

Milford Moments in Time – The Hilda Richman Lawrence Story **By Joyce M. Clark**

There is a saying that the more things change, the more they stay the same. For Hilda Richman Lawrence, this may be true. Hilda, born in 1921 and the youngest of eight children, lives on the same Milford property her great grandparents established back in the late 1830's.

Hilda's great grandparents, George and Mary Jane Richman, moved from England to the area back in 1835. George was a tailor apprentice in England but turned to farming once in America. George and Mary Jane owned the property off of Oakland near the railroad tracks.



**Hilda's grandparents Samuel and Josephine Richman on their Oakland property. The greenhouse is off to the right with Oak Grove Cemetery off in the distance on the left.
(Picture courtesy of Hilda Lawrence)**

At that time Old Plank Road, a toll road, curved around by their property. Mary Jane worked the toll booth, collecting tolls from all those who wanted to travel along the road down to the major thorough fare - Grand River. According to Hilda, Old Plank Road was named after the materials used to construct it, wood planks.

George and Mary Jane had three children, one of which was named Samuel, which is Hilda's grandfather. Samuel, born in 1850, initially sailed the Great Lakes as a wheelsman steering ships. Samuel married Josephine Coe and they settled onto the property on Oakland establishing a greenhouse business that they ran until 1920. Samuel also worked across the street at Oak Grove Cemetery as its sexton. The sexton maintains the cemetery property and in those days, dug the graves by hand.

Samuel and Josephine had one son named Fred, who was Hilda's father. Fred played on Milford High School's football team in the late 1890's and married Bertha McCurdy in

1900. Fred and Bertha had eight children (four boys and four girls), all raised on or near the property on Oakland. As with most families, they didn't have a lot of money, but they were happy.



Bertha Richman in 1944 (center) with her 8 children (from left Effie, Lewis, Hilda, Fred Junior, George, Margaret, Samuel, and Bertha Bell)

Lewis Richman was Hilda's oldest brother and was born prematurely weighing in at only three pounds. His mom fed him through an eye dropper and carried him around on a pillow. On cold evenings they would sit near the wood range oven with the door open and fire burning to keep Lewis warm. Lewis grew into a strong man and along with his brothers and sisters, doted over baby Hilda. There is 20 years difference between Lewis and Hilda.

Hilda's siblings took good care of her while she was growing up. She remembers going to them on occasions to bum a nickel here and there to go the picture show. Her parents didn't have a car, so she walked everywhere. Most of the walks took place along the railroad tracks heading into town or home from school.

Hilda, as with her father and siblings, graduated from Milford High School. She married Donald Lawrence, also a graduate of Milford High School, and raised their four children in Milford. Hilda remembers back in 1953 looking out the window in her backyard and seeing loads of trash swirling in the air. She ran out the front door and scooped up her youngest daughter Sally who was playing on the sidewalk and ran back into the house. That was the day a tornado plowed through town and knocked trees down on cars next door to her then home on Union Street.



Site of Milford's Post Office on the corner of Main Street and Commerce (now houses For Feet's Sake) back in 1953 after the tornado plowed through Milford. (Picture courtesy of Hilda Lawrence)

By 1962, after moving around a bit in town with her family, Hilda's family settled back on the Richman property on Oakland where her sister Effie also lived. Most of Hilda's siblings stayed in town building or living in homes up and down Oakland. Hilda's sister (Margaret) and mother (Bertha) became the family historians creating several volumes of scrapbooks containing all sorts of Milford history regarding family and friends. Hilda now maintains these chronicles. While speaking with Hilda about various historical Milford events such as tornados, train derailments, or weddings, Hilda pulls out a box or scrapbook and quickly turns to a newspaper article or picture illustrating the event.

As for personal family information, such items as pictures, apprentice papers from England, or wedding certificates are just a few steps away either in a frame hanging on the wall, or in a neatly organized scrapbook spanning many years and several generations.

Besides maintaining a slice of Milford's history, Hilda crochets afghan squares for Milford's Senior Center who will then take the squares and create lap blankets for wheelchair bound veterans. She also knits numerous new-born hats in either pink or blue which are then given to the new born babies delivered at Huron Valley Hospital. Both crocheting and knitting were taught to her by the wives of her older brothers over 60 years ago.

Three out of four of Hilda's children have remained in the area. Along with her children, several grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren, Hilda keeps quite busy while she continues to enjoy living on her great grandparent's land on Oakland.

2007 is the 175th Anniversary of Milford and in celebration of this major milestone, we are asking you to share some of your stories with the rest of the community. If you have a little Milford history to pass along, please contact Sue Bullard, Milford Historical Society President, at milfordhistory@yahoo.com. The Milford Historical Society is happy to document your story and share it with others.