bought. We were allotted \$1.25 per student for supplies. Pens, pen holders, 10 sheets of colored paper. Less than one sheet of white paper per student per day. We bought our own rulers.

Sometimes teachers would hide paper in the pianos. Because the Board of Ed. deducted left over paper from the next year's order.

40% of the kids were colored kids, they appreciated a good place to be in, many came from Virginia.

Talbot (*Principal before Dr. Biggs???* Or Board Secretary before John Anderson???) was just as bad as John Anderson. Mrs. Poncerolli once invited him to dinner.

He would come by the school on the day after I worked late at night as the secretary. I signed in at 8:30am. He said "you are suppose to be in at 8am" He also said my room was messy because there was an eraser on the floor. We taught penmanship, with pens and inkwells, and he would spot a drop of ink on the desks. He had to find something.

I found the Christmas program from 1925. Husband's niece Babe. Claudia Twitchells, Mildred Franks. School strips pictures of 1925. Safety patrol pictures.

Miller took the school pictures. I was the only one who complained. But Tony Y wanted us to use him (*Tony Yelencsics*). Miller did not get the pictures to me until after school was over in June.

"No dog can chase a cat, if the cat won't run"

During the Depression you paid in script. 6 \$10.00 script notes. When you took them to the bank, they would cash them at 10% on the dollar.

But if you took them to Woodbrook Farms, Mr. Hale paid face value. I got a milk bill, and it said credit of \$50.00.

Kirkpatrick said they were going to put up her house for Sheriffs sale because she was not paid.

We took a 20% pay cut, and worked 13 years without a raise. 42 years I averaged \$3,800 per year. After 32 years I was making \$5,200 per year.

Snyder farms was at New Dover Rd. & Tingley Lane.

The water was hard. The water company put in a 20" main in front of the house. I saw a kid crawling through the pipe. The water was so hard, it did not taste fit to drink.. We had to use detergent, because the soap would clot like spoiled milk. So we bought Mullins Spring Water to drink. (*Mullins was in Perth Amboy*)

I had two sons. (*One may have been killed in WWII*).

I got 5 bedrooms where I am now.