

East Falls Past--Rose Whitty Interview

The Fallser, January 2009, by Wendy Moody

Preserving the memories of long-time residents is an essential part of our Society's mission. Oral histories provide a first-person, anecdotal spin on our past that formal histories do not capture.

Here's an excerpt from a 1981 interview with lifelong resident, Rose Welsh Whitty:

Tell me about your family. I was born on Stanton Street on July 27, 1899, one of 7 children. I'm now 82 and have lived here all my life. In 1828 my grandfather, age 16, emigrated from Ireland to work at Powers & Weightman chemical plant. Their employees lived on Laboratory Hill (near Calumet) where my mother, Rose McHale, was born. She married James Welsh, who was born on Sunnyside, in 1860.



Tell me about your home. I grew up at 3513 Sunnyside. The house, one of eight built in 1874 without a bathroom or heat, sold for \$2500. My parents bought ours for \$1900 because of the poor condition. In 1918 people began to remodel, adding plumbing, heat, and electricity.

Why then? After WWI people had money from cashing in their war bonds.

Was your street paved? Our street was cobblestone until the 1940's when it was covered with black tar. All the kids came with their bikes to ride on the smooth surface.

Describe the stores. There were all kinds – fish houses, butchers, dry goods, ice cream, feed stores for horses. The bakery opened at 5am so mothers could buy buns. Stores closed late. Grocers would come around to take orders and deliver later that day. We knew which days the hucksters came to sell fish.

The businessmen held an annual picnic in West Grove; we went by trolley with the family basket. There was free lemonade, ice cream, and tickets for amusement rides.

When did it change? When the supermarkets came. There was an Acme at Ridge & Midvale and an A&P at Tilden and Vaux.

Have you school memories? I attended the old graystone St. Bridget's. Girls and boys were in separate classes. I liked studying. There was just one exam in June; ones who didn't study didn't advance.

On Friday afternoons in December we made Christmas presents, like pin cushions or hat pin holders. The Christmas story was read as we made gifts.

I loved spelling bees. The captains picked the best spellers. An award was given at year-end.

Did you pay for school? There was no cost, only 25 cents a week for school repairs. My brother went to Roman Catholic High for \$15 a year.

Did you go to high school? No. I worked in the plush mill's velvet department until my brother could afford to send me to business college. I ended up making more than the girls who went to high school!