

Kenneth Paul

Ken Paul was interviewed on January 13, 2008 by Emily Salvette at a Sunday program meeting of the Pittsfield Township Historical Society. This was held at the Pittsfield Community Center, 701 W Ellsworth Rd, Ann Arbor. Ken grew up and farmed on a farm his grandfather bought in the 1870s, which was just west of Sutherland-Wilson School House. Ken, with the help of childhood friend Russ Payeur who was in the audience, reminisce about life on the farm, in country school, and in the farm community that was Pittsfield Township until recently.

Interview Contents:

- Grandfather's and Grandmother's farming backgrounds
- Being snowed in and the definition of a stone boat
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- First car
- Description of Sutherland-Wilson School and a typical school day
- Shopping in Saline and deliveries of other necessities
- Using the dinner bell for meals and emergencies
- Visiting on Sundays
- Disciplining children

Interview Participants:

P: Kenneth Paul

I: Emily Salvette (Interviewer)

R: Russ Payeur (Audience)

AM: Audience Member

W: Wayne Clements (Audience)

Interview Transcript

I: Thank you very much for being here. I am very happy to be able to interview you. Were you born in the Township?

P: I was born in Ypsilanti at Beyer Hospital and raised at 1340 Textile Road, which is just west of the Sutherland-Wilson School House.

I: You were telling me that you grew up on a farm that was purchased by your grandfather.

P: Yes.

I: Did he build that farm?

P: No, it was built three or four years before he bought it.

I: What year did he buy it?

P: I don't know.

I: In the 1870s?

P: Yes, because grandfather died in 1896.

I: What was his name?

P: Henry Paul

I: So it was bought in the 1870s. Was he from Michigan ?

P: He was homesteaded here, I believe.

I: Do you know where he came from?

P: No.

I: What was your Father's name?

P: Oscar Paul.

I: What was your mom's name?

P: Marie. Her maiden name was Engle. She grew up in Dexter, then moved to Ypsilanti on a farm on Geddes and Prospect when she was a young girl. They drove their cattle all the way

from Dexter to their farm one day. Back then everyone had fences along the road and the girls went ahead and set all the gates so the cattle couldn't run the fields.

I: What year would that be?

P: 1920s, somewhere in there.

I: So they were still running cattle down?

P: Oh yes.

I: What kind of farming did your family do?

P: Dairy, steers, hogs and chickens. When I was real young we had a snow storm and we were snowed in for a week at a time, and in order to get the milk, we had to take it by a team of horses and a stone boat down to the Cody farm, and that's where we met the milk truck.

I: What is a stone boat?

P: It's about six feet wide by about 8 feet long and has runners made out of a small log, flat at the bottom and flat at the top. There would be nailed oak planks across the top. They use them to pick up stones from the fields. So we would put all the milk cans on there and put a rope on them and tie them together and went through the snow. That was ok the first day but the second day the snow was too deep. The Cody farm bumps up against the school fence and they put a gate in there years before on purpose so you could open that gate and go through their field to the Cody farm. When grandfather died (which was before my time, he died in 1896) the neighbors got together and shoveled it all out by hand to get out by horse and buggies to go to the funeral.

I: That must have taken forever. Back then the County wasn't responsible for the roads, were they?

P: I don't believe so.

I: So when you were snowed in, you weren't going anywhere.

P: Not for a week at a time.

R: There was about 6 feet of snow.

P: Most people today haven't seen a snow storm.

R: If Retha Lavender walked across the field then, by God, we went to school in 6 feet of snow. Now a day you get 6 inches of snow and schools is called off for a week.

I: Russ, did you go to Sutherland School too?

R: Yes, for three years.

I: Were you both there together?

R: Yes.

P: I was there when you got hit with a baseball bat.

R: You remember that?

P: Yes.

I: Talk about going to a Country School like that. Who was your teacher?

P: Retha Lavender.

R: They lived where Avis is now.

P: Then we had Ms. Groosenburger. We didn't learn much that year. She was a young teacher, her first school, and we had some rowdy boys.

I: I can't believe that. (Laughter)

P: Not us farm boys, Russ and I. (Laughter)

R: Remember the day when we knocked over the outhouse with her in it.

I: You knocked over the outhouse with the teacher in it?

R: Yeah

P: I missed that one. She didn't teach there the next year. Then they hired Lucy Allen and things changed fast. She had a fifteen or eighteen inch ruler that was thick. She would tell you once and if that didn't stop you, the second time the ruler would come down on her desk, your heart stopped for a second.

I: How many kids in the school?

P: Eighteen or twenty. There were kids that went to the school that lived where the new construction is down on State Street. Jake Grant lived there.

R: Heisers lived next door. Then the family that lived down by the railroad tracks on State Street by 84 Lumber.

P: Janice Harwood on US 12. They were about the furthest away.

I: Other names you can remember? Were the Cody kids there?

P: No. The Cody boys never got married.

I: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

P: I had a brother.

I: Were you about the same age?

P: He is 8 years younger.

I: What was his name?

P: Ronald Paul.

I: What kind of chores did you and your brother have to do?

P: School was from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. and when you got home from school you took your school clothes off and put your work clothes on. We didn't get into the house till 8:00 p.m.

I: Some people might not know what chores consisted of on a dairy farm.

P: Well, you had to milk the cows twice a day regardless.

I: What time was milking time?

P: In the morning around 5:30 a.m. and at night we never got done before 8:00 p.m. We would have supper earlier. Then you would feed the cows three times a day and we would gather the eggs from the chickens and feed the hogs. You would spend two thirds of your day taking care of livestock.

I: How many dairy cows did you have?

P: We had room for twenty eight and in later years we had fifty.

I: When did you get electricity?

P: As long as I have been alive.

I: So you were always milking with electric machines?

P: I never milked much by hand. We had a milk machine fairly early.

R: Cody farm never had a milking machine, they would get up at 4:30 a.m. on that farm and would be milking about forty cows by hand at 5:00 a.m. And you were eating breakfast by 6:30 and if you were late, too bad.

I: No breakfast?

R: Grandma said 6:30 a.m. or you didn't eat.

I: Did you live with your grandma?

P: No. They both passed away before I was born. My grandfather died in 1896 and she died in 1898, I think.

I: Were you in 4-H?

P: No.

I: What did you do for fun?

P: Worked on the farm. That's all I wanted to do my whole life, until I got wise.

I: Where did you go to high school?

P: I didn't. Just country school K-8. I worked for an International Harvester dealer for 23 years and went to school for a week every year in Columbus, Ohio and Indiana ; Hickory Hill , Illinois went there for a week in the winter. In the summer they come around with a school on a semi and have a day school on tractor repairs, engines and air conditioning, stuff like that. And that's what I've done ever since 1987. Well, in 1987 the dealership closed down and then I went on my own and still did work on International equipment.

I: So that was your career.

P: Yes. We sold the cows in 1964. My brother and I both still farmed and worked in town.

I: So were you and your brother living at that farm house?

P: Yes.

I: In 1964 you sold the cows?

P: My brother went into the service and we sold the cows.

I: Did you ever serve in the military.

P: No

I: After you decided you were going to sell the farm, what went into the decision?

P: Well, we kept the farm for a long time after we sold the cows. I went to work in Saline and my brother went into the service. He came home and went to Fingerle Lumber and retired from there. We still farmed at night. You couldn't get rid of the farm; once it's in you it's worse than cancer.

I: Did you have animals or crops?

P: After we sold the cows, we kept some hogs. We mainly just raised and sold grain.

I: How many acres was the farm?

P: Two hundred and thirty acres. Before my brother went into the service we worked the Wilson Farm, the Cody Farm and the Keiser [spelling? May be Kaiser] Farm east of State Street where Christina Lirones lives. After my brother got back from the service we both just worked our farm and the McCalla Farm on Lohr Road, which wasn't very big.

I: When did you sell the farm?

P: Approximately 1977 or 1978.

I: That's when it was sold for the development of Silo Ridge?

P: Yes. There were four silos and the silos were on a ridge. That's where they came up with the name Silo Ridge.

I: Are there any elements left?

P: Just some trees where the house used to be.

I: Tell me about the type of work your mother or wife had to do on the farm?

P: My mother always took care of the chickens. She also baked all the time. Sewed. My wife never worked on the farm. We didn't get married until 1981 and she worked at the University of Michigan.

I: Did you have a lot of hired help?

P: When I was real young my dad had a hired man. In the summer time the neighborhood got together to thrash wheat and oats and corn.

I: So you just cooperated in the neighborhood instead of hiring a work crew?

P: Yes. Everyone helped each other out.

I: How many families was that?

P: The thrashing [threshing?] crew had some Codys, Gyers, Wilsons, Ed McCalla and Max Genrick.

I: So you shared the equipment around the neighborhood?

P: Yes. Dad had the thrashing machine and crew, and...there was another group on Warner Rd...Wiedeman. Wasn't that Sutherland on Textile who had the thresher.

I: How many other pieces of equipment did you use?

P: ...we had a corn binder where you would cut the corn and tie it in bundles and the neighbors would get together with their horses and wagons and would go out and pitch these heavy bundles on the wagon and haul them up to the silo filler, which is a machine that had a fly wheel with knives in it and would chop the corn up and blow it up in the silo. Dad had that and a corn shredder which you pitch corn bundles in. In the fall when the corn is ripe, it takes the ears off, separates the ears from the stalks and blows the corn pile in the barn for bedding. I ever did much of that. We bought a corn picker later that picks the corn, picks the ears off.

I: What about plowing in the spring?

P: Everyone had their own tractor plow.

R: I remember the day when your dad lost his fingers in the silo filler. He went to shut off the table and his hand got caught underneath.

AM: He didn't lose any fingers.

(Man)

I: It's a very dangerous job isn't it?

P: Just like anything else, farming's pretty high up in the amount of accidents—mostly carelessness.

I: Can you remember any other farming events like barn raisings or dances?

P: There were no barn raisings in our township that I know of. Maybe way back. Nothing exciting happened.

I: What about fires?

P: Only fire I can recall that dad told me was at the ice house at the farm, west of the farm house. Lightning struck it and that was back before they had fire trucks. When you had a fire you

would rung the dinner bell and your neighbors knew if you rang the dinner bell between lunch and supper that there was something wrong and they would all come over with their buckets. But they never saved the ice house.

I: Can you talk about some of the different buildings for people don't know. What is an ice house?

P: You pack ice in sawdust when you cut the ice in the winter off the pond or the lake or where ever you can get it, you would put it in there and pack it sawdust. Dad always said that they had enough ice to make homemade ice cream in July yet. I never saw the ice house, which was gone before I was born. But the foundation was there yet. We had a buggy shed, a hog house, chicken house, horse barn, the big barn for the livestock and cows and steers.

I: How long were you farming with horses?

P: I drove horses some, not a lot. Sometime in the early '40s probably. Dad used them some.

I: You were kind of young, but do you remember how WWII affected your life on the farm?

P: I remember the day it was over. Because all of the schools in the area let out and went to Saline and had some kind of program up there on VE day to celebrate it. I remember that like it was yesterday. That was in 1945.

I: Do you remember your first car?

P: Yes. I can't tell you what year it was. I think it was a '53 Plymouth. It was used when I bought it.

I: How old were you?

P: Well, that's a good question.

I: Were you young? Were you a teenager?

P: I was a teenager. I might have been older than that. I should have written all that stuff down. I drove before I had a driver's license.

I: Well, you had to get stuff around.

P: Mother would always go with me to Saline to get parts.

I: Did your mother drive?

P: No.

I: That's an interesting phenomenon that is kind of hard for us to understand.

R: Most women back then didn't drive.

P: Well, I was born to drive. Dad never drove if we went any place.

I: What else can you remember?

P: I can remember when we were thrashing at the Leon Geyer farm and Joe Payeur was driving a team of horses. They stopped at the milk house to get a drink of water and you always just stopped the horses there and they would just stand there. I don't know if you remember Mr. Geyer, Leon's father, he was in a wheel chair because he had a leg off. He was out there in the yard under trees and they had this one horse when the flies would get on him he would jump up and down on his hind feet. I was right there and saw it because we were hauling the grain up in the barn floor with Ed McCalla's pick up, and that horse started jumping up and down and he went across Textile Road. Behind the school house, the fence comes to a V and he got all tangled up in the fence and I went over with Joe to Leon's shop to get a wire cutter. We had to cut the fence to get him out of there. He just got skinned up a bit, but it stopped him. Lucky there wasn't a car coming down the road, there weren't many cars then. Maybe six a day, maybe.

I: On Textile Road? Can you imagine that now?

AM: Where was the school house?

(Lady)

P: Over by the railroad tracks on Textile Road. It doesn't look like a school house anymore. It's been built on twice. It's for sale for \$390,000.

AM: I know where the railroad tracks are but I am not sure what building.

P: It's right across the street from what was Leon Geyer farm, west of State Street. There was a railroad track and a school fence or the railroad fence well that was the schools line, there is a triangle where the school is at. They built on it and tore the wood shed and garage down and put a garage in the back of the school house. It doesn't look like a school house.

I: Was it a brick building?

P: Yes. It's 900, that's the house number.

AM: What was a normal day at school? Did you have chores?

(lady)

P: Yes. We had a meeting and I don't remember if we had this meeting every week or once a month. We had a president in our class. Also two people would put the flag up in the morning and two people would take it down at night. That was your job for a week. The bell rang at 9:00 a.m., which one of the kids rang. We didn't have any running water. At noon they had a bench in the entry way into the school house in front, which didn't have any heat. The only heat was when you opened the door going into school. At noon time they would put two buckets on this bench. The kids would go out and get buckets of water from the well and there would be three kids standing there. One kid would pour cold water over your hands, one would hand you the soap and the other would hand you a paper towel, and that was our sink. Then we had an hour noon, usually we would play baseball if it was decent weather. In the winter we would make a snow fort or snowmen. Then at 1:00 p.m. the bell would ring. At 2:30 p.m. some of the younger kids got to go home and the older ones stayed till 4:00 p.m. Then you had to get coal in before you went home. There were people assigned to bring in coal so we would have coal for the morning. It was a coal furnace, but it was always warm in there.

AM: How would a teacher teach kids of different ages?

(Lady)

P: They were all mixed in the room. She would call beginners up and the teacher would be sitting there and there would be a row of chairs across the front. She would ask them questions and then would dismiss that class and call another class and that's what went on all day.

AM: So when you were dismissed you just went back to your studies.

(Lady)

P: Yes you would go back to your seat, you never took homework home. If you needed help you would raise your hand. If you need to use the bathroom, you would raise your hand. One finger or two. (Laughter)

AM: The pledge of allegiance would start the day.

(Lady)

P: Yes, definitely. The teacher a lot of times in the winter would read to us for 20 minutes to a half an hour at 1:00 p.m., not everyday.

AM: Did you have art or music?

(Lady)

R: No music.

P: Retha Lavendar could play the piano real well. It was all work. You learned a lot at country school.

AM: Did you have any Christmas pageants?

(Lady)

P: We had Christmas plays every year.

I: Did you have socials or ice cream socials where the families would get together?

P: May Day the mother's were invited for a May Day party. Everyone would bring a dish to pass. There were PTA meetings at night.

R: We were outside playing. (Laughter)

I: It doesn't sound like there was a lot of socializing around the school.

P: No

AM: My grandfather taught in a one room school house. I had been to that school house and there are typically six or eight or ten students in the class. The procedure went like this. My grandfather would say, will the eighth grade class come forward and a few kids would come up and he would ask them questions and they would answer. So the other kids were hearing the questions and answers and therefore they were learning all along and so it really went into them really strong.

(Lady)

P: You would hear all the classes from beginners on through all day long.

AM: They would also talk about some of the issues that the people in the rural areas would face. The kids got a very good education in those one-room school houses. They would hear it over and over every year and it sinks in.

(Lady)

AM: You said that when you washed your hands one gave you a paper towel. Did they actually give you a paper towel or a cloth?

(Different Lady)

P: Might have been a cloth, probably was.

AM: Did you make the soap you would use?

(Lady)

P: I don't know. It was a bar of soap.

I: What about shopping? Did everyone go to Saline?

P: Yes we would go up to the Smith Store in Saline.

R: Ceaser's Pizza is there now. Right next to Benny's Bakery.

P: They had cereal way up high and they had a stick with a hook for whatever cereal you wanted and they would reach up there and tumble that box of cereal down.

I: But you didn't just run out to the store whenever.

P: No. That was unheard of.

R: You would wait till Saturday to get it.

AM: Do you remember when tanner would come around?

(Man)

P: Yes. I'm glad you brought that up. He used to come up Textile Road in an enclosed body truck with whatever groceries you wanted. They stopped right in the road.

R: The closer to town you were they came on Saturday's and the further out you were they came on Wednesday and Saturday's.

P: Do you remember Charlie Tower? He came around with a panel with sweet rolls and whatever else, dinner rolls, long johns.

R: Mill's man came after that. Mill's Bakery.

AM: I remember Har's Market coming with meat or Smith one of the two.

(Man)

R: I think Leon Geyer lived off the Mill's Bakery truck for twenty years. (Laughter) He loved his sweets. That truck was there twice a week.

I: What other kind of services came down? Such as sharpening knives, implements?

P: None that I know of. We've done about everything in our shop on the farm. We were plumbers, electricians, and blacksmith's forge. I think Leon Geyer's farm had a blacksmith's forge. I don't think Cody's did. Wayne's dad was good at fixing things and making repairs.

W: Yeah, he had a Ford...The big thing I remember being delivered is fuel oil, gas and grease.

P: A truck would come and fill five gallon buckets and we would pour it into our fifty five gallon barrel. Right?

W: Well we had an underground tank.

P: When I was real small they would fill these five gallon buckets. They had a tally on the door of the truck and every time you would fill a bucket, he would turn that and that would keep track of how many buckets you would have. Then later they had a hose that would be pumped into your tank.

I: And that's fuel oil?

W: We ran fuel oil in our John Deer and gas in the cars. Of course during the war talking about the **some pond? And another pond?** You would have coupons in order to get gas for your tractor and sometimes you would **snitch?** Little ones while they put it in the car.

(Wayne ?)

R: The Rolly Man and the Watchman's man would come too.

P: That's right.

I: Who are the Rally man and the Watchman's man?

R: **something products?** Pills, vitamins.

AM: Did every farm have a dinner bell?

(Lady)

P: Ours did.

AM: The Wilson's farm had one. Was there a code when you rang the dinner bell for lunch or if you needed help?

(Lady)

P: They always rang it a 12:00 p.m. and dad had a team of horses that would answer that dinner bell. If there was a problem in between lunch and supper like when the icehouse caught fire they would ring the bell and the neighbors knew.

AM: So it would be continues?

(Lady)

P: They would ring it for a long time and people would know you needed help.

AM: Did they only ring it a 12:00 p.m.?

(Lady)

P: I think they would only ring it at noon because farmers were out in the field.

AM: Did the Cody farm have a dinner bell?

(Lady)

P: Not sure.

AM: There are stories of the Cody dinner bell and the rope going down through the kitchen.

(Lady)

P: In the Wilson farm?

AM: In Wilson farm.

(Lady)

P: Ours used to go down through the kitchen but dad took the dinner bell off the roof when we got a new roof. I still have the dinner bell at my house up on a post.

AM: Do you ring it at 12:00 p.m.

(Lady)

P: No. (Laughter)

AM: My grandmother was so precise my dad said that the neighbors would sit there watches by their dinner bell when it rang at 11:45 p.m.

(Man)

AM: Where was your farm?

(Man)

P: Are you familiar with where **Sutherland?** School is located? Where Silo Ridge subdivision is at on Textile Road west of State Street, east of Lohr Road ? In fact it runs down Lohr Road then comes down Textile Road .

AM: Where was your farm house?

(Man)

P: In the subdivision on Textile Road , about five hundred feet east of Lohr Road .

AM: In early agricultural often times the mill with a steam engine would blow a whistle with a different code and that would indicate what the weather conditions were to tell the farmers. Do you remember any traditions like that?

(Man)

P: I don't but it sounds like it might have been a good idea.

AM: Do you remember the saw mill at Lohr Road and Textile Road ?

(Man)

P: No but I have always been told there was one there.

AM: How did the railroad affect you at school? Did everyone look out the window when a train went by?

(Man)

P: Yes. It was an excuse to look out the window.

R: Didn't happen that often.

AM: Back then it was maybe four a day.

(Man)

P: Usually mid morning. Then the section car would go everyday? I don't remember anymore. You could hear it coming.

