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Neighbors

Oral history preserves glimpses of township past

By MARY HILL
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FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP — Blodwin “Blondie” Anderson fell in love with her future husband in grade school.

In the 1930s, Blondie Lewis and Ray Anderson attended a one-room school heated by woodstove. The stove was located toward the back of the room. School benches were located along the back wall, behind it.

“Ray and I would walk back there and steal a kiss,” Blondie Anderson said. “That’s where it all started.”

It’s one of many memories Anderson has shared for Franklin Township’s Oral History Project. Funded by grants, the project is intended to preserve Franklin Township history.

“We realized that much of the life and times of our residents from 1890 through 1940 was

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MARY HILL/Erie Times-News

Blondie Anderson reminisces about growing up in Franklin Township.

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History: Talking up past

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soon to be lost with the passing of those who have these memories," said township Supervisor Dave Henderson.

The oral history project began four years ago when the township applied for two state grants totaling \$13,750 from the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

"The township crew was reminiscing one day about how it was," Henderson said. "Larry Pieper is our elder employee. He always remembers how it was back then, and how it is today."

The conversation made supervisors realize that the township had no documented history since the 1880s. Henderson talked to Ihor Bemko, Ph.D., a professor in the history and anthropology department at Edinboro University of Pennsylvania, for help in documenting what it was like to grow up and live in Franklin Township through the years.

Bemko came up with questions and graduate students to interview longtime residents. Each discussed the same general themes and were recorded for both audio and video.

Equipment for the project was purchased with grant funds.

And the results, Henderson said, are priceless. Many of the township's senior citizens shared stories about growing up on family farms.

"Times were tough, snows were real bad and the roads were really bad," Henderson said. "People today are very impatient about the services they receive. You get three to four inches of snow and they want the roads plowed immediately so they can go to Wal-Mart."

For Anderson, 81, who now lives in Washington Township, the project gave her an opportunity to record a lifetime of memories for her family. Each oral history project participant will receive his or her recollections in book form, and on compact disc, cas-



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Franklin Township tax collector June Shelhamer, township supervisors Dave Henderson, center, and John Sachar prepare to ship a copy of the township's completed oral history project to Harrisburg.

WANT TO KNOW?

About what: Franklin Township Oral History Project

Where: Copies of the oral history available at Edinboro branch of the Erie County Library; Edinboro University of Pennsylvania library; General McLane and Northwestern high school libraries; at Franklin Township Municipal Building, 10411 Route 98; and online at <http://twp.franklin.erie.pa.us/>

sette tape and videotape.

Anderson was interviewed for about two hours, and chuckles at what her family and friends' reactions to her memories may be.

"One year in school we were very, very bad kids," she said. "There were four of us that had gone through school together, Blair Dunton, Jimmy Wheeler, Goldie Kovaly and I."

Fortunately for teacher Thora Harris and unfortunately for the timid substitute, Harris had a baby and went on leave for a time that year, Anderson said.

"She just could not control kids," Anderson said of the sub-

stitute. "And of course we knew it and we sure took advantage."

Classmate Phyllis Dunton climbed up onto a cupboard that reached to about 18 inches from the schoolhouse ceiling.

"We would give Phyllis a pail of water with a dipper, and when (the substitute) would go to get her down, she would pour a dipper of water on her," Anderson said.

"One day we stayed outside throwing stones at the bell just to hear the bell ring, and then when (the substitute) would stick her head out to get us all back in, a stone would hit her on the head. We broke her glasses five times in one year."

Anderson heard about the oral history project from longtime Franklin Township resident Diane Horn.

"Diane wanted to know if I would be interested in doing it, and I said, 'I'd be delighted to,'" Anderson said.

The township has sent copies of the completed oral history project interviews to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg. Copies are also available locally.

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