

**VOICES OF LANSING: AN ORAL HISTORY**

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**Lansing, Michigan**

**PHYLLIS FITZPATRICK**

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview**

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**Phyllis Fitzpatrick**

## PREFACE

This transcript is the product of an interview conducted August 24, 1990, for the Lansing Public Library Oral History Project, by Geneva Kebler Wiskemann.

Signed, dated agreements of release and biographical information accompany the original cassette.

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers  
Lansing, Michigan

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VOICES OF LANSING

Oral History Project

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8 Phyllis Fitzpatrick

10 PF: I really don't know what I can tell you that would be  
interesting.

12 GW: Well, I think that you have a special story. We've  
been talking here this morning. I'm sorry I didn't  
14 know you better, all those years you were in Lansing.

PF: Well, I know. When Doyle was working on his book, I  
16 think that's how he got to know you. He'd come over  
during working hours, and I just saw you like in  
18 historical meetings once in a while or something like  
that.

20 GW: That's true. That's how I met Doyle Fitzpatrick, was  
because he was working on the book. THE Book; Strang  
22 Story.

PF: I know that he mentioned so many times how much help  
24 you were to him.

GW: Oh, really? I didn't know that I did so much.

26 PF: Oh, yes; and how much you cooperated, and all the  
things he needed, how you were helpful and always  
28 helped him and got it for him. He very much  
appreciated it, I remember.

30 GW: His material was -- his book was well received, by  
scholars and amateurs alike.

32 I, for purposes of the tape, should say that:

It's August 24, 1990. This is Geneva  
34 Kebler Wiskemann, and I'm sitting here with  
Phyllis Fitzpatrick (Mrs. Doyle Fitzpatrick).  
36 We're at Paradise Bay on Beaver Island -- and  
what a beautiful spot, Phyllis, to look out and  
38 see the lighthouse right out here.

GW: Now, you've been on the Island fourteen years?

40 PF: Fourteen years this August, actually.

GW: You and Doyle both were long-term employees of  
42 General Motors' Oldsmobile.

PF: Right. He was thirty-two years, and I was twenty-  
44 eight, actually; although I had some interrupted  
service. You know I left at one time and then came  
46 back, but it dated back to twenty-eight years. It  
would have been more, but when you break your service  
48 then they start you back. He went there during the  
war. He had run a business on his own; painting, art  
50 work and doing free lance type of artwork, and then  
went to Oldsmobile.

52 GW: And you did stenographic work, Phyllis?

PF: Yes.

54 GW: When you went to work, probably there weren't very  
many opportunities for different kinds of jobs  
56 compared to what we have today.

PF: No, mainly it was typing and filing. I actually went  
58 there during the war too, and worked in Engineering.  
There was three girls that were out there in this  
60 huge area of this huge, big room where all the  
engineers were; the draftsmen at work on their  
62 drafting boards. We were out there in the middle,  
kind of, and were surrounded by files -- huge files  
64 that went from the floor way up, where they filed all  
these blueprints of the parts of the parts of the  
66 canons, and the shells, and all these things that we  
were working with. Then we would also collate them  
68 (put them together), and they were distributed  
different places, and then all these copies that we  
70 had to keep were filed.

It was a very routine and kind of boring job,  
72 but it had to be done. Sometimes we had these little  
milkstools, like that we'd sit way down on the floor  
74 with those things to get to the low drawers, and then  
we had to have a high stool to get up to the top  
76 ones, you know. The only part about it that made it  
all worth while was that we were out there among all  
78 these fellows. They kept it very entertaining. They

80 picked on us a lot, and teased us, and came over and  
talked; and this was allowed. It was all kind of  
like family and we enjoyed that. That kept all the  
82 boredom away.

84 Then I especially enjoyed it because if some of  
the secretaries would go on vacation, why then they  
would have me come over and work for them, because I  
86 could type and I could do dictation. So I got to  
have a little experience that way. I eventually got  
88 a stenographic job because of it. I had worked at  
the Weather Bureau before that, and I was so tickled  
90 to get [into] Oldsmobile. I liked it so much better  
that I was willing to do a very mediocre job, because  
92 I figured that sometime there'd be a better one.

GW: You worked at the Weather Bureau?

94 PF: Yes, in East Lansing.

GW: That must have been an interesting job.

96 PF: It was, kind of, but I had a very difficult boss and  
I was a State employee, actually; I was a secretary.  
98 The other people in the office were federal. He was  
federal government, and there were two -- there was a  
100 fellow and I think two girls: They were all federal,  
and I was state because I was a secretary. That was  
102 a funny setup.



It was kind of interesting with all the  
104 different things, but I didn't have too much to do  
with that. The interesting part was where they got  
106 the information in about the weather and the things  
they typed up and sent out; but the interesting part  
108 was like you'd get a lot of phone calls from people  
asking the weather and asking different questions,  
110 and that was interesting. If I didn't know, I could  
ask one of them, so that part was fine. I didn't  
112 have too much to do with it, but I learned some  
things just by being around the rest of them and the  
114 equipment and all.

GW: Were you a native of Lansing?

116 PF: Yes, I was a native of Lansing and went to school  
there, Eastern High School. Then I went to Michigan  
118 State for about two and a half years.

GW: Then you went to work, and that's where you met  
120 Doyle?

PF: I met Doyle at Oldsmobile, yes. Before the Weather  
122 Bureau, I worked at Auto-Owners Insurance. I had  
been going to business school and just taking special  
124 courses in typing and dictation -- business courses,  
things like that. I was there for maybe three or  
126 four months and finally decided I'd better just get a  
job. Somebody told me that Auto-Owners had certain

128 days of the week that they interviewed girls for  
jobs, so I went down there.

130 There were about twenty-five girls waiting to be  
interviewed, and I was the last one. I sat there all  
132 afternoon. I was very nervous, and the longer you  
sat there, the more nervous you got. Everybody would  
134 go in and come back out, and you wondered if they got  
the job, but they interviewed all of us. They didn't  
136 just make up their minds and say, "Well, she's hired  
and the rest of you don't need to wait." So I was  
138 the last one.

This gentleman was Jim Otto who did the  
140 interviewing, and he said to me, "If you don't hear  
from me within a couple days, you call me." He said,  
142 "You call me." I think it was on a Friday when I was  
there, so then the next morning being Saturday, he  
144 called me and he said, "If you want a job, you will  
have a job." So, "When can you come in?" and "Can  
146 you come in like on Monday?" I said "Good."

That was a very interesting experience. I  
148 started out in Underwriting, where you figure the  
policies, and I went through a whole bit there before  
150 I got a secretarial job there. It was a nice company  
to work for. That's where I really got my first  
152 chance. They were willing to give inexperienced



people training and give them a chance to work. I  
154 found that was very hard even way back years ago,  
that you couldn't necessarily walk out and get a job  
156 -- if you had never worked before. How could you  
have experience if nobody ever gave you a chance?  
158 That's the bad part.

GW: You still hear the same stories: How do you get  
160 experience? Somebody has to be a mentor.

PF: That's right; and they were noted for that. Then  
162 from the figuring (that part of it), then I worked in  
the part where they had the billing -- all the  
164 machines where they typed the policies up. It was a  
special machine that you used, like a typewriter but  
166 how they were threaded on this long kind of roller  
thing, and how they fed on this and then cut off; but  
168 you couldn't make any mistakes, and that was pretty  
tough. They saved all of them that you made a  
170 mistake on and had to destroy, or put to one side.  
You had to put in one place like a wastebasket, and  
172 they checked those all over every night to see how  
many you had. If you had too many they really told  
174 you about it, because that was costly -- paper, and  
all the waste.

176 The woman in charge of it was really tough. She  
really was, and there were a lot of girls in there

178 (this great big area where we worked). She had to be  
that way; because she wouldn't let you talk to  
180 anybody unless you asked her if you could. You know,  
if you wanted to talk to the girl in front of you  
182 about something, you had to ask her if you could  
speak to her. She would usually say yes.

184 GW: Well, if you visited you would make mistakes.

PF: Sure, and if she had all these people and all these  
186 machines running and all the noise, and people  
talking and everything too, why -- she had to be that  
188 way. But they all thought she was really a dragon  
lady. She knew her business, though, and she stuck  
190 to it. She was alright if you played fair with her;  
if you asked permission; if you didn't talk unless it  
192 was important.

I remember this girl that sat back of me, and  
194 she had fingernails that were way out -- I'd swear  
they were an inch long. She would be typing on this  
196 machine and I just couldn't believe it, that she  
could do that and type on those nails; how she could  
198 do it and be accurate and not make mistakes. Just  
typing with those long, long -- claws, actually; but  
200 she did. < Laugh >

That was before Auto-Owners had their building  
202 and were all together, and they had offices in three

or four different places all over Lansing. That made  
204 it quite an operation.

GW: After the war they came together in a building there  
206 on Townsend Street. They bought where the Pattengill  
House was and tore that down.

208 PF: Right, and had a nice office building.

GW: Eventually they outgrew that and moved out to a  
210 suburban area, a familiar pattern of development.

When Doyle retired did you retire together?

212 PF: No, he retired about a year and a half before I did.  
I was able to retire that soon because they had a --  
214 Well, it was actually a similar situation during the  
oil crisis in the seventies. They were then trying  
216 to cut head count back, so they were offering special  
retirements for people who were fifty-five and over.  
218 I was fifty-five so I was able to go on a very  
special deal and I was glad, because he'd been  
220 retired about a year or a little more, so it worked  
out really nicely.

222 GW: I know that after his book was finished, I think some  
of his energies began to be devoted to this house.

224 PF: Yes.

GW: Did he design this house?

226 PF: No, we found it. A friend of ours showed us this --  
it was a house of the week that was in the State

228        Journal. On Sunday they would have a house, house  
plans, and tell about it. We'd already found one  
230        that we liked. It was like a double A-frame, like  
where it was kind of one angle one way, and one  
232        facing another. It was a good plan, but then a  
friend of ours had cut this out because he had known  
234        that we were interested in Beaver Island and in this  
property. He said, "I found this, and I think it  
236        might be something you could use." We liked it  
better because it seemed to fit the lot better. It  
238        had to be one that was narrow on one end and then ran  
the long way of the property, because there was a lot  
240        next door available, but the woman wouldn't sell it.  
We didn't acquire that until after we had built the  
242        house. Otherwise, we could have moved it over more;  
you know, more in the center but she wouldn't sell it  
244        at the time.

          We sent for the plan through the State Journal  
246        and got the blueprints and everything. We had quite  
a time to find anybody that would build it. That was  
248        one thing. We had given the plans to a local  
builder, and there weren't very many on the Island at  
250        the time. This one probably had the bulk of the  
building. He had the plans for almost a year and  
252        never would give us a quote or a price or any

information. I guess he just really was afraid to  
254 tackle it, but he didn't want to say so. Finally,  
one time when we came up here, Doyle just went over  
256 to his house and said "I want the plans back." Then  
we tried to figure out how we could get it built.

258 GW: Many of the things you have in the house came from  
the R. E. Olds residence that went down to make way  
260 for 496; some of the beveled glass doors --

PF: And the windows.

262 GW: The decorative art-glass windows.

PF: The leaded glass windows, yes; and then the bedroom  
264 windows. All three were in the ballroom, < unclear >  
in the ballroom. I'm trying to think if there's  
266 anything else you'd want to see.

GW: This medallion that you have implanted into the stone  
268 fireplace; can you tell us the story about that?

PF: That was from Oldsmobile and up over the company car  
270 garage that was attached to the Administration  
Building. When they razed the building all of those  
272 just came down, and when they were doing this, Doyle  
went out there and talked to the men who were working  
274 on it and said "Would it be possible to get a couple  
of those?" and explained how he wanted to use them.  
276 They said: "Well, we aren't going to go to any big  
effort to save them, but if we just happen to get one

278           that comes out alright and doesn't break, why fine.  
              You absolutely can purchase it, but we're not going  
280           to just sit here and take pains that it doesn't break  
              or break up when it falls." We were able to get two,  
282           so it worked out very well; one outside on the  
              chimney, and one in here.

284   GW: One on the outside that looked like a Phoenix.

          PF: A Phoenix, it is. These were beautiful all along the  
286           edge of the garage.

          GW: Very distinctive decorations.

288   PF: You didn't think too much about it when you went by  
          there every day and looked at them, but then after it  
290           got moved and put in where it stood out -- just one,  
          you think about everybody always notices that. We  
292           thought the bird looked like a robin, and that was  
          the State Bird, so we thought that would be pretty to  
294           have that one. We're glad that was one of them that  
          they saved, and also the Phoenix was very special.

296   GW: Yes, the two birds supporting the flower.

          PF: Doyle always said that was an eagle, but it really  
298           wasn't. Outside, it was the Phoenix. The man who  
          did the stonework was interested in it, and he was  
300           very willing to put it in. Of course, we weren't  
          here when he did most of it; just sketched it out and  
302           how we wanted it to go. First we planned to put both



of them inside. Then we decided no, it wasn't -- you  
304 know, it was too much. We just needed one, so one  
inside and one out worked out very well.

306 GW: This is just the right size, where you have it here  
on the right side as you face the fireplace.

308 PF: The other was a little larger; so the outside  
fireplace or chimney is massive, so it fit in there  
310 very well.

GW: Do you have other things that came from the Olds  
312 residence that I'm not looking at?

PF: I'm trying to think: Of course, those doors were in  
314 the ballroom too; that French door there, and the one  
that's downstairs. I think that's about all.

316 GW: Oh, and the chandelier. That's an outstanding  
feature of this cathedral ceiling.

318 PF: Yes, the chandelier was in the Greek Orthodox Church  
in Lansing, that was very close to Oldsmobile, and  
320 they tore that down to build a new church. The  
chandelier had been given to the church by A\_\_\_\_\_

322 Pregoris, who I think had owned a restaurant at one  
time in Lansing, and had gone over to Greece and had  
324 seen this and decided to give it to the church.

At one time it was not electrified. It was just  
326 candles. Anyway, he shipped it back to Lansing for  
the church, but somehow or other it got lost, and it

328           wound up in some South American country. They  
              finally traced it back and did get it back to  
330           Lansing.

              Father Poulous, who was the pastor at the time,  
332           wanted a really good home for the chandelier. He  
              felt so badly [that] they couldn't use it in the new  
334           church because that was going to be a modern  
              structure, and this just wasn't going to fit in. He  
336           had several offers I guess for it, but when he found  
              out what we were going to do with it; then he was  
338           very, very interested, so he said: "Oh, that's yours.  
              You can just count on that, you can have it; you can  
340           plan on it, because I know that it'll be in a good  
              place and that's where I want it."

342   GW: Well, we're just sitting here at mid-day, and it  
              catches the light even though it's an overcast day  
344           here on Beaver Island. Tonight I'm going to walk  
              down by the shore and look back toward the house.

346   PF: Oh, that's a sight! That's a sight to behold.

              GW: It must be like a lighthouse.

348   PF: It is, and sometimes in the evening we would turn it  
              on just so people coming into harbor on boats or  
350           something could see it. It is a sight to see from  
              the beach when you look back up and see it, because  
352           you don't expect to see that, for one thing. And

354 this structure is only half of it. The full  
chandelier had -- that's nineteen arms, and there are  
356 nineteen more that we didn't put up because it would  
be so massive. Then it was solid with crystal. We  
358 purposely wanted the skeleton to show through so it  
wouldn't look so ornate. When he told me what he  
360 wanted to do and put that in this house, I said  
"That'll look terrible. It's too ornate, and too  
362 big, and it won't fit in there at all." But he was  
right. He said "We won't put it all up," and that's  
half of it.

364 GW: Did you save the other part?

PF: Yes. It didn't have another center part. You know,  
366 there would be enough for another chandelier if you  
could get the center -- the ball and the center glass  
368 and all that part, because there's a lot of crystal  
still that we didn't use. I don't know where you  
370 would ever get the part. I've often thought I should  
contact somebody and see if there would be a need for  
372 it, because somebody might have some other parts that  
would all fit in.

374 GW: It's a gorgeous piece, and it's now just the right  
size for this.

376 PF: Yes. It really is.

GW: You have no idea how old the piece really is, do you?

378 PF: I'm not really sure: I don't know if he has that  
written down. I don't recall coming across that  
380 anywhere, but he might have written down about it,  
because he did document some of those things.

382 We had quite a job getting it down. At that  
time they were just doing Oldsmobile's new office  
384 building, and the man who was in charge of a lot of  
the interior work was from Detroit. He told Doyle,  
386 he said: "That chandelier is a real bargain. You  
should be sure that you do get it." And he said,  
388 "I'll help you so you can get it down."

It was up real high in the church, just about as  
390 high as it's hanging there; so he built a  
scaffolding, we went down on a Saturday, and Doyle  
392 got up there and took it down. Then there was a man  
who worked around the church and did odd jobs for  
394 them, who took the whole center part down (the chain  
and all the main part of it). We took all the  
396 crystal off and put it in boxes, labeled it, and on  
the outside he drew a picture of each piece that was  
398 in the box, so we knew where they were. We had I  
think, seven boxes altogether when it was all apart.

400 GW: It's an outstanding piece. Now, I know from being in  
Dr. Joyce Thomas' office a few weeks ago, Phyllis,  
402 that you donated some materials there to the Lansing

Room of the Public Library. Can you tell us for the  
404 record how that happened?

PF: It happened because I was disposing of some of his  
406 books. Through a mutual friend, I was in contact  
with Shirley Sliker of Lansing (who is a book  
408 dealer), and she came up here to visit her friend who  
is on Beaver Island also, and looked at the books.  
410 Then we talked about some of the things that were  
historical about Lansing, about the Olds Family,  
412 about Oldsmobile, and she mentioned that the Lansing  
Library would be very happy to have things like that:  
414 That there were many places, that they also worked  
with the Olds Museum, that they kind of interchanged  
416 materials, and if they couldn't use some things they  
would probably contact them to see if they could be  
418 used elsewhere. So that's how it came about, and we  
found quite a few things that did pertain to  
420 Oldsmobile, and pictures -- a lot of pictures that  
were taken during the war of the assembly line; and  
422 the workers; and different parts that they were  
featuring (different new parts that Olds had gone  
424 to); hydromatic drive, and many different things that  
they were advertising. Then there were some  
426 executive pictures also. Just general information,  
some pictures of Lansing that were Old Lansing that

428           were from Ford Ceasar's collection actually, that  
              Doyle had duplicated so they had quite a variety.

430   GW: Ford had accumulated things that you find in the  
          Library and in the State Archives that were from the  
432           old Edmonds-Bovee collections. Ford took a lot of  
          photographs through the years, with his own camera.

434   PF: I'm not sure which they were. I think most of these  
          might have been duplicates.

436   GW: From the old era?

          PF: Right. They were very interesting pictures, but I  
438           thought that that would be a better place for them  
          than for me just to have them here to look at once in  
440           a while. There was one time at the Press Club, that  
          Ford and Doyle and Rajee Tobia put on an evening's  
442           program of Old Lansing, and they had these pictures.

          GW: Oh, yes. Rajee was a good friend of Doyle's. He  
444           loved Doyle.

          PF: Yes, he did.

446   GW: And Rajee was such an interesting man. I knew him  
          too. I still miss him.

448   PF: Yes. I always miss him. He used to come over and  
          spend an evening, and they'd get to talking about  
450           history and different things. He was very  
          knowledgeable, too, because of his work at Michigan  
452           State Library. It was always interesting to hear



454           them. He used to come over a lot, and [sometimes]  
          call up and they'd talk on the phone. Every  
          Christmas he'd come over and bring some of their  
456           goodies.

          GW: Lebanese goodies. Rajee had gone to the American  
458           School because his father worked for Oldsmobile. He  
          was part of that community of Lebanese people that  
460           were brought over by R. E. Olds to work in the  
          factory.

462   PF: That's interesting. I had forgotten about that, but  
          I do remember him mentioning that too.

464   GW: And he, of course, was not really trained for the  
          world that he found. He had to work in. I believe  
466           he ran a newspaper in Detroit in a Lebanese community  
          for awhile.

468   PF: I believe that's right.

          GW: He came to Lansing and had a restaurant on Verlinden  
470           there, opposite the factory.

          PF: That's right, he did. He told us about that, and the  
472           problems that he had. < unclear > A very nice man.

          GW: When you say Doyle's books, did you have a remainder  
474           stock on this book on King Strang?

          PF: Yes, I still have about three boxes left and about  
476           twenty-four in a box. I get orders every now and  
          then for -- like Ferris State University, and

478 different book stores; not a lot, but occasionally.  
They sell some on the Island yet there at the museum.  
480 One store had a whole box this year and sold them  
all. There's still orders come in for them, but the  
482 supply is dwindling down. He had 5,000 printed,  
which was a lot for that type of a book.

484 GW: I believe he told me at the time [that] it was  
computer-generated text, and it was very innovative  
486 at the time.

PF: Absolutely.

488 GW: I don't know long he worked on that.

PF: On the book? About seven years before it was final.

490 GW: How did he become interested in Beaver Island?

PF: Well, actually, just mostly through George Egbert,  
492 who had had a place here for a long time and worked  
at Oldsmobile with him. He talked to Doyle about the  
494 history of the Island being very unique.

496 < Tape 1, Side 2 >

GW: He had a cottage up here?

498 PF: He already had a cottage here and had come here for  
quite a few years, and he talked about there were  
500 many Mormon buildings on the Island, and Doyle got  
very interested in that. Of course, he found out  
502 that wasn't true. They really weren't. There may

have been some lumber that they had used from some  
504 Mormon buildings, but there weren't any Mormon  
buildings actually, except the print shop; which is  
506 the museum. But he got very interested in the  
history because it was very unique about a Mormon era  
508 on Beaver Island, and then them being driven off the  
way they were, and then the Irish taking over.

510 He got quite absorbed in it and sort of wrote  
things down, and always said he didn't realize he was  
512 writing a book; just was kind of writing things down  
just to have a record of them. First thing he knew,  
514 he decided King Strang wasn't really as bad as he was  
painted, and he wanted to prove it. This was a big  
516 thing, but people up here would never agree with  
that. A lot of that has been dispelled. I think the  
518 book did a lot to correct that, but they still have  
their feelings about it -- that he was pretty bad.  
520 People who come over here and visit and come to the  
museum -- that is the main thing they want to know  
522 about, is this King Strang and that Mormon era on  
Beaver Island.

524 GW: Which is very unusual.

PF: We've met many descendants from all the different  
526 wives; and very, very interesting people who've come,  
who've looked, have stopped, and have wanted to know

528           how they fit into the whole picture. Usually, I was  
able to help them and to find this and trace it back.  
530           I have a lot of knowledge because of having typed the  
book so many times, but I don't have the ability to  
532           check this out and help them like he did. Then to  
trace it back, and if they could tell him who their  
534           grandfather was or give him some names, he could find  
it -- usually always find it for them.

536   GW: He used primary resources and used good research  
techniques.

538   PF: Yes. It's been a very, very interesting experience.  
This one fellow who came last summer, Jim Strang, who  
540           was a great, great grandson of the king, lives in  
Mexico. He has traced the family from -- He was  
542           from Sarah, the fourth polygamous wife. He has  
really researched that and knows the history very  
544           thoroughly and is fascinated by it, and follows it  
up. His two sons also do it, but he's not interested  
546           in the other branches of the family from the other  
wives, or in following that or piecing it all  
548           together or getting all of it fit into the whole --  
just of the one particular one.

550           Most all of them are like that. They want to  
know about the one particular line, and they're all  
552           very interesting; so when you sit back and see them

all, together, and all the different ones, and meet  
554 them it's really wonderful. I have that advantage  
that they don't have, really, because you get to see  
556 the whole picture.

GW: They have a common gene background and common  
558 ancestry to a degree, and yet they isolate themselves  
from part of it.

560 PF: Yes, that's true. They don't seem that interested in  
the other, and all of them have been remarkable. It  
562 seems like they're very talented. The genes seem to  
carry through. This one who visited us is a very  
564 talented person. He was a flyer and flew for Great  
Lakes Steel and several companies, and he had his own  
566 air transport service and charter service: Does now  
repair work on instruments (aviation instruments) and  
568 still flies, a still very good pilot. [He] is a very  
fascinating person. All of them seem to have a lot  
570 of charisma.

GW: Is this man you've been describing Jim, that you  
572 mentioned?

PF: Yes. He was here last summer. He visited us in  
574 Lansing nineteen years ago and came to the house and  
spent an evening with us, and at that time wasn't  
576 that interested in the family. [He] got interested  
over a period of time and later on just studied it a

578 lot more, but the connection was that Hazel Strang  
McCardel was his great, great aunt; and she was the  
580 lady that helped Doyle so much with the book and told  
him a lot of things (a lot of history) and gave him  
582 different things to use in his book.

She was one of the few that was not ashamed of  
584 the fact that she was a Strang. Most of the  
families, at one time or another were; and kind of  
586 hid with it from the rest of their children and other  
generations who they really were. But she had always  
588 been very open about it and was very proud of the  
fact of who she was, and she helped Doyle a lot with  
590 the book. That was why we had a close tie-in with  
her and a lot of correspondence that they did.

592 I gave all the correspondence to him to sort  
over and to keep what he wanted, and what he didn't  
594 want, to destroy. It told she had a journal of when  
she was a child and how they journeyed from Oklahoma  
596 way up into Canada, where they had this farm. They  
still have this farm today. It's in his family, and  
598 all the children own a portion of it. They kept this  
intact over all the years.

600 GW: That's interesting. In this area, do you know how  
Doyle got in touch with her?



602 PF: I don't know how he heard about her. Somehow or  
other he started writing to her, and they had (over a  
604 long period of years) a very lucrative correspondence  
of all these letters -- several file folders. [They]  
606 told a lot about the family and about things she  
remembered. It helped him a lot in getting the book  
608 organized and different things that she knew -- that  
she remembered, and that she was proud of knowing and  
610 didn't try to keep it hidden, which was the case in  
many families. They just didn't want to admit who  
612 they were; changed their name and just never said  
they were -- but the book did a lot to do away with  
614 that kind of thing. Then they came forward and we  
heard from many of them all over the country, even  
616 those that are not directly related but go back to a  
common grandfather or someone way back.

618 GW: If Jim has that correspondence, it might be available  
for microfilming and adding to the material that you  
620 gave to the Lansing Public Library. It would be a  
co-lateral collection to support the book publication  
622 and continue to be used.

PF: Yes, it could be. Then, of course, Doyle has  
624 microfilm that he used from Young University that he  
used to put into the book. He didn't use everything,

626 but I still have that, so that's available if anybody  
ever wanted to research that more thoroughly.

628 Then there was the young man here last summer  
also, from the Grand Rapids area, who was < unclear >  
630 Strang and wanted to know how he fit into the family  
background and picture, and thought he was related to  
632 the king. When Doyle checked it out, he was not,  
except way back through a common relative. But we  
634 did find out that he was related to one of them who  
was a murderer, way back in the East, and had been  
636 hanged for murder. He thought that was about as  
notorious as though he had been related to the king.  
638 He came back up this summer. I saw him in the  
library, and he was mentioning it again that how he  
640 was able to find this out and hadn't known how he fit  
in before.

642 GW: Was this a Michigan-oriented story? Was this a  
murder in Michigan?

644 PF: No, it was back in the East. He didn't really know,  
and all of a sudden then he mentioned some names that  
646 he was familiar with; so Doyle was able to through  
this one work that Charles Strange did (who was  
648 related also, but back through a common ancestor who  
did a lot of genealogy on the family). They had put  
650 out this publication, Strength of Westchester, and

Doyle had this together in a book (a real thick book)  
652 so he was able to trace that back. That's how he  
found how the young man tied in. This person was an  
654 actual convicted murderer.

GW: How did the young man react to that?

656 PF: He thought it was very interesting. His wife thought  
it was pretty terrible, but he thought it was pretty  
658 neat, really. < Laughter > Almost as good as being  
related to the king.

660 GW: Are there any descendants living on the Island today?

PF: No; no Mormons. There are a few Strangites still in  
662 existence who practice the religion, and a lot of  
them are in the New Mexico area; some up in  
664 Burlington, Wisconsin; some out west a little further  
-- California, Colorado; not very many that practice  
666 it, but there are still a few. There was one in  
Lansing, Stanley Johnson. I don't know if you  
668 remember him, but he was a very devout follower. He  
had a lot of material on Strang. I think that his  
670 material went to the Clarke Library in Mt. Pleasant.  
I think that's what his wife said, that she had  
672 disposed of it.

GW: Is he still alive?

674 PF: No. Stanley died two years ago.

676 GW: I remember seeing him one time at the archives when  
Dr. Mason was there.

678 PF: He had a lot of information; quite a collection, too,  
of different pamphlets and things, and was quite  
helpful about sharing information.

680 GW: I know it's not easy to decide what to send where,  
and Doyle was a real saver of materials.

682 PF: Yes, definitely. One thing I'm puzzled about what I  
684 should do with is this diary. Edward Chidester, who  
was the postmaster and a very loyal follower of  
Strang, wrote this little diary that Doyle acquired a  
686 few years ago. It tells of an actual shooting, and  
of taking Strang from the Island back to Burlington,  
688 and of his actual death. All of that is very, very  
valuable information.

690 GW: Do you have that now?

PF: Yes, I do.

692 GW: And you're trying to determine the best place for it  
to be. Is this something you want to sell on the  
694 market, Phyllis, or are you able financially to  
donate it?

696 PF: I hate to think of anything as important in history  
as that being sold for a price, but I don't know  
698 either, the best place to donate it where it would be  
the most valuable. It's very delicate; couldn't be

700 handled or actually looked at by people because of  
the delicacy of it and the fragile nature of it. It  
702 couldn't be reproduced, because that would be too  
difficult.

704 GW: It would have to be transcribed very carefully. Do  
you remember what the dates are, approximately?

706 PF: I think it starts like in January and mentions a  
meeting that was being held, and then goes on up to  
708 the time when he was actually assassinated. That was  
1856, wasn't it? and goes on through. Then there are  
710 several other diaries, but they're just general and  
tell about life in general after that -- maybe not  
712 really interesting. This one tells the whole actual  
shooting. It's just unbelievable. It would tell  
714 this in maybe one sentence or one line, and this says  
so much in a few words.

716 GW: This diarist was the postmaster here on the Island?

PF: Yes, and the printer; also the printing office. He  
718 worked in the printing office too, where they had the  
newspaper. [He] printed what was actually the only  
720 newspaper north of Grand Rapids for a long time.

A lady had this diary and two or three others  
722 that were together in an old shoe box. She lived in  
East Tawas, and she had seen an article in the Free  
724 Press that had been written up about Doyle. There

were quite a few pieces done by reporters who came  
726 here and interviewed him and who did stories on the  
Island. There had been this one particular time in  
728 the Free Press; and it had quite an article about  
him, and pictures, and mentioned the book.

730 This lady had found in this shoe box out in her  
garage (an old, old garage that they were going to  
732 tear down because of wanting to sell the property and  
not wanting the building on it). Somehow she saw  
734 this old box in there, and she looked in it to see  
what was in the box, and she found these diaries.  
736 She wouldn't have thought much about it except she  
had seen the article in the paper. So after she put  
738 two and two together, she realized that she had  
something important.

740 She called him on the phone and asked Doyle if  
he would be interested in buying it. He said Yes, he  
742 would; so then they tried to figure out a price of  
what it would be worth. She said "Well, I don't  
744 know." He said, "Would \$50 be O.K.?" and she said,  
"Oh, yes, that would be fine." He said, "Well, I  
746 don't really know unless I look at it," but he said  
to her to mail it registered mail, or certified mail.  
748 She said: "No, I'm going to bring it up there in  
person. I'll bring it right up to you." She said:



750 "I've wanted to see Beaver Island, and now I really  
am interested. I'm going to bring it." So she did.

752 When he looked at it, he knew it was very  
important; but she does not know how it came to be in  
754 this building, how it got there -- anything about  
getting it or how she happened to have it. It seems  
756 that some of the family of this man must have been  
around in that area somehow, but how it got in that  
758 old garage nobody seems to know.

GW: The provenance up to that point is very obscure.  
760 Fascinating story.

PF: I think after she had disposed of it, she sort of  
762 wished she hadn't, in a way. I mean after she sold  
it to him, because she wanted -- just wanted parts of  
764 it, so we did photostat very carefully little main  
pages and sent them to her. She didn't know what to  
766 do with it either, but she got [it] in a good place.  
Now I have the same problem with wondering what to do  
768 with it, because it is a very important document.

GW: Let me think about that a while. Maybe I can make  
770 some suggestions.

PF: Right. I'm sure it would be valuable monetarily, but  
772 I hate to have a price put on something like that.

GW: It's difficult to put a price on a one-of-a-kind item  
774 of that nature.

PF: That's right. It could be worth a lot, but it's just  
776 the idea that it should be somewhere where it would  
be taken care of. It really should be up here I  
778 think, but the museum here does not have anything to  
preserve it, and it's already very delicate. It's  
780 definitely a Michigan item. It really is Beaver  
Island, but it would be very foolish to put it here  
782 under the conditions, because it's damp. They have  
no way to keep the moisture out or anyway to protect  
784 it.

GW: It's never been exploited in any way?

786 PF: No. A strange thing happened though. We received a  
letter from a gentleman in Independence, Missouri,  
788 who says he has the largest Strangite collection of  
material of any place and mentions 3500 items or  
790 something like that, that has to do with Strang  
material. Somehow or other -- I don't know how, but  
792 he found out about it.

He wrote us a letter; and it was after Doyle had  
794 become ill from one of the mini-strokes he had, and  
he couldn't answer him, but I did write to him and  
796 told him. He wanted to know if we had considered or  
would consider releasing this to him so he could  
798 reprint it, and then publish it -- you know, probably  
sell it.

800 I just wrote and told him that that was  
impossible to do because it was so delicate it  
802 couldn't be handled, and it would just fall apart if  
anybody tried to duplicate it in any way. [I] told  
804 him that he was ill and that he couldn't answer, but  
that I was answering for him. So then I did hear  
806 from him. He wrote me a letter after Doyle died, and  
said he was sorry to hear about it, and wanted to  
808 know what I planned to do with any of his material.

He came to the Island this summer, and did come  
810 to see me. He asked if he could see the diary, and I  
showed it to him. He said, "I would give you a  
812 couple hundred dollars for it." I said, "No way."  
How he ever knew about it, I do not know. I should  
814 have asked him, but I didn't. He was a young man,  
too; very surprisingly so, about late twenties, but  
816 very interested in Strang -- and a Strangite,  
apparently.

818 GW: You have his address and know how to contact him?

PF: Yes, I do. And he told me an interesting tale: That  
820 Independence, where they do apparently have Latter  
Day Saints' big headquarters; that they have Strang's  
822 scepter. I always felt that the crown and the  
scepter and robe were theatrical sort of stage props,  
824 and that this was just a useless ceremony here, and

it was just a symbolic thing -- the coronation which  
826 they call it. But he told me that they have the  
scepter, and it was made out of wood, and described  
828 it. It was a brilled type of wood, and some real old  
lady had had this in her possession for many years,  
830 and that they were able to acquire it. I just  
couldn't help but think it just couldn't be true.

832 GW: You questioned the authority of that.

PF: I did, yes, but he said he'd seen it. When he told  
834 me they had the scepter, then I think I said to him,  
"Do you have the crown and the robe also?" To me it  
836 was just a kind of a prop, really, but whether this  
is true or not, I don't know. I don't recall ever  
838 seeing anywhere where it mentioned about what the  
scepter was made of or anything.

840 GW: But he didn't have any of the other things that you  
mentioned?

842 PF: No, he didn't know about that, so I don't understand  
that. I really can't quite believe it, but he did.  
844 He definitely did.

GW: And this is in a church-sponsored collection?

846 PF: No, it's his own private collection. He told me that  
he has this (in his own home) kind of a library-type  
848 thing; and he has all these cases and places that he  
stores all this material, but this scepter was in the

850 church collection at the Latter Day Saints  
apparently.

852 GW: That's what I thought I heard.

PF: He said he'd send me a catalog of all these items he  
854 has, but so far I don't have it. I would be  
interested in seeing what < unclear >. He knew of a  
856 lot of different things that Doyle had had. A few  
years back, he [Doyle] sold a lot of Mormon things to  
858 a podiatrist out in California whom we had met, who  
was interested in Strang being a true Mormon. This  
860 was a very unusual thing, because most of them did  
not really acknowledge him as being -- really even  
862 existing; but he was very interested in him, and so  
Doyle sold him some books and things that were mostly  
864 Mormon, but there were a few other things too. This  
gentleman who came this summer, knew that. How he  
866 knew that, I don't know. He knew that Doyle had sold  
them to him; so it's strange.

868 GW: There probably was a network of the faithful, and of  
the scholars, where they shared information.

870 PF: Right, that's true. Then he did mention that Brigham  
Young University had quite a collection, so through  
872 all these different sources, they probably find this  
out somehow.

874 GW: Then he came here and you verified it. That's  
fascinating.

876 PF: Yes, right. He was a very pleasant young man. He  
and his wife came and they were a very nice young  
878 couple. I really didn't get into it with them about  
why he were so interested, but I said: "Are you  
880 really a Strangite? Do you follow his teachings?"  
He said, "Yes, I do, except of course, the polygamy."  
882 The Strangites in Wisconsin follow his teachings, but  
they aren't that interested in him as a person; but  
884 they follow the religious part of it. It's strange.  
To me, you couldn't really be interested in one  
886 without the other.

This goes on and on and on, all the connections  
888 and all the people, and all the interesting things  
that have come up because of that book; all the  
890 people we've met, that come here, that we wrote to.  
It seems like every little while, even today, there's  
892 somebody writing asking how they fit in, or wanting  
to buy the book to see if they tie in. If it's not  
894 Strang directly, some of their family were families  
here on the Island; you know, that were followers of  
896 his. So it just goes on.

GW: That's the importance of keeping that correspondence  
898 file: Tangible evidence.



PF: Yes, it's very interesting. I've got several real  
900 thick files on < unclear > in general and quite a few  
specific ones.

902 GW: It's wonderful that you were involved with the book  
publication and Doyle's long interest, so that you  
904 may follow up on that, Phyllis.

PF: The whole story itself of publishing it; founding his  
906 own publishing company, and picking out the paper,  
and picking out the bookbinder, and establishing the  
908 company itself under the name and all -- because he  
couldn't get anybody to publish it and do it the way  
910 he wanted. That quality paper and quality binding  
and everything, are special, and founding the company  
912 to do it purposely was fascinating to me.

GW: He just went ahead and did it, to get the quality  
914 production he did.

PF: Right, and set up this name. It came up for renewal  
916 again this last year, which I renewed it again for a  
five year term. Probably when the books are sold,  
918 then it won't be necessary to keep it, but it still  
sells some. It was a very interesting experience  
920 (the whole thing), and not easy either, because at  
that time we risked quite a bit of money doing it all  
922 on our own. He always said he never wanted to make  
money on it, just get the money back -- which he did.

924           It still sells for the same price it started out for.  
              Books are very expensive today, but it still sells  
926           for the same price; \$7.95, plus shipping. Paperbacks  
              are more than that.

928   GW:   Oh, yes, much more.

          PF:   It's very unusual.

930   GW:   You not only told the Strang story and about primary  
              resources, but you've told the story of a Michigan  
932           author who published his own -- and that's the only  
              book he ever published, isn't it?

934   PF:   Yes; never had any interest --   Everybody would  
              say: "When are you going to do another volume? When  
936           are you going to go on with it? When are you going  
              to do this?" [He'd say] "I'm not interested; I just  
938           don't want to do anything. I just accomplished what  
              I set out to do, and that's it."

940           He did have a collection from a man who was here  
              on the Island who was a very interesting person in  
942           Island history also, named Protar. He < unclear >  
              Protar, and he did write down a lot of things about  
944           him and originally was going to publish a book about  
              both of them: One part about Protar and one part  
946           about Strang, and then decided that that wasn't too  
              good an idea; that each one deserved a special book.  
948           If he had to choose, he decided Strang was the more

interesting one. There is a lady who comes to the  
950 Island every year, who's done much research on Protar  
and has researched him down, traced his family, found  
952 out a great deal about him. She has enough to  
publish a book, but she has never actually done it  
954 yet. I wish she would.

GW: That's a fascinating story.

956 PF: Yes. Wonderful story.

GW: Newspaper publisher and a highly educated man --

958 PF: Who escaped from Russia at the time when the people  
were -- The Tzar was in danger and the revolution  
960 was going on and everything. He came over here, and  
how he found this particular spot in all the United  
962 States to come and settle.

GW: And started an entirely different reclusiveness.

964 PF: Right. A reclusive life; and actually administered  
to the people as a doctor, and they called him  
966 Doctor, although he was not. He was really a  
pharmacist and just a very good first-aid person, and  
968 that's what we're back to again now < Laughter > on  
the Island -- no doctors.

970 GW: You have no doctors if you're ill?

PF: No. If you're ill, you'd better pick it to be on the  
972 day the doctor's coming over from Charlevoix.  
Otherwise you'll be flown off.

974 GW: A medical doctor comes over from Charlevoix on a  
[basis] of once a week?

976 PF: Once a week, but in the winter that may not be true,  
because he may not be able to get here.

978

< Tape 2, Side 1 >

980 GW: We were talking about the doctor being on the Island,  
and the fact that a baby was born.

982 PF: Yes, this winter -- They aren't equipped at this  
medical center to deliver babies, but they used to.

984 The doctor who was here when we first came up here,  
Dr. Christy, delivered a lot of babies. It was just

986 by the grace of God that nothing terrible happened,  
because they had no equipment. You know, some things

988 are complicated: They have unusual things that  
happen. They don't have instruments or anything like

990 a hospital does, but he somehow was able to get by.

992 When he left and the doctor who followed him  
(who became a very close friend of ours; was here for

994 five years), a very, very good doctor, just threw up  
his hands and said, "No way am I going to deliver any

996 babies with no equipment." You know, with all these  
lawsuits now and everything, and he said, "It's

dangerous for the baby, for the people, for

998           everybody." He said, "No way," so they just went  
              across when it was time.

1000           Last winter we had a case of bad weather and  
              they couldn't fly her off. There's a doctor retired  
1002           here who's not practicing, but he lives down at the  
              south end of the Island. He was a family practice  
1004           man in Lansing, Dr. Laing, a very fine doctor. They  
              called him so he came up, and finally the doctor did  
1006           come over from Charlevoix -- was able to fly in.

              Anyway, it was a very successful delivery. The  
1008           people always bragged about they were native  
              Islanders, born on Beaver Island. Now they can't do  
1010           that, because for the most part, they have to either  
              go to Petoskey or Charlevoix Hospital. It's just not  
1012           safe.

              GW: So you have a 1989 native. < Laugh >

1014          PF: Yes, we do have one more native. It could happen  
              again, but we have no doctor permanently. There's a  
1016           nurse practitioner who's very competent for the minor  
              things, but he is quite knowledgeable and able to  
1018           determine when you do need to fly off and can insist  
              that you go, which is important. You don't always  
1020           know that, if you're that sick yourself. It's kind  
              of scary not to have a doctor.

1022          GW: You go downstate for your services?

PF: I go to Petoskey to the Burns Clinic.

1024 GW: I remember the last time I saw Doyle, I was (I don't  
know why) -- I'd gone probably to see someone, in  
1026 St. Lawrence Hospital (or Sparrow): Memory is so  
fragile. You came by and it was a very difficult  
1028 time there for a member of your family, as I  
remember. Someone was very ill, and you'd come down  
1030 to be there. Suppose it was one of Cora Hunt's  
sisters at that time?

1032 PF: It might have been. It was \_\_\_\_\_, I think. We were  
down to see her, and then we wondered about staying,  
1034 because we knew she was very close to death. But we  
did come home, and it was just a few days later that  
1036 she died, so we went back again for the funeral.  
You're right. I remember that.

1038 GW: I remember greeting you there [sic] and having a  
visit, and in a few minutes you came along.

1040 PF: Yes. I remember that now. That was Sparrow, I  
think.

1042 GW: I notice on the wall, you have a painting that says  
"Fitzpatrick." That's Doyle's?

1044 PF: Yes. All of them are; this one, and this one, and  
the little one, and that one over the organ. Those  
1046 are all his.

GW: He was an accomplished painter.



1048 PF: Yes. He could have been very good. He loved to  
paint and did all of these when we were still in  
1050 Lansing, and painted very rapidly. I was amazed to  
how fast he could paint and just come up with it. I  
1052 do have a lot of sketches he did for future  
paintings.

1054 Then he took a lot of them from my slides that I  
took; because I am a photographer. He would put the  
1056 slides on and then sketch from those and did a lot of  
them that way. But he did all that in Lansing; never  
1058 painted when he was up here. All of a sudden he just  
didn't seem to do it, and he planned to. I have  
1060 about six boxes of canvases that he purchased and  
brought up here, planning to paint. You can't  
1062 believe all the artist's supplies; the brushes, the  
paints, and I had a palette and easel and all these  
1064 things to do painting, but all of a sudden he just  
seemed to not be interested at all in doing it. I  
1066 had so hoped he would.

GW: Now the sun is out. Look at this gorgeous light that  
1068 floods this whole house; perfect light for an artist.

PF: He always said, "If I had a certain room, a studio  
1070 room, and I could leave everything in there and I  
wouldn't have to put it away; and I could just go  
1072 down there when I wanted." I think that was the

- whole thing. He didn't really have the right light.  
1074 He needed the north light, actually, and didn't  
really have the right place to do it.
- 1076 GW: Somehow he just set that aside from his life. I'm  
impressed though with the quality of his artwork.
- 1078 PF: Yes. There's one in your room of this old house on  
Barney's Lake, which is a beautiful old house.
- 1080 GW: Oh, I noticed that immediately!
- PF: And I have a lot of sketches of things that he had  
1082 planned to do.
- GW: He caught all the mood of the old building and its  
1084 environment in it.
- PF: Then one in the kitchen is, too. It's a different  
1086 view of it, like it had enormous lilac bushes. It  
was fantastic, but it burned down the Fourth of July  
1088 about five or six years ago. The house just burned.  
Whether someone set it, or camping -- you know, the  
1090 fire got out of hand. But I happen to have quite a  
few pictures of it that I had taken with the lilacs  
1092 in bloom, and I sold many, many of that. It seemed  
to be one of the favorites. Now the family that  
1094 owned this property have donated it to the  
Conservancy, the Michigan Conservancy. They have a  
1096 sign up there that --
- GW: How do you spell that name? Did I hear it correctly?

1098 PF: The O'Donnell Family; Barney O'Donnell. The lake is  
Barney's Lake, and this is the family of Barney  
1100 O'Donnell, the heirs to this property. They fought  
over it for years; didn't know what to do with it;  
1102 couldn't agree, and there were more heirs every year  
with the family increasing. They decided that there  
1104 wouldn't be anything left of it by the time the  
lawyers' fees and everything were taken out.

1106 Finally, some of the descendants last year sort  
of agreed that this would be the thing to do -- give  
1108 it to the Conservancy. This will all be kept intact:  
There's orchards, apple trees. It's a beautiful  
1110 area, and then this hill and this house that was up  
there, and it looked over this little lake.

1112 It was a tragedy that the house burned, but it  
would have fallen down eventually because they never  
1114 fixed it up. They couldn't agree on what to do with  
it. Somebody decided then I guess, because probably  
1116 it was set, either from a campfire and the fire  
blowing or somebody deliberately torching it -- just  
1118 thinking it was an old house. But it was beautiful,  
and the lilacs made it special.

1120 GW: Lilacs survive for centuries.

PF: They're still there. They're still there; they  
1122 didn't burn. There are many interesting tales and

things about the Island too, you know; all special  
1124 places. Now there's a lot of development. Some of  
the areas that you never -- When we first came up  
1126 here that we always said: "Oh, how beautiful these  
are! Isn't that great the way the terrain is.  
1128 They'll never be able to develop this."

GW: Never!

1130 PF: No, never; and of course, here they are now.  
Fantastic houses and all this gorgeous area.

1132 GW: You say that the new large, very prosperous --  
prosperity-produced houses are on the west side?

1134 PF: On the west side of the Island, and there's one area  
that was called Bonner's Bluff. It was real high,  
1136 steep bluff that went down this little road that was  
very treacherous to go down, although we did go down  
1138 there once with our Blazer and wondered even then if  
we were going to make it. But it was beautiful, and  
1140 then you got down to this gorgeous beach. Nothing  
there; you never saw anybody. You could walk along  
1142 there and it was just a special place. Now it's all  
been a modern road put in there. All these places  
1144 are platted out and houses in there. They're  
beautiful, but it's just entirely different, like  
1146 another world. Every spot like that now is

developed, it seems like, and there's hardly any  
1148 undeveloped beachfront anymore.

GW: This has all happened within the fourteen years  
1150 you've been here?

PF: Yes, within the last -- oh, probably five to seven  
1152 [years] at the most.

GW: What's the nature of the developers? Are they large  
1154 outstate developers, or are they local people?

PF: Some are local. Some are local and have capitalized  
1156 on it actually, you know -- sold the lots. Not  
developed it themselves, but sold the lots and then  
1158 people building. There's one or two on the Island  
now who are very good builders, and they do a good  
1160 job. I think maybe that's why it's sort of losing  
its charm for me, because of the trend now in the way  
1162 it's going, when I remember all the beauty of it.  
I'm spoiled on how gorgeous it was. All these areas,  
1164 and you could walk all these beaches and never see a  
soul, or it would be very rare if you would ever.  
1166 And you felt free that you could go down there and  
walk and take pictures. Now people that do have any  
1168 places along there, a lot of them just have got  
posted "Keep out, private." It's just altogether  
1170 different.

1172 GW: Change. You've been away from Lansing for fourteen  
years. When you go back, what are the things that  
stand out first that's changed?

1174 PF: Just everything is so different about Lansing; the  
roads, the super highways, all the roads going in and  
1176 out, all the development, all the -- I don't know:  
It just doesn't even look like Lansing to me. When I  
1178 get in the downtown area and the approaches to the  
city, it's just so totally different. Some of the  
1180 areas -- of course, we lived on the east side and I  
go back there around the Frandor, and the area is  
1182 still pretty much like it was. It hasn't developed  
that part of it, and it's easy to find my way around;  
1184 but some parts of it I'm just thoroughly confused  
about where I am until I finally find a landmark or a  
1186 skyline that tells me the general area that I am.  
It's much different, and I think living there would  
1188 be a lot more difficult than it used to be.

I still have a feeling that it's home. I mean,  
1190 I always think about it which that was my home for a  
good many years. I really always think Lansing is a  
1192 special place. I go back and visit my friend that  
lived across the street from us when we lived in  
1194 Lansing, and I stay with her whenever I go down  
there. It seems like I'm home there more than



1196           anyplace that I go anywhere now. We had a lot of  
                  good times together, and being across the street from  
1198           where I lived, that area seems to be more natural.

GW: You sold the home?

1200 PF: Yes, we sold it. Our daughter bought it and then she  
                  only lived in it about a year. Then she sold it. I  
1202           think several people have lived in it since then.  
                  One neighbor I saw last time I was down there still  
1204           lives there, and I was glad to see her. -- A few  
                  people, but most of them are different, have changed.

1206 GW: The neighborhood's changed too.

PF: Yes, one or two that's still living there, that were  
1208           there when I lived there, but not many.

GW: I wonder what you think the future might be for the  
1210           community, with these changes taking place? What do  
                  you think the future of the town is going to be?

1212 PF: You mean up here?

GW: Of Lansing.

1214 PF: Oh, of Lansing; I don't know. I just think it's  
                  still developing a lot, growing a lot. The town  
1216           frightens me because of the crime. We really didn't  
                  have that much. When we had a murder or a shooting  
1218           or something, it was an exception and a very unusual  
                  thing. Now it's common just like all cities, and  
1220           that part of it I'm frightened of. I would be afraid

1222 to go back there and live, probably, from that  
standpoint. But people that are there seem to accept  
1224 it and just get along alright. Right now, the way it  
is up here, and you don't have anything like that to  
put up with; you're safe, and I never lock my door in  
1226 the summertime. I go out all day long and I'm gone.

We never take the keys out of our car. Leave it  
1228 on the street anywhere and just leave the keys in the  
ignition, or in the garage overnight, and never worry  
1230 about it. I have to watch myself when I'm on the  
mainland, anyplace, that I don't leave my keys in the  
1232 car: And then keep your doors locked, because here  
you just don't have to worry about those things. You  
1234 know it's much different now in any kind of a city.  
Even in Petoskey and Charlevoix now, the crime has  
1236 come to the northern cities too. They have a lot  
more problems than they used to have a few years ago,  
1238 so I'd say it's anywhere.

GW: You said you had about 350 in the winter, and that  
1240 population probably doubles in the summer?

PF: In the summer we have probably two or three thousand  
1242 people. There are a lot more cottages and people  
here than you realize, and then of course, an awful  
1244 lot of tourists who come like just for the day or for  
the week, or two weeks. An awful lot of people who

1246 are tourists who've been coming here for many years  
come back. They just come back year after year, in  
1248 rent places. They speak for them -- like if they're  
here in August this year, before they leave they  
1250 arrange for getting it next year in August or July or  
whenever, so it's kind of a thing that just goes on.

1252 A lot of people come over here with the idea  
that they can just come over and just get any place  
1254 to stay, but that's not true, because they'd really  
only be taking a chance. Then there aren't that  
1256 many. Several of the motels that were near me down  
here are now condominiums, and they have sold them  
1258 and people own them. They're kind of the condominium  
thing and they come up, although they do subrent them  
1260 or sublet them. This has happened in several of  
them. There are only actually about two that are  
1262 strictly motels as such, two or three.

GW: Planning and zoning is such an important part of the  
1264 Ingham County and the Greater Capital Region. What  
kind of zoning do they have up here?

1266 PF: It's been kind of a hit and miss kind of thing, and  
now the last few years they're more strict about it.  
1268 It seemed to be before that they gave any kind of a  
variance. They had rules and laws and zoning  
1270 ordinances, but anybody could get a variance for

anything they wanted. It's a little more strict now.  
1272 They're getting a little bit more -- In the last  
few years they've kind of eliminated anything around  
1274 the harbor; anything more commercial going in, trying  
to keep it the way it is. People want it that way.

1276 They did a big survey a couple years ago on this  
whole thing. A property owners group organized to  
1278 try and see that anything undesirable is not going to  
be allowed to come in here, like a development.  
1280 Several were in the wind, but it's kind of died down  
now temporarily. The zoning is, I think, enforced a  
1282 little more. They're getting more younger people and  
different people on the zoning board, and I think  
1284 maybe better qualified people than they had before.  
There were a lot of people that were "yes-men," and  
1286 "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," and "I  
owe you and you owe me and so O.K., we'll put this  
1288 through for you"; and then, "Now I've got a thing  
coming up, and let's see if you can work this out."  
1290 Now it's getting to be a little more that they're  
more concerned with the overall good of the Island  
1292 and the future of how it's platted out.

GW: When we flew in this morning, even though it was gray  
1294 and overcast, I was well aware of the excavation for

1296 gravel or stone - the mining that I saw - here on the  
Island, and then what looked like a dump.

1298 PF: Oh, the dump! That's been a big problem. We've been  
having a real problem with the dump. June 15th I  
1300 think was the deadline for the time that you could  
dump anything in there free, and that you could just  
throw anything in there.

1302 GW: Anything?

1304 PF: Just about anything; like lumber, or old furniture,  
or whatever. It was bulldozed over and buried, but  
the State of Michigan really got on them about it;  
1306 and the DNR, which has been coming up for a long  
time. The people here have been negligent (the  
1308 supervisors of the townships), and didn't do anything  
really. They've had a lot of warning, but they have  
1310 just put it off till the crisis has been this year.  
So we're recycling and they're going to have a  
1312 transfer station. It was going to be just capped  
shortly, but now they've extended it for a little  
1314 while -- gotten a grant from the State so that they  
have a few more -- About another month they can  
1316 still take some big items out there. A lot of the  
summer people didn't have a chance to come up here  
1318 and clean out things, like old metal or old things  
they wanted to dispose of. I took a lot of advantage

1320 of it and got rid of a lot of old lumber and things  
that I knew I wasn't going to use, and just took it  
1322 out there.

We had a joke about all these things that were  
1324 sitting out around. People would go out there to  
take something. Then they'd look around and they'd  
1326 see something else that they decided they might want  
and they'd take home < Laughter > so it was kind of  
1328 a --

GW: A fleamarket.

1330 PF: Yes, but they are getting into cycling now for the  
glass and plastics and a lot of things. Eventually,  
1332 it's going to be that it's going to have to be taken  
on barges, and over to Charlevoix, where they do have  
1334 an approved landfill. That's going to be very  
possibly (and hopefully) the State's going to help  
1336 somewhat, but it's going to be another tax burden on  
people.

1338 GW: The City Council in Lansing has just had a very  
controversial decision about the city taking over  
1340 providing recycling services. Some people were  
against that being a city-sponsored activity, and  
1342 wanted it to be in the private sector. The Council  
has moved forward on that now, with a vote from the



1344 people. it is going to be very expensive, but I  
think people are prepared to pay for this now.

1346 PF: Yes. I think they realize they have to.

GW: But to me it was a little shock to fly into this  
1348 Island, which in part presents a pristine view from  
the air; and then all of a sudden, this sore, as we  
1350 came in to the airport.

PF: It's terrible. It's been a bone of contention with  
1352 me for many years. I hated to go out there, which  
you have to do, but I've always thought how awful it  
1354 was that they have it. There's a lot of opposition  
even now (when they realize this has to be), and  
1356 people saying they thought there would be some other  
spot on the Island where they could still have a  
1358 landfill, but the State and the DNR say there  
absolutely is not.

1360 It actually all came to a head when they thought  
that maybe there was ground water contamination up  
1362 from this dump, from all those plastics and all these  
things, so they really got on them about it. Now  
1364 people are more-or-less getting used to it, and we do  
have recycling going on. They voted a millage just  
1366 recently for money for the transfer station and for  
whatever they have to do about getting it over there;  
1368 which will be costly, so I guess they've reconciled

1370 to the fact that this has got to be. All over the  
country the people are going to have to realize this.  
1372 It's pointed out every day more and more with this  
oil crisis and everything, and how negligent we've  
1374 been during the last few years about that, not making  
any effort to conserve or save, or to explore new  
1376 channels and new sources. Still, Bush's riding  
around in his power boat, and all that stuff. It's  
just kind of scary, but gasoline prices went up  
1378 within about a week's time on the Island and so did  
fuel oil, so I'm not looking forward to that -- which  
1380 I will have to do -- about filling my oil tank. What  
can you do? If I'm here at all in the winter, I've  
1382 got to have it warm. It's always expensive, but it's  
going to be more expensive.

1384 The dump is very, very unsightly; and the awful  
part is that part of the land nearby, in back of it,  
1386 there was some beautiful trees and actually pretty  
land near it. It always seemed to me like it was a  
1388 terrible waste of a pretty land, that they had this  
dump right in that spot.

1390 I think they did actually purchase additional  
land from somebody that owned it, for expanding it.  
1392 If they did, why, that's been money down the drain;  
but it was a pretty area back in -- some apple trees,

- 1394           and kind of sandy, kind of little small dunes. This  
                  seemed too bad to have it there.
- 1396   GW:   You mentioned the water supply. The water level is  
                  much reduced, and people are digging new wells of  
1398           deeper depth.
- PF:   Yes. The water table is down.
- 1400   GW:   At the same time that you're getting development and  
                  more people.
- 1402   PF:   They even talked about this survey they did about a  
                  central water system and a central sewerage system;  
1404           that this may eventually come, but if that happens it  
                  will be prohibitive practically, to live here,  
1406           because it will be so costly. If I haven't decided  
                  before then what I'm going to do, that probably will  
1408           determine it, because that would be very difficult.  
                  Because everybody has their own well and their own  
1410           septic system, it's a lot to think about. But they  
                  keep developing, having more houses; and if they do  
1412           have any kind of development nearby, they will have  
                  to go to some central system. They're not equipped  
1414           for anything like that now, but it's growing. The  
                  Island's population is growing. One thing about it,  
1416           most of the homes (although winterized and  
                  everything) -- the people are just mostly summer  
1418           residents because most of them are still working:

1420 They're doctors, or they're lawyers, or they're  
professional people.

1422 We did have one enormous, very unusual home, and  
a very interesting story that would take me on and on  
and on if I told you about it. This home was built  
1424 over on the west side and was a very gorgeous,  
beautiful thing. They call it the castle, and I  
1426 don't know how many rooms are in it, but it's  
thirty-some rooms I guess. This man came in here  
1428 from Minneapolis and started building this, and it's  
very -- Nobody could believe it unless they would  
1430 see it, that that would be on Beaver Island. He  
turned out to be a con man, actually, and had  
1432 borrowed a lot of money from this bank in Minneapolis  
that his wife's family was connected with. They  
1434 backed him, and he really didn't have a cent.

The whole thing was unbelievable, and finally,  
1436 after they just left it -- it stood unfinished for  
about three years and was starting to deteriorate  
1438 actually, because it wasn't all finished and some of  
the outside wasn't done. Finally someone did buy it  
1440 on the market for a little over \$100,000, which was a  
steal for what was involved there.

1442 This couple from Michigan State -- (she was, I  
believe, the Dean of Women, or had some very

1444           important job, or head of a department, or something)  
              -- was going ahead and finishing this, but it turns  
1446           out that since this happened they are divorcing, so  
              the woman is ending up with this huge place all  
1448           herself and finishing it off. I've no idea how much  
              it would cost for the finishing of it, but it's a  
1450           very unusual house. You'd never expect to see  
              anything like it on Beaver Island. I wish we could  
1452           go down there and I could show it to you, but they're  
              still working on it.

1454                     I don't know if she's there or not or how it is,  
              but it's remarkable -- and to think he ended up being  
1456           a con artist. One of my friends told me recently,  
              [that] he is in jail right now. They finally caught  
1458           up with him for some of this bad notes and bad debts,  
              and everything that he was pulling.

1460                     It was too good to be true, you know, all of  
              this tale that he was telling about this place. The  
1462           way it ended up, a lot of people on the Island had  
              done work and contracted out -- stone work, and a lot  
1464           of other work, and heating, and some of the things,  
              and hadn't been paid. Finally, I guess they did get  
1466           so they were all paid off in the end, but they were  
              kind of worried about this.

1468   GW:   Weren't even paid for labor.

PF: Right; the labor and the materials.

1470 GW: That's quite a story.

PF: Yes. But it's a very unusual house. We all wondered  
1472 what he was really going to do there, and what kind  
of an operation he was running, and what it was all  
1474 about. He had a wall painted up around the outside,  
a stone wall. He was going to have an electronic  
1476 system, like with the gates and security and  
everything. We wondered why he needed this, and what  
1478 he really was up to; if he had some kind of drugs or  
something that he was going to be doing that was kind  
1480 of questionable.

GW: A compound of that kind on Beaver Island didn't quite  
1482 fit.

PF: Not that many houses -- or that many rooms -- that  
1484 practically had a house within a house, and a guest  
house besides. All these things were just too much.  
1486 He didn't have that big a family. He evidently just  
pulled this kind of deals. I don't know why they  
1488 didn't know that when they loaned him the money, but  
apparently they didn't. It was the talk of the  
1490 Island for a long while. They did give a lot of  
people work for quite awhile.

1492



1494

< Tape 2, Side 2 >

GW: That's a fascinating story: That'll become part of  
1496 the Beaver Island folklore, the story of that.

PF: It will, yes. They were saying that they wondered if  
1498 he was connected with drugs or something, what the  
tie-in was, but the people that lived next door to  
1500 him in a very beautiful house; the man told me the  
other day, he said "I understand that they've got him  
1502 in jail," but apparently he had fled the country, and  
they had been looking for him for a long time. He  
1504 was just where they couldn't find him, but  
apparently, somehow or other they did catch up with  
1506 him.

Strange, but oh, so many rooms in that house.  
1508 This woman is spending a fortune on it. She's got a  
special fellow who is very talented that does the  
1510 carpentry work and the finish work. He's doing  
beautiful work there. I'd sure like to see that when  
1512 it's all done. I've been through it when they were  
still working on it (and it's still far from  
1514 finished), but it would be something to see when it's  
all complete -- very unusual.

1516 GW: It's a far cry from the Protar House.

PF: Right. I can remember when we first came up here and  
1518 there was a man who lived down on the south end of

1520 the Island, a real nice man and he had a place down  
there. He said: "You know, I'm going back. I've  
1522 got a farm near Lansing, a lot of land. It's out  
near [Grand Ledge, or Portland, or somewhere in  
there]." He says: "I'm going back there, and I'm  
1524 just going to build my house out in there. The  
Island's getting ruined. There's too many people,  
1526 too much building, too much exploitation. It's not  
like it used to be. I'm going to go back." He said,  
1528 "I don't like what's happened to the Island."

That was way back before we built the house and  
1530 before we moved here, when we first came up here on  
vacation. We used to go around the Island and enjoy  
1532 it down at the south end. We met him a couple times  
and talked to him, and that's what he was saying even  
1534 then. You know, he was right. It is spoiled in a  
lot of ways. There's a lot of State land that they  
1536 own, and as long as they keep it that's one big plus.

A few years ago they were having a big zoning  
1538 thing about -- rezoned a whole -- all this harbor  
area from certain parts from residential to  
1540 commercial to apartments. This vacant property  
between us and the medical center, a couple lots in  
1542 there that this guy in Chicago owns (he's a lawyer);  
they were going to rezone that to -- like from

1544 residential, which it is along here, to like for  
apartments. I think that's what he had in mind, but  
1546 he couldn't get a septic system very well to do that  
unless he wanted to run it under the road, through  
1548 somebody's property across the street, back to the  
property that he owns back on the other side away.  
1550 We all just said to this fellow, "Don't do that;  
don't do it; don't ever sell it to him, or don't let  
1552 him do it." Then he was interested in here, but  
found that we owned this next door, and everything,  
1554 or he could have run it up this way. Anyway, they  
had this one township meeting where they were talking  
1556 about the zoning, and which I went to. I said that I  
didn't think that they should rezone it; that it was  
1558 residential, and all the houses were all along here.  
There was one fellow who was the DNR officer at the  
1560 time, and he was on the zoning board. He really  
agreed with me, and he said to everybody, "I don't  
1562 think it should be, either." Well, they did leave  
it; they did leave it.

1564 But he, I think has got something up his sleeve,  
eventually. We tried to buy it from him. He  
1566 wouldn't sell it.

GW: Money's no object at that point: But you could see  
1568 the damage that would be done to the visual

environment if high condominiums were put in there.  
1570 The view of the bay would be obstructed.  
PF: Right. People, you know, want to be on the water and  
1572 this is ideal; and actually, to be in something down  
below -- somebody bought it and wanted to do that.  
1574 GW: You've got enough land.  
PF: Yes. But then finally, the consensus of opinion  
1576 seemed to be that most everybody wanted the harbor  
left just the way it was. They had this survey:  
1578 This company had the whole development around the  
boat dock and around the rest of the harbor -- like  
1580 boardwalks and park areas and a whole lot of  
development, but people didn't go for it; just said  
1582 they wanted it left pretty much the way it was. One  
family over on the other side have quite a large area  
1584 there (a house and several lots), and it's right on  
the harbor area. They were all set to put it on the  
1586 market for a condominium type of thing [and] were  
going to do this. People were protesting so bad at  
1588 one meeting we all went to, they just backed out.  
They have that for sale through some real estate  
1590 company, but I don't think for the type of thing they  
were going to do. They finally said, "If somebody  
1592 wants to buy it and develop it, O.K., but we're not  
going to do it," because they got so much static from

1594            everybody. It might happen sometime; I don't know,  
but so far it's been about three or four years now,  
1596            and it's been just left in limbo. It seems to be  
dying down. Then this property owners group  
1598            organized, and after the survey came out, and people  
-- one young man who is from Lansing that heads it up  
1600            -- have been quite strong in getting their voices  
heard, so I think that's helped.

1602    GW: You're saying that there are quite a few people from  
the Lansing area, that are up here.

1604    PF: Yes. There are some from around Okemos and -- yes.

          GW: How do you account for that?

1606    PF: I don't know, really, unless -- Some are from the  
College. Several there are teachers - that were  
1608            teachers, some retired and some still teaching. They  
know each other or talk about it, and I guess the  
1610            same way with Ann Arbor. A lot of them from Ann  
Arbor that are friends and had friends here, and then  
1612            it just kind of grows.

          GW: I know Central Michigan has involvement here on the  
1614            Island, and there's hospice -- elder hospice that's  
going to take place in September, I believe, here.

1616    PF: John Cumming is coming back. He was retired from  
CMU, from Clarke Library. He was here last year and

1618            did an elder hostel, and he's coming back this year.  
                 Shirley told me a while ago that he's coming back.

1620    GW:    I've heard about that, in Lansing.    It's being  
                 promoted there, at the Biological Station I believe,  
1622            that it's to take place.

                 PF:    Yes.    I sort of debated about whether I thought I  
1624            might go.    Doyle was quite friendly with John at one  
                 time, and he came to our house several times.    I  
1626            think they came to a historical meeting one time and  
                 came like for dinner, or something; came to the house  
1628            first.    Several times we visited them in Mt.  
                 Pleasant, and then he took us through the Library and  
1630            showed us that collection.    But after Doyle wrote the  
                 book and the book came out, it just seemed like he  
1632            never wrote to him and said --    You know, even if  
                 though he didn't like it or didn't approve of it, he  
1634            never even wrote a courtesy letter and said anything  
                 about the book.    Never any contact or anything, so  
1636            Doyle didn't contact him again either; and when he  
                 got the tapes from Yale -- the microfilm from Yale,  
1638            he let John Cumming use it (which he did, I think,  
                 make copies from that).    I don't know what happened.

1640            It was just kind of a funny thing, so we lost  
                 contact.    He hasn't been to the Island for many, many



1642            years until last year when he came up for that, and I  
                 understand he's coming back again.

1644    GW:    And he's actually running the elder hostel.

                 PF:    Well, he's involved in the speaking I guess, and  
1646            everybody enjoyed him last year, because he does know  
                 a lot about Strang.

1648            One year they were having it and the people who  
                 were in charge (I guess it's CMU, the Biological  
1650            Station actually running it, but then they get the  
                 speakers and they) asked Doyle to do a thing on this  
1652            book and to give a talk. We were going off the  
                 Island and going to Lansing. It was the very time  
1654            that they wanted to have this, and we couldn't change  
                 our appointment. It was such a sudden notice, within  
1656            a couple of days; so he never did do it. They wanted  
                 him to talk about Strang; but John knows an awful lot  
1658            about him. Some friends of mine attended it last  
                 year, and they thought it was very interesting. But  
1660            they didn't know too much about Strang, actually, so  
                 they would find it more interesting, probably. -- So  
1662            I'm thinking about I might go. I think it would be  
                 interesting.

1664    GW:    I was considering it too, when I heard about it. I  
                 didn't know John was involved, but it's a week long.

1666            If I can get away for a whole week, it would

1668                   certainly be a treat. I've never done anything like  
                          that, have you?

1670                   PF: No, I haven't, but a friend of mine told me that  
                          there's < unclear > possibility of traveling because  
1672                   they're reasonable, and yet you learn a lot. There  
                          are many very interesting places, and you meet a lot  
1674                   of very nice people and very interesting people that  
                          are doing this.

                          GW: Which makes it a pleasure.

1676                   PF: Yes. He said that a friend of his -- some women who  
                          are widowed go, even on their own. Sometimes they go  
1678                   together; sometimes they just go on their own, and it  
                          just works out really well.

1680                   GW: Here comes Helen; she's back. I'm going to turn this  
                          off now.

1682                   Phyllis, I really appreciate your sharing your  
                          memory with us.

1684                   PF: Oh, I just went on and on.

                          GW: That's wonderful. Thank you so much.

1686

< End of Interview >

1688

1690

Transcribed by Patricia Siggers

Lansing, Michigan

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