



Waldo Fisher recounts his life

Monday, March 11, 2013

Waldo Vaughn Fisher, generally known as Red Fisher, passed from this life on 15 February 2013 at age 99. Waldo composed a short account of his life several years ago that provides insights into his life, experiences, and the times in which he lived. Waldo's son Lannie provided a printed copy of this account that I have transcribed and lightly edited for clarity. I am sharing this story with Lannie's permission.

It appears that Waldo's account was substantially written or revised around 2004-2005. I recall Waldo telling me that someone helped him record this at Masonic Pathways in Alma, Michigan. His obituary states that he and his wife Dorothy moved there in 2004. Waldo's reference to his sister-in-law and himself being the oldest family members currently attending family reunions suggests that the account was written before Hazen Fisher's wife Malva Wallace died in March 2005.

Lannie believes that the reunions Waldo referred to were Dennis family reunions. Waldo's mother, Idell Fisher, was born Florence Idell Dennis.

Waldo V. (Red) Fisher

I was the fourth child of Florence Idell and Clyde M. Fisher. After they returned from Idaho, I was born in the morning of November 24, 1913, in Morenci, Michigan. That is near the border of Ohio, about thirty miles west of Toledo. I was two or three years old when we moved north to Mansiding, in Clare County. We lived on a farm for a few years, in a log cabin that was built in 1870. It is still there. My memories of the area are sandy roads, only stumps all over, not trees or forest. There was an apple orchard and few small wood lots. I could see a long ways.

I remember the hardships of WWI when we had to go easy on the white flour and eat lots of Johnny cake, which I didn't care for. We lived a long ways from school and I was small and frequently sick with ears and eye trouble. That kept me home a lot. One winter, when the flu hit the area very hard, Mom took most of us kids to Harrison to live, so we could go to school there. The weather was really bad so Dad and one brother stayed on the farm to care for the geese, cattle, pigs, horses, and our dog Happy. After school was out, in the spring, at the end of 2nd grade for me, we left the farm and moved to Clare. I started the 3rd grade in a new school. Dad worked with horses on road construction and Mom operated a big machine at the elevator. It was like a huge sewing machine and had a six-inch-wide belt that carried beans. Mom picked out the bad culls, any dirt and stones, and bad beans, so the good beans could be sold in the stores. Four of us 3rd grade boys sang at the Clare Cemetery for the Memorial Day celebration.

A family from Sheridan started a bakery in town. Their oldest son was about my oldest sister's age. They eventually married and moved back to Sheridan, somewhere in the mid-1920s. Coyne Kidder suffered a lot from TB and went to a sanitarium in Howell. He died at the University of Michigan Hospital on July 1, 1935 [note: he died on July 3]. I hitch-hiked from the CCC in Newberry, Michigan with a four-day leave. I was off for the 4th of July but it allowed me to attend the funeral. I was back in time for roll call four days later.

In the fall of 1927 we moved to Lansing from Clare. I went to West Jr. High School. Then we moved across town, I graduated from Eastern High School in January of 1934.

I had a chance to see some really hard times then. There were long lines at factory employment offices. War veterans of WWI sold apples on street corners. I saw so many families lose everything they owned. There were no jobs or food under Hoover's times. Things changed when President Roosevelt came in. The CCC, WPA, and other projects started a recovery for the country.

I couldn't get a job so I joined the CCC and went to Camp Newberry in 1935, and later I went to Camp Lake Superior. When I went to the CCC it was the first time I had ever been away from home. Under military supervision, I worked on KP, buzzed timber for firewood, was an ax man and cleared timber for roads to be built, planted pine trees, cleared streams, built fish shelters, worked on fish survey crews, was on lake and stream crews, fought forest fires, drove trucks, and built the road to Tahquamenon Falls. All the while we wore army WWI uniforms with army shoes and overall fatigues. We were fed good nourishing food and got plenty of sleep. It all built our minds and bodies

so we could take a place in society in the labor movement. My brother Hazen Fisher got me a job at the Olds factory in Lansing, Michigan. My CCC experience was a big help when I started to work with others.

During WWII factories made war materials. I had been schooled in machine repair so I was started on the die-making machines. We made guns, cannons, shells and etc., to supply our troops in WWII. I was living in Sheridan then and took turns driving with three other people. We worked in Lansing. The speed limit was 35 mph. Gas, tires, food and many things were rationed. Our autos were getting older but we made do with what we had. All surpluses went to our troops.

I met Marguerite Taylor in 1937. Later we were married on June 8th, 1940 in Ionia, Michigan. We had two children, one girl and one boy. We lived next door to my mother- and father-in-law in Sheridan. I figured they could look after my family if and when I was called up. Olds factory granted eleven deferments and I was granted one of them so I was not called up.

When the war ended we were very busy changing the machinery over from war material to the plant's original assembly for building automobiles. After our uniformed veterans returned to the plant, things were in full swing. There was much less demand for repairmen by then.

I moved on to work at the Greenville Gibson Refrigeration plant. When I moved to Sheridan in 1943 I joined the volunteer fire department and later was elected to the Sheridan Village Council.

In 1952 I took a job as village engineer in Sheridan, Michigan. John Kidder was being replaced. He was [the village] marshall and took care of water lines, streets, the parks, the cemetery, the swim beach, dock, wells, sewers, and the dump. Elton Sampson became our [Montcalm County] sheriff and hired me as a deputy. We made a three-way move in housing. I moved to the village house, Kidder moved out of the village house to his house that he had rented to Bill Mastkal [Maskill], and Bill moved into our house.

My duties were to sweep the Main Street (by hand), plus sweep in front of the local stores two times a week. When it need it, I painted the cross walks and the parking areas. Each school day I set out the school signs in the middle of Main Street. The Lions Club bought the Uptigrove [Uptegrove] farm and had it plotted out for a subdivision. The village bought an old galleon [Galion] grader. I dug the trenches and put in the water lines. Then I built the streets and graveled the area. Next was installing water mains and hooking it all up to the houses plus the fire hydrants. Roads had to graded to each home too. I was made the building inspector and handed out permits. The village had a 12-inch water well drilled to 160 feet deep. I hooked up the water pipes and installed the gas motor as a backup. The treatment plant used chlorine, Kalgan [Calgon], and fluoride equipment. I was also a member of the water works association. I went to the University of Michigan and Michigan State for my courses in water treatment and maintenance to get a certificate in water treatment plants. Later I set up the water treatment systems and testing it all for the City of Stanton.

Twice a year the water tower had to be cleaned with disinfectant, by me. I installed and read water meters and upgraded the water mains. More water lines and hydrants had to

be installed over the years and maps revised for these changes. Most of those streets were graded and salt-brined in the summer but plowed in the winter. Eventually I poured sidewalks when a more progressive town council and mayor ordered it. Soon the main streets were blacktop. The mower had a cycle bar cutter to make wide cuts on the right side of the tractor. The local catch basin for the water runoff had to be cleaned out two times a year. I also patched the holes in the blacktop roads. Some of the cemetery lots needed wall repairs or improvements plus I dug the graves, put in foundations, and upkeep on the grave sites. Our Memorial Day was a big affair for the community. Services were held in the cemetery. I also mowed the cemetery and belonged to the Michigan Cemetery Association. Meetings for the Cemetery Association were held in Traverse City.

Our lake always had a swimming dock until recently. It was mounted on barrels. I would put it in each spring. I made sure the springboard worked OK, and in the fall I took it out. In the winter I cleared the roads and made an ice rink for ice skaters. Roadside picnic tