

Mrs. Tillie Marie Sancrant 6263 Wells Rd. Ida Township June 17, 1958

Mrs. Sancrant was born in 1869 and has spent all her life in Monroe County. At 89, with great grandchildren to her credit, she lives on a farm near the former Wells Cranberry Marsh in a house she says is well over 100 years old (but now greatly altered and added to) where she moved some 42 years ago.

Sancrant con't.

She is very alert and keen and active, despite considerable arthritis, appearing around 70. She does her own housework, keeps a sizeable garden, keeps 150 chickens, plus ducks. For years she has done a thriving egg business with customers from as far away as Toledo who apparently love to stop by to chat with her. She has seen egg prices as low as 19¢ a dozen (around 1900) and as high as 69¢. These prices are hardly comparable, she says, because nowadays eggs are graded so carefully as to size whereas prices used to be for "coop run" eggs - i.e. large and small ones mixed together. Currently she charges 40¢ which is 10¢ per dozen cheaper than the local market.

She is full of fun, loves to go places and it is said she dances to this day, although she denied it. She could though, I'm convinced. Her humor and good cheer are remarkable.

Her girlhood was spent in the one-room log house in which she was born near Yargerville and Strasburg Roads about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Zion church there. This tiny home had a loft, reached by a ladder through a hole in the ceiling, where the 11 children slept.

The parents had a bed but the children slept on ticks placed on the floor. Each spring the ticks were emptied, washed, and as soon as the grain was threshed, filled with fresh oat straw. Sometimes wheat straw was used, but it was harder and less comfortable to lie on, and sometimes shredded corn husks. These latter weren't too bad if just the inner husks were used. During the daytime the ticks were piled on top of each other so that there'd be some floor space, but at night they pretty well covered the entire floor.

The children played many of the things children play today - drop-the-handkerchief, hide and seek, etc. - but had few toys. They worked too.

Their father, John Poland, never owned any land but farmed on shares or did odd jobs - helping with harvesting, chopping wood, etc. It was customary for the owner of the ground to get $\frac{1}{3}$ of the proceeds of the crop if the share-cropper furnished the cost of the seed and production and his own labor. When the owner paid half of the costs of seed and expenses and the share-cropper the other half, the division of profit was fifty-fifty - the use of the land being held equal in value with the labor of working it.

John Poland chopped wood at 50¢ a cord. Tillie along with her brothers and sisters worked with him piling the short sticks into rectangular piles. The lifting and carrying was hard work.

The woods in that area contain many oaks - about $\frac{1}{2}$ of the total - the rest of the trees being mainly ash, maple, and hickory. Sometimes 3 cords of wood were obtained from a single tree. The largest one Tillie recalls as being an oak of fully 4' diameter. The hickory logs were prized as they furnish great heat and their splints were used to make baskets in Dundee.

The children also worked in the fields with their father at grain harvesting time following him as he cut the wheat with a great wooden cradle. Tillie has raked many acres, gathering the sheafs after they have been tied with a long stem of the wheat itself by twisting it into a sort of knot (but not actually tied into one), and setting them into shocks.

John Poland, if not a money maker, was a good provider and the family never lacked for food. He salted and smoked pounds and pounds of meat for the 13 mouths he had to feed, made apple butter by the barrel, dried apples by the bushels.

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These dried apples when soaked in water and cooked with raisins and sorghum made a wonderful dish, esteemed worthy of company.

Tillie recalls their family meals thus: pancakes and bacon for breakfast; potatoes and home cured meat and johnny cake for dinner at noon; white bread (or mush and milk) and "whatever was handy" for supper.

Usually the family had real coffee in the house but sometimes when the roads were so muddy that the going was so hard for the horses that trips to town were almost impossible and then people used what they had available rather than strain their horses. The people used to say they lived "on the Yargerville clay."

Ersatz coffee was made by browning rye in the oven and then grinding it. Barley, too, could be used - or corn. Fully ripe ears of field corn were roasted in the oven to the point that they were almost burnt - added to boiling water, this corn-coffee tasted real good.

Whenever company came to the house a meal was always served - it was part of the hospitable welcome with which guests were received.

Tillie recalls the weekend parties held in this little one-room log house when a sleigh full of people (mostly relatives) used to drive over from Whiteford. This crowd included her father's father, John, and some of his 21 children, among others. This John, a farmer, had married Maria Compeau of Monroe, but she had died young and he married twice afterwards, hence his large family. The sleigh also contained a fiddler, Dick Guy (sp? pronounced "Ghee" - French) a well-known Whiteford fiddler and caller for the square dances.

It was a jolly, robust crowd that fully enjoyed Tillie's father's barrels of hard cider that were always on hand. While the Poland house was small it was a place where people liked to go.

Tillie recalls one Saturday night when the whole Poland family was getting ready for bed. Father stepped outside into the frosty air. Pretty soon he dashed back inside and said, "Marie, get things going. I can hear Hank Burnham three miles off. The Whiteford gang are coming over." (This is the Burnham who lived in the old house now occupied by the Yapes whom I interviewed near Deerfield June 27th.)

Great hustling followed this announcement.

All of the kids were packed off to bed in the loft. The furniture was shoved back into corners, and mother fired up the wood stove and put a great kettle of dried apples on to cook. They were ready for their guests by the time the sleigh reached their door and the people poured out. They were already feeling happy and high spirited as they'd brought some jugs of cider along and had been drinking enroute.

The dancing started and continued off and on all Saturday night and most of the next day - with time-out for eating once or twice.

Tillie remembers Frank Burnham particularly. "He was genuine French," she says (with that name!). And he loved to dance. She remembers him whirling around that little room and calling out "Allemand left - and pommes dese'."

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(Pommes dese! - the spelling is probably wrong but it was some such word and it meant "dried apples.") Everytime he said, "pommes des!" he'd whirl around so he could whisk his finger into the apples on the stove which were cooling by this time so that the foam was raising the cover off the pan. How he could get this hot stuff to his mouth without burning his finger, Tillie just doesn't know to this day! She thinks he must have been boiled himself!

All of these people were French through and through. Tillie's family spoke French up to the time she went to school. The family name was altered at this time to the Poland spelling - it had formerly been Palau or some such name (Tillie doesn't even remember how it sounded for sure, let alone how it was spelled).

Tillie's mother had been Marie Boudrie who had come from Montreal in 1837 as a tiny child with her father, John Boudrie, to Monroe. He was a young man at the time. He settled on the north side of the river and worked at whatever he could find to do and fished and trapped.

Tillie's mother often told of their experiences with the Indians. Her general impression of them is that they caused no trouble except when they had been drinking - and "they were great ones for drinking," she added.

Grandfather Boudrie spoke the Indian language and was on good terms with them. A young Indian boy who lived near the Boudries made it a point to come to their house for breakfast - usually soup was what they gave him for they always had a kettle of that around. Usually they didn't mind the boy coming, but it became a nuisance eventually. So grandfather put a great amount of pepper into the boy's bowl of soup one day - so much that the boy could hardly swallow it. He'd take a mouthful, gulp it and then blow out air to cool his tongue. "Eat it up" grandfather said in Indian, "eat it all up." So the boy did even though he didn't want to.

That very day the Indians were given their "gift from the government" and as was customary on such occasions they built a great bonfire to celebrate and proceeded to drink and dance around the fire. The Indians carried long sticks which they stuck in the fire and kept smoldering on the ends. If anyone made a mistake in the dance or did something that wasn't liked by the others the burning stick was poked at him. Often cruelty resulted. During the celebration that day the little Indian boy was killed. When grandfather heard of his death he regretted very much his having forced the little boy to eat the peppery soup that morning.

This group of Indians had a camp on the north side of the River Raisin. Their homes were made of bark over poles of wood. The bark was in large flat pieces obtained in the spring of the year when the bark could best be pulled off the trunks of the trees in this fashion: a split was made along the full length of a log, then with a flat chisel the bark was loosened along the length of the cut, going gradually around the diameter of the tree. When the bark was all loosened it was laid on the ground (bark-side up) and, flattened with weights, allowed to dry.

Tillie's father once built a bark shack like an Indian's for her mother to use as a summer kitchen behind their Yargerville house. It was a real luxury not to have a wood stove going in your house in hot weather.

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Tillie says her mother told her how the white people took advantage of the Indians frequently. The story of how the Lorangers got the property at the south end of Macomb Street where the brick house stands on Rosalie Street is one that she insists is true. The Lorangers paid the Indians \$1.25 an acre for 100 acres - the price was set at that amount because that was what a gallon of whiskey cost - and the area was determined by the distance that could be measured by a man riding a horse around a square for 15 minutes on each of the 4 sides of the square.

Tillie's schooling was obtained at Gayville School (now a dwelling) mainly, and also for awhile at Wood School and at Muir School near Samaria.

When she was 10 she was sent to live at St. Mary's Academy (southwest corner Elm and Anderson Street at that time) to learn her catechism. She lived not in the Academy part but in what was called the Orphanage, a part separated from the Academy by their Chapel.

There were about 35 or 40 youngsters in the Orphanage at that time (some were really orphans, others were there, like the Polands, for a purpose). They slept in narrow single beds arranged in long rows in one big room.

Each morning very early Sister rang a bell and the children had to sit up in bed and make the sign of the cross. She rang the bell again and the children hopped out of bed on to the floor. The bell rang again when it was time to go to the wash stand, to go for prayers at the orphan's chapel, to go for breakfast, etc.

The orphans waited on table, polished the floors, dusted and did lots of work. They were never allowed to go away from the building except for walks in lines supervised by the Sisters.

The walks were a part of the Sunday routine and usually they led to the cemetery. Tillie described one of these cemetery excursions: first, 4 of the littlest girls with baskets of flowers walked spreading blossoms for the priests who followed them to walk on. The priests were followed by the rest of the girls who, too, threw flowers for the nuns to walk on as they ended up the procession. All of the girls were dressed all in white - if they had no white dresses of their own the Sisters furnished them. There were board walks going all the way to the St. Josephs Cemetery in those days.

The Sisters were very good to their charges and Tillie really loved them. She loved her life there at the Orphanage, despite the work involved, and when it came time to leave when she'd finished her catechism she cried and cried and wanted to stay on. In fact she wanted to become a nun, but her mother wouldn't hear of it - wanted to keep her on at home.

As a special treat for the girls who had their First Communion that year Old Man Willetts donated hacks to take them all out to the County Farm. This was 1879 and the County Farm was new about that time. It was a big treat: the girls were taken thru all the rooms - even up on the roof where they could look far out over the countryside. They saw the inmates - all kinds of people: deformed, crazy, foolish, old - and pregnant women and girls. She remembers best a man whose legs were so twisted that he couldn't stand on them and had to sit all day long on a cabinet toilet stool - he was terrible to look at with his great popped-out eyes that looked like a frog's.

Sancrant con't.

Years later a woman Tillie knew always went there when she became pregnant: she was mentally retarded and had long since been deserted by her husband but continued to have children.

Tillie's mother died the year after her stay at the Orphanage and her father remarried a year or so afterwards. At the age of 13 Tillie was on her own - she began a series of jobs doing housework. She didn't mind the housework and got along fine everywhere except one place. This was when she worked for a family named Wilson who lived on North Monroe Street near the power house. Mrs. Wilson was Irish and very fussy and put on style. She had "a hole in the wall" between the kitchen and dining room so she could call out to Tillie to bring in the food and dishes. Mr. Wilson worked for Ilgenfritz Nursery. Tillie's wages were \$7.25 a week - she did "everything" for the family.

At 17 she married James Sancrant who was 35 and whom she had always known as he'd been a neighbor who'd spent as much time at the Poland's house as at his own and had many times rocked Tillie as a baby in her cradle. He was always good to Tillie, but he did drink too much at times - but Tillie says, "most French men did."

She was married at St. Mary's, like everyone else in their family, and wore a wine colored dress with velour trim, long sleeves with white lace at the edges as well as at the neck, and she wore a tiny poke-type bonnet with plumes on it that tied under her chin. Her sister made the outfit. She wore black shoes (no white ones ever then), but can't recall whether they were low or high - she thinks the latter.

The next day she and Jim started housekeeping in a little house east of US 25 off Stein Road on the first road going south (probably Lajiness Road). This area was known at that time as "Skunktown", supposedly because a fellow who lived there, named Albert Russeau (sp?), spent much of his time hunting skunks and frequently got one. The whole neighborhood smelled because of him.

The young couple started meagerly enough. They had 6 chairs, a table, a stove, and a bunk bed intended for one person, a few sheets and towels and one comforter that Tillie's mother-in-law gave her because they had nothing else in the line of quilts. ("You see I had no mother to provide anything and I'd only been engaged 3 months and hadn't had time to make much for myself, working as I was," Tillie explained.) The comforter was split the entire length right down the middle, but Tillie sewed it up so it was all right.

Tillie's wedding dress had neither hoops nor bustle, but she has worn both in her day. "When a girl wore a hoop she had to be wise in managing it. If you didn't pick it up with one hand in back as you sat down it would bell up in front and show all your underwear."

Of course if you were used to going to bed up in a loft you wouldn't be scared to show your pants!

Tillie remembers one time the priest came to call on her mother when she wasn't dressed nicely enough to see him so she scurried up to the loft meanwhile admonishing Jim Sancrant (the neighbor boy who was always there and whom Tillie was to marry) not to tell where she was. He didn't but one of the little boys said, "Mamma is hiding upstairs." So poor Marie had to climb down that ladder, trying to wrap her dress around her legs all too unsuccessfully. She never forgot her confusion and embarrassment.

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No permit to bury or doctor's certificate was needed.

Tillie tells about a neighbor woman who had twins born to her alone because the doctor from LaSalle refused to come for some reason. The husband came to Tillie's and asked her to return with him which she did. The twins were dead. So Tillie made up some little flannel dresses for the babies, washed them and dressed them. Then she made a double casket out of some boards and covered it all over both inside and outside with the flannel the mother had intended to use for diapers and it really looked just lovely. The family had relations over at Lambertville so they took the twins over there to the cemetery and buried them - there was no funeral - just a simple family event.

As a child Tillie often went with her family to the neighborhood of her present home to pick huckleberries and cranberries. They took along lunch and water and spent all day, picking and playing. It took much fruit to feed a family the size of theirs. As there were no jars, the preserving was done in crocks, either by a pickling process or preserving with sugar or, more likely, molasses. The cranberries were so plentiful that you could pull off handfuls just by running your fingers along the branches. In those days Tillie never dreamed she'd someday be living there.

Most of the soil in this area is peat. "Nobody knows how deep down it goes." It has been stripped from the surface on both sides of Wells Road south of Tillie's house and the fields lie considerably lower than the road itself. The Heint (sp?) Greenhouse Company of Toledo has been cutting off the peat from the east side of the road for some time now.

Wells Road used to be named Plug Road and it ended at the gate which shut off the Cranberry Marsh when it was first producing cranberries in the old days.

There is a local joke about all the people on Plug Road own only old plugs for horses - but the name really comes from the fact the road was plugged by the gate and you couldn't go through.

Old Man Everts of Toledo bought the cranberry marsh from the government. When he died his widow sold it to Old Man Stone whose widow sold it to Jones who passed it on to his son who got too old to work it any more. A fire burned for many months and destroyed many of the cranberry bushes too (the peat soil burn obstinately and it is difficult to stop a blaze once established).

Originally the cranberry bushes were wild. It is as easy to start new plants as to start willows - just poke a hole in the ground with a pointed stick and put a shoot into it and rooting takes place. BUT it takes 5 years for a plant to produce cranberries.

About 2 years ago Mr. Jones gave up and sold the marsh. Nowadays you can't tell where it was: the new owner has tilled, drained, and plowed it all over and it's hard to believe that only a few years ago there would be as many as 150 automobiles parked at the marsh at one time - they were the cars of the pickers who came miles around to work there. The price for picking was usually around 3¢ a quart and the quarts filled up rapidly at the height of the season. Usually after the peak was reached the pickers worked on equal shares with the owner of the marsh. The only other cranberry marsh that Tillie knows of is 4 miles west and a little south of this one - off Summerfield Road.

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In the 1880's Old Tom Day (Bill's father) had a "molasses factory" (ie. sorghum mill) on South Otter Creek Road near the United Brethren Church in LaSalle ("not far from Nort Kinne's place where Pardons live now"). He ground up the cane, squeezed out the juice and boiled it in great copper pans (copper seems to give flavor to things made in it - apple butter is an example: it never tastes the same made in pans other than copper ones). He kept the sorghum in great barrels to sell - or you could take your own cane to be made into sorghum and pay him so much a gallon.

Every farmer used to like to raise his own cane. It grows in high stalks that can be stripped of its leaves either by hand or with a paddle used as a flail. Then the stalks are cut and tied into bundles - often willow branches are used for tying - then the cane is put into the grinder.

South Otter Creek Road, between US 25 and Telegraph Road used to be known as Miller Road - named for Lucien Miller's father whose home was there. Lucien and Clif Miller used to be known as fine fiddlers and were in great demand at dances.

In fact most of the roads were named for the early residents on them. A good example of this practice is seen on Stein Road which continues across the LaSalle-Ida Township line to become Todd Road where the Todds lived.

On the north side of Todd, just east of Hanson's brick house, and kitty-corner from Dwyer's Cemetery there is a small family cemetery belonging to a family named (to the best of Tillie's recollection) Bordel or similar to it. The family was well-to-do and it was said that some of them had been buried in the vault there with jewelry. Anyway the grave robbers did their work there - the caskets were opened - but nobody knows whether anything of value was found.

The first doctor Tillie knows about in LaSalle was Dr. William Knab who lived on a little hill next to O'Connor's Saloon. This was Neil O'Connor and his place was on the southwest corner of the intersection where Art Neidermyer now is. She thinks the first store in LaSalle was Mike Knab's on the northwest corner of LaPlaisance and US 25. Sharkey owned a saloon one block away from O'Connor's.

She described the old horse-drawn hearse used at LaSalle with it's high wheels and the little seat for the driver, high up in front and away from the body of the carriage, who looked swell indeed with his tall plug hat and his cutaway suit. The driver was always accompanied by a second man, his helper who was likewise outfitted.

Even the horses were decked out - regardless of the weather - even in the dead of winter - they wore black fly nets with heavy black tassels that hung down to the horses knees. The horses were not owned by the undertaker in LaSalle but were rented or loaned to him by farmers just for the occasion.

It was customary to use matched gray or white horses for funerals of the young and always black horses for the aged.

The only preparation of the corpse for burial was to wash it. In hot weather a rag rinsed out in soda-water was kept over the face when no one was around. Of course it depended on what a person died from whether the body was kept around or not - and how long - but it was usually 3 days.