AM: Did the train ever set fire to your land with the sparks?

(Man)

P: No. They would come down there in the spring that threw flames out to burn the dead stuff off and the followed behind with a tank to put out the fire.

R: They would burn the railroad right of way. That was fun to watch.

Side B

AM: Were you related to the Paul's in Scio Twp. near Lima Center ?

(Man)

P: No. Dad had a cousin near Whitmore Lake . Guy Paul, now passed away. He is the only Paul around that I know was related.

AM: My great grand father married **something?** Paul. The farm is still in the family.

(Man)

I: Did you go visit family or have family visit?

P: On Sundays.

I: So your relatives from Whitmore Lake would visit or did you have closer ones?

P: Mostly mothers family, her sisters and brother.

I: So you would go to church on Sundays and have a big meal? Then the family would come visit?

P: Yes. Sundays were always a big meal. We had a pie at noon and cake at night, homemade. Good cake, it would last four days.

R: Then you would go back to the barn at 5:00 p.m.

AM: Did you do the entertainment? My mother came from southern Minnesota and the big things on Saturday nights were everyone went into town. They would sit on their cars or benches, they didn't do anything, well the men probably went to the bar. Did you do that in Saline?

(Lady)

P: Mother bought groceries and we would walk down the street to the international dealer, he was open on Saturday nights. Us boys and dad would go down there and visit with the farmers that would come in there.

I: While your mom was doing the grocery shopping?

P: Yes. That was our entertainment for the week.

I: Did you go to church?

P: Yes

I: What church?

P: St. Paul United Church of Christ . Our grandfather and dad hauled stones from our farm in the winter time with a bob sled and a team of horses with a blanket around the stones for the foundation. Dad was the second Conformation class when the church opened. They just celebrated one hundred years last year.

AM: I want my kids to hear this. When you were a bad boy how were you punished?

(Lady)

P: I was never bad. (Laughter) I would get my mouth washed out with soap.

AM: You were ever whooped with a belt or a paddle.

(Lady)

P: I never had a spanking. All dad and mother would have to do is look at us and we knew what they meant. When we went some place you'd be seen and not heard.

AM: He (Russ) must have had the whoopen. (Laughter)

R: I know when the old man took off his belt you better be **something?** (Laughter) We had it coming.

P: I probably had it coming too but dad didn't believe in that.

I: What about in the school house? Did the teacher have to lay down the law?

R: She threaten a lot.

P: When that ruler came down on her desk your heart skipped a beat. If you were busy studying, and not knowing it was going to happen, it was like the roof was falling in.

R: She had your attention.

P: You better believe it.

AM: When you went to school did you dress any different.

(Lady)

P: We wore blue jeans. We had new blue jeans in the fall when we started school, every fall.

AM: So you wouldn't dress the same on a Saturday?

(Lady)

P: No. I don't remember how we dressed when we went into town. We may have worn blue jeans.

R: Maybe overalls

P: I'm seventy five years old, you are testing my memory. (Laughter)

AM: In the early 1800's the ground water level in this area was up about twelve to fifteen feet higher than it is now. We tend not to remember how things have changed dramatically over the years and we measure everything by today's circumstances. Do you have any memories of problems on Textile Road with water levels and the road washing off, marshes and of course there was quick sand at the hog leg on Thomas Road . Do you have any memories of any of that?

(Man)

P: We had that big flood when the dam went out in Saline and the water was over Textile Road in 1968. That's the only time I remember water being over Textile Road just west of the school house.

R: I remember the year when the airport got here, their wastebasket was floating in the middle of State Street on a Saturday morning.

I: We have been talking about for about an hour now; is there any closing remarks or closing memories?

P: I can't think of anything else.

AM: According to oral tradition there was a church near the intersection of Textile Road and Platt Road . There was talk about the beams being used for various things. Do you have any memory or discussions of that particular church?

(Man Ed?)

R: I don't remember a church there at all.

P: The only thing I remember on Platt and Michigan Avenue was Katie's Corner, the grocery store.

AM: May have been before your time.

(Man Ed?)

R: Katie's store, which was quite a place.

P: Yeah.

I: Well thank you very much, I appreciate your time and sharing your memories with us. Thank you. (Applause)

P: Thank you.