

Garman, Ethel
(Mrs. Horace B. Garman)

Interview by
Miss Betty Turnell

for the
Decatur Public Library

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Mrs. Horace B. Garman Interview

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This is Betty Turnell speaking for the Decatur Public Library. Our guest today is Mrs. Horace B. (Ethel) Garman. She is going to tell us of her experiences "growing up in Macon County."

Mrs. Garman:

I had a wonderful time growing up in Macon County. It was a very pleasant place to live. I went to the Marietta Street and Gastman Schools as a youngster. I was an only child and my father was interested in playing with me. I had a pony which he made me take care of. I really didn't - I think he did it all himself, and he taught me to turn cartwheels and he taught me to play marbles with the boys, and he would take me to the Three-I ball games. There was a ball field at the north edge of town. You had to go out on the open air street cars they had in those days.

I thought it would be interesting to tell you a little bit about the Corn Carnivals. I just barely remember them. I don't think there were very many after I was born in 1894, but I do have a picture of one, which was held in 1898. The buildings around Central Park had the fronts decorated with pictures made of corn cobs - blue and yellow and red and white. They made pictures of flags and the insignia of the state.

One of the things I used to love to do when I was a child was to come up town with my mother because always she took me to Louis Nichols' candy store to have a chocolate soda. That was at the north end of the 300 block of North Water Street - not very far from the Bijou Theatre, which A. Sigfried operated in Decatur. I went to many movies there, and there was a man who played the piano -

his name was Rex Messersmith - and I thought he was just wonderful, and a young girl named Dixie Harris sang to the music and pictures.

Another candy store I patronized whenever I could possibly get there was Sam Malleous which was near the Bachrach store on Merchant Street.

Among other things that were entertaining were balloon ascensions, independent exhibitors who would come and perform for us. And a merry-go-round would come and establish itself on a vacant lot. We would get nickels from our parents to ride on the horses of the merry-go-round.

I was very much interested in the library, first in going to the library with my mother, before I had a card myself. It was a lovely library. Along one wall of the hall was a basin of red marble - I can see it now - and above it was a plaque which recited that it was a Carnegie Library. I think that plaque was kept when the library was torn down. I hope they kept that plaque and that marble fountain. I was told that it was stored at the court house, but where it is now, I don't know.

Alice Evans (during my early days) was the librarian. Even later on, when I was on the library board, I remember Miss Abel and Florence Love and the women who took care of me at the library.

As a child, once a month there were new books at the library, and those in the children's room were particularly interesting to me. I read all the books of the little Japanese cousin series and my little German cousin, etc., and all those. I read all the Elsie books and all the Pepper books and the Little Colonel books. I read everything I could put my hands on and I hung on the door knob before the door would open on those Monday mornings at 9 o'clock so that I would be sure to be the first to get just the new books I wanted. They would let us take out just two.

I remember a little later on when I was in high school, Miss Jane Hamilton presented to the library a collection of original Lincoln photographs which she had made. She had become a good friend of Alice Evans, our librarian, and she came to Decatur and stayed with Mrs. Evans. I was on some sort of committee to help with the occasion. Out in front of the library, a platform was built and the Goodman band was on the platform. Miss Hamilton made a speech and presented the photographs to the library. O. W. Smith was the mayor then, and he accepted them and thanked her. Then this committee I was on took Miss Hamilton and the mayor and Mrs. Evans and went to the St. Nick, which was the place to go in those days. When we got there, Miss Hamilton almost had hysterics when she realized she had on one gray stocking and one black one.

She was a charming woman. What has happened to that collection of Lincoln photographs, I haven't the slightest idea. I hope it is still in existence.

When the Y.W.C.A. was organized in Decatur, my mother signed me up to take swimming lessons and to take gymnasium lessons. We wore bloomers, I remember. They were very curious things.

About that same time money was being collected to build the building for the YWCA; Billy Sunday came to Decatur. Everyone was very much interested in him. The tabernacle was a temporary sort of building located where the Greek church is now on West Eldorado Street. Mr. Sunday had a new baby while he was here. (I can remember all these silly things about those times!) He contributed to the fund for the YWCA by giving his diamond ring. Frank Curtis, who ran the jewelry store in town, bought it and gave the money to the fund, and as I recall, we got \$500 for the contribution from Mr. Sunday.

Later on, when the building was about thirty years old, Mrs. J. D. Moore, who was president, died suddenly. I was vice-president and I became president. My board was a very interesting board. They were very prominent

women in Decatur - Mrs. Eda K. Pegham and Mrs. T. T. Roberts and Mrs. Elizabeth Wells and Myra Bell Ewing. We had an executive committee luncheon meeting every Tuesday before board meetings once a month and those luncheon meetings were real occasions - really delightful. The women on the board - several of them - would drive down in their little electric phaetons and park in front of the building and in front of the post office next door, and I would come down in my Chevrolet, and I would drive around and park behind the building - not because I minded driving a Chevrolet, but because there was room for me there and I could go there.

The YWCA did much for the girls who worked in the war plants in and near Decatur and we did what was probably the first work with colored girls. Crystal Bird was one of the prominent colored women of that period, and the club organized for the colored girls which was called the "Crystal Bird" Club. Whenever we spoke of those girls, we always called them the "Crystal Birds." They were a very nice group. One of them was Georgia Leaflet, who did social work for colored people. She was one of my good friends. She died not long ago.

I wanted to mention that, while I was in grade school they used to take us to the Greenwood Cemetery for - they called it "Decoration Day" then. On Decoration Day we would decorate the graves of both the Civil War Blue and Grey soldiers in Greenwood Cemetery.

I joined Study Class about 1943, and it has been one of the most rewarding things that has happened to me. It was organized in 1901 and many of the women who had been on the YWCA board were members of Study Class. We have a special vocabulary. We do what we call "topics." The art class had been organized by Mrs. James Millikin. When the library was torn down, in the cornerstone they found a little book in Mrs. Millikin's handwriting. It had a list of

the members of the art class. When the Study Class was organized, they were supposed to be the daughters and friends of daughters of Art Class members. They were girls who had gone away to school and had come home. There wasn't any radio or television or that sort of thing. They had to make their own amusement, and they decided that since the Art Class studied "Art", the Study Class would study history. During the years we've studied just about everything and even repeated. The last two years we've studied Italy, particularly the Renaissance. Many Study Class meetings were held in the home of Mrs. Alice Bering Evans, a charter member. Her home was the former home of Governor Oglesby, later owned by the Bering family, and now known as the Governor Oglesby Mansion.

We would often have a "Frolic" - in fact, every year. I always think it's amusing when we call the activities of the Study Class a "Frolic."

The house was adapted to theatricals. We would dress in an upstairs room. We did skits and funny "take-offs" of the things we studied, and in the first year I was on the program of Study Class, I had to sing a song about being a little Canadian fish. I made my costume out of a green Norman's dress bag, by adding silver painted scales of a fish. I had that costume for years before I sold my home and finally cleaned out the attic.

Howard W. Schaub (owner of the Review) was a trustee of the YWCA and was good at appointing me to do things. Along with Fran Lyons, I did case work for the Red Cross. We would investigate the young women who were the wives of boys who had gone in the army (in W.W. II) and who were having new babies and who were getting allowances from the army. I remember Mr. Schaub also appointed me on a bond sales drive and other jobs.

One of the things I remember is the dedication of the new city dam. On that occasion Johnny Weismueller was featured.

I don't believe I mentioned the Powers Grand Theatre. When I was in school, the Powers Grand Opera House was at the south end of Water Street, where the Orlando is now. I saw many famous people there - Bob Hope and Al Jolson. And there was also what they called a "stock company." They would have a different play every week. I think it cost about a quarter to get in. It was lots of fun to go. Boxes were reserved for celebrities.

About 1930, during the depression, the YWCA was in charge of a Christmas store, which was held in the old Herald building. At that time the Herald and Review had combined and no longer used the Herald building. Mr. Schaub, again, gave me a job - that of running the Christmas store. Margaret Wood and I ran it. We collected broken and unused toys - through the churches and different organizations. The painters' union and the carpenters' union painted and refurbished the toys. The women's societies and the churches made doll dresses. It was really quite exciting. We also collected food to give away. It was the first time for such a Christmas store although I believe in recent years they've had something similar.

Of course, there were many activities in town to help people during the depression. One was to have a "block man." I was married in 1930. Not long after that a program was started to include everyone employing a block man for half a day. I remember that my husband and I couldn't afford it but we did it anyway. We had a very good block man who was a skilled carpenter. Later on, when I was president of the YWCA I was able to hire him as our janitor at the new redone YWCA.

The YWCA had inherited about \$100,000 from Jake Latham, a prominent lawyer in Decatur, and was a wealthy man. We decided to use the money to renovate

the building. That contract, I was told, was the first sizable contract to be awarded in quite a long time because of the depression. The contract was given to Roy Christy.

We also ran Camp Kiwanis. Camp Kiwanis was made possible by Barney Fulton, who owned property on the lake and who gave us the land. The Kiwanis Club built the building for us with cottages around. I can remember on one occasion Gail Tallman and I washed all the dishes and made all the beds for the girls coming to the camp.

Mr. Schaub was one of our trustees and very active in the YWCA. His daughter Betty was our swimming teacher at Camp.