

**PALMYRA KINGS DAUGHTERS FREE LIBRARY**  
**ORAL HISTORY OF PALMYRA**  
**MRS. LOUISE BREEN**  
**TAPE 32**  
**Part 1**

February 16, 1985 - The following is the story of Mrs. Louis Breen, of her life and memories of Palmyra. It was told by Mrs. Bree to Betty Troskosky, her friend and nextdoor neighbor for 35 years, who now narrates it.

Mrs. Breen is the daughter of Peter and Janne Mickielson, both born in Holland, but didn't know each other over there. Janne, a little bit of a woman, had been previously married, but her husband died of what was then called "quick-consumption" when they had lived here only a year. Neither Peter nor she and her husband could speak English, so when Peter heard of another family nearby that spoke Dutch, he often went to visit them. Sometime after Janne's husband died, she married Peter. They lived on the Faas Road, next to Chester Faas, just off the Armington Road. Peter got a job as what was called a "day man" and received \$.75 a day, if lucky, plus meals. They had 8 children of whom Mrs. Breen was next to the youngest. The only survivor is Mrs. Sarah Morgan of Mesa, Arizona.

Mrs Breen's first school was at the corner of Armington and Howland Roads. Since then Alvin DeVey bought it and moved it near his home on Armington Road and uses it in his swimming pool business.

Later Mrs. Breen moved onto the Curran Road and had quite a way to walk to school. She was pretty small to buck the snowdrifts in the winter so had to stay home when the older ones braved the weather. One particularly bad day, she stood looking out the front window as the wind swirled the snow around the barn that faced the house on the other side of the road. As she watched, a huge gust of wind came up and lifted the roof right off the barn, and carried it into the field next to it. Needless to say, she was one very frightened little girl.

Of course, not all of the winters were that bad. She told about Christmas activities in the school. In the Old Country the *fun* was on Saint Nicholas Day on December 6th when there were big bags of cookies and popcorn balls. Christmas itself was strictly the Lord's Day. The Dutch Reformed Church they then attended was on Cuyler Street, where the bowling alley now is.

When the new church on Canandaigua Street was built, Mrs. Breen's father helped build it. It also had a basement where Sunday School meetings and suppers were held. To quote Thomas L. Cook's *Palmyra and Vicinity*

*"In the rear they have a large hitch barn, 50 x 100 feet that will accommodate fifty horses. This is all enclosed so that all horses and carriages are sheltered from the storm. To do all this work, everyone lent a helping hand, young as well as old, being Willing to do their share in building both church and parsonage. This church, as well as the parsonage, is both an ornament to the street as well as a credit to society."*

The first minister was Garrett Flickkema who served until 1918

After Christmas Day services at church, the family exchanged gifts at home and had a special dinner of roast chicken, homemade rolls, vegetables and always berry pies that had been baked the night before. Mrs. Breen remembers one time her mother warmed the pie up in the oven on Christmas Day, but when she opened the oven door to take the pie out, it fell on the floor and smashed - so no pie that Christmas.

The family later moved onto Stafford Road, almost opposite the turning for Fox Road. A little oddity of the house was something I remember reading in a book about Vermont. There was a wide staircase, with a low attic to the right. It had a little window that looked out on the roof of the lower part of the house, but there wasn't room enough for the window to stand upright, so it was installed on the diagonal, something you rarely see. From here Mrs. Breen didn't have too far to go to School No. 11, a cobblestone building on the property of what now belongs to Mr. and Mrs. Lupold. At that spot the winter snow sweeps across and makes great drifts. The children brought their sleds with them to slide during their noon hour. And they played "fox and geese tracks." Does anyone remember doing that?

Just before Christmas, the children begged their teacher to let them have a program, and stayed after school to practice. They planned ahead to hang lanterns in the windows to light the way for parents to attend. There were about 20 children. Every child was supposed to do something. The small children were especially cute. They had a stage on which some gave recitations, others had dialogues, and they all sang. They had a big Christmas tree with candles on it. Unfortunately, but not tragically, the tree caught on fire, but no one got hurt. Two big boys had the presence of mind to jump up and clap their hands on the newly started flames and put them out, and the program proceeded. After the speaking and singing was over, Santa came in Ho, Ho, Ho. Every child received a gift brought by a parent. The teacher gave each child a popcorn ball put in a red mesh bag, tied at the top. No modern kids with their Star Trek toys were happier.

When Mrs. Breen was about 18, her family lived in a house on the south side of the Erie Canal; right where the modern Breen's Bells store stands. She remembers that her father had big beautiful white sweet cherries there and he knew how to spray them to produce such good fruit.

From this house, she walked up the Erie towpath to go to work at Garlock's factory. She often saw the canal boats stop to change mules. She noticed there were cleats on the boards leading down from the towpath to the boat, to give the mules their traction. And the men from the boat went behind the mules, holding onto their tails so they would not go too fast and fall in the water. She said the mules "brayed and brayed" whether from having their tails pulled or their anxiety to get fed, she didn't know.

Mrs. Breen worked in the same department at Garlock's as Ed Tappenden who was the foreman or supervisor. She said he was a wonderful kind man to work for. She recalled that, in later years, her father hurt his foot. He had it all bandaged and propped up on a chair on the front porch when Mr. Tappenden came along and asked what the matter was. Her father said he had hurt his foot. Tap asked "Which one?" Of course it was obvious which one, but Ed had to have his little joke.

Mrs. Breen remembers other prominent Palmyrans too - Mr. James Gallagher, who was president of the Wayne County Trust Company when the State Bank of Palmyra and the First National Bank of Palmyra merged in December of 1929. And there was Charles Congdon, who made out their wills. And she remembers William Rushore, who owned the drug store on Main Street before his son-in-law, David W. Briggs bought the business. It was well known that Pliny T. Sexton had a standing order with Lucius H. Foster, owner of a shoe store on Main Street that when any child going to school needed shoes, he would pay for them. He also gave Mt. Holmes, now known as Prospect Hill to the village. These were only some of the good deeds he was known for. Then when Lou Breen received a draft notice during World War I, when his daughter Bernice was 1 month old, he went to W. Ray Converse, the lawyer, who went to the draft board and got him excused. Lou was needed at home by his family.

And she recalls that where the Henry Griffith house and Charles Congdon's, James Gallagher's and Robert Waples' houses, and all the other houses on the west side of Canandaigua Street, north to the Farnham house on the corner of Jackson Street; where St. Anne's Christian Formation Center now is; was the site of the Hathaway Circus Grounds where a carnival was held yearly and lasted a week. One day during the carnival Lou Breen got an order at his store for meat to be delivered to the carnival grounds at lunch time. He hitched up his usually reliable horse to his delivery wagon and took it up as requested. Lou had the horse hitched when suddenly it went berserk. It ran up Canandaigua Street, down East Foster, past the Breen house where it was usually stabled, and on up to Johnson Street where it tried to turn into the cemetery. Some men nearby caught the horse and calmed it down. It was thought that the scent of the wild animals at the carnival had set it off. That was quite enough excitement for Lou that day.

When the fair moved up to its present location on Jackson Street, Saturday was the big day. The family hitched their horses and went, taking their lunch with them. Mrs. Breen especially loved the merry-go-round. Times were hard, so she felt if she were allowed to ride on that twice, she was lucky. And she loved the hot dogs. They were a treat. At the end of the fairhouse, you could buy a glass of lemonade for 5 cents. There were wonderful contests for handmade quilts, home canned goods and baked goods. There were beautiful peaches, tomatoes and prunes. There were good horse races then. And she remembered that one year a big orange balloon was sent up from the center of the raceway, not manned as today.

September was a good time to have the Fair as the farmers could bring their produce. They all of course thought they were going to get first prize. Some were disappointed, but the winners rejoiced.

When the trolley came through, people from all over, especially former Palmyrans came to the Fair, and to see each other. The trolley company had to put on extra cars coming from both Rochester and Syracuse. But the fair had to close at 5:30 p.m. before electricity was installed.

Later each church took turns serving dinners; so Mrs. Breen helped when St. Anne's had their turn. It was usually a chicken dinner, and was a good money maker. And they served cake, coffee and tea in the afternoon. She sometimes contributed as many as four or five pies.

To go back to when Mrs. Breen was still called Carrie Mickielson, she was helping out in the Albert Powers house when Mrs. Powers had a baby. Their well water was not too good, so just before noon each day, she was sent to a neighbor's to get a pitcher full of cold fresh water for dinner. One day she met a young red-headed man driving his horse and delivery wagon up Fayette Street going home on East Foster Street to his dinner. After a few days of these chance meetings, he said "Hello," and she said "Hello." Before too long he worked up courage enough to ask her to go to the movies with him. She later heard he told a friend right from the beginning "That's the girl for me." From October to Christmas, Lou rented a horse to come get her to take her to the movies. Shortly after Christmas, they became engaged, but they did not get married until three years later, during which time they had a house built on East Foster Street, where Mrs. Breen still lives. The carpenters got \$1.75 a day, but it was a well built house with a lovely bay window in the dining room. This has been a comfortable home for Carrie and Lou and their children.

There was the question of a difference in the religions they had both been brought up in, but love won. They knew they could work it out. Lou never asked her to become a Catholic, but she admired the kind of man he was, and how devoted to his church he was, and gradually she became curious about his religion. She went to see Father Edward Dwyer, who was a wonderfully understanding man to talk to. She soon decided she wanted to be a Catholic, too. She has found over the years it was a very happy decision.

They had seven children: Bernice, who married Raymond Wood and lives in Rochester, Madelene, who married Raymond Sauer and lives in Palm Springs, California; Geraldine, who married Raymond Havert and also lives in California; Betty who married Tom Benzel and lives in Florida; David who married Mary Phipps and lives in Palmyra; Richard, who married Dorothy Levis (Dick died in 1977); and James, who married Kathleen Smith and lives on the Armington Road.

1985 is the 75th anniversary of when Lou started what was called a "frost market." Farmers of the time didn't have refrigeration, so they butchered only in the winter. They skinned the meat

and brought it into the village to sell. Lou had a cooler and handled just meat at first and then added groceries. The store was first on Market St., with Doc Hornsby as partner with whom Lou bought the business from James Lytle. But the ladies of the village did not like to trade on Market Street because there were so many saloons there. (Whiskey could be bought for 25 cents a gallon). They moved onto Main Street where the vacant lot, next to Wooden's Custom Upholstery Service now is. Lou's next partner was Abe Vanderwege, who was very well liked. Bill O'Brien joined them for a while. Later Ave sold out to Lou, who moved to West Main Street where the Cypress Roland Garage was. There was not enough parking space there for customers as business increased, so Karl Ziegler built them a new much larger store at the west end outskirts of the village. This was a big decision for the family to make, as by this time the children were grown and took part in the business, but they made the Big Move. All but Gerry worked in the store, a real family affair. Gerry stayed home and helped her mother make meat loaves, macaroni salad, ham loaves and baked beans - the beginning of their Deli department. Business grew by leaps and bounds, and they outgrew that building too; and decided to build an even bigger one of their own at the other end of town. As it happened, the new, and present, store is located on the same property where Mrs. Breen's parents once lived, on the south side of the canal, from where Carrie walked up the towpath to work at Garlock. Son David now runs this store, now called Breen's Bells, ably assisted by some of his sons and capable staff. Son Jim runs a big Breen's Bells in Macedon, and his son Mike no runs a new Breen's Bells in Williamson. They have become a dynasty.

After Lou retired, he helped the boys and kept flowers blooming around the store wherever possible. Lou was almost 85 years old when he died of a stroke 15 years ago. Mrs. Breen and the children were devastated, but have carried on. He loved his children and grandchildren and just had their 40th great grandchild. Mrs. Breen had her 92nd birthday last October and is now a bright, alert, fun-loving women who has been delighted in telling this story of her family and her memories of Palmyra, in which she and her family have played a big part.

---

At the time of her death on June 30, 1985, Mrs. Breen had 42 great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild, a family of which she was justly proud.