

News from Nan

NAN'S WRITINGS

NAN'S REMINISCENCES: HORSES AND CARS

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This post is part of a series of reminiscences that Nan (born 1906) wrote about her childhood in Minden City, Michigan. Most of the pieces were written sometime between 1990 and 1995.

This post describes the barn (later the garage) and the family's various modes of transportation that were housed or parked there.



Garage (former barn) behind the Red House

Driving the horses

The barn originally held a horse and buggy, and the animals slept there and had their babies there. (I remember going out to see new puppies – what a joy!)

One of my very earliest memories is of being allowed to hold the reins. I was driving the horse – what a thrill! Then when I was older, it was a thrill to drive the car, all by myself, all the way to Harbor Beach [a larger town than Minden City, located about 10 miles away on Lake Huron].

When the barn became a garage

We had one of the first automobiles, and that made the barn a garage. It was a Maxwell, which was the forerunner of Chrysler. Cars were more something to show off than of use as work horses. We still ran errands on foot, because only Dad drove the car.

In summer, on a nice evening after supper, you would go for a little ride. And because not many people had cars, you always took a neighbor along for the ride. Sometimes they would suggest that we stop for ice cream on the way home. I always held my breath, HOPING that Dad would say yes, but he almost never did! I couldn't imagine how he could turn down such a lovely treat!

When winter came, the car was put away. The radiator was drained, and the battery taken out. The car was jacked up to preserve the tires.

Early roads

Roads were not at all good in those early days. Most of them were just dirt, ungraveled and no hard surfaces. Some were corduroy, which is a road made of tree trunks or poles laid side by side, so that it looks like corduroy cloth. It is very bumpy riding, but serves well on wet ground, such as swamp.

In spring dirt roads turn to mud soup, so that even horses can hardly get through country roads. Even "improved" roads tend to get full of "pot holes." So until there began to be highways, driving was much limited even if you had a car. People who didn't have one and saw a car driver stuck in the mud used to delight in yelling, "Get a horse!"

Dad worked hard to get good roads built.

Negotiating hills on the way to Grandpa Schreiter's house

The early cars had little power, and when we visited Grandpa Schreiter in Forestville, we had to climb a little hill. We were never certain that the car would get to the top of the hill without sliding down backwards. When that happened, we had to get out of the car to lighten the load, and all adults in the car would push on the next try!



Alvin ("Grandpa") Schreiter, Forestville,
Michigan

Sunday drives with Dad to visit Grandma Riedel

My father was a dutiful son, who visited his mother regularly. In the early days, the whole family went, but as the older ones grew up, they had Sunday plans of their own, and Mother began staying home to attend to family matters there. The car was still a novelty, and I loved to ride, so I sometimes went with him. I also also enjoyed the time with my father, as he made comments on the crops and other things he saw along the way.

And when I came alone with my father, Grandma Riedel paid a little attention to me, too. I was, after all, her namesake! Although I didn't like my middle name, Augusta, it was hers, too, and I had it at her request! She used to take me to a room she kept as a kind of office, and she would find a coin or something for me. Once she gave me a watch and "silver" chain that she said she had earned by doing embroidery. That still surprises me: she was not at all domestic, and it was hard to imagine her sitting peacefully embroidering!



Marie Augusta ("Grandma") Joram Riedel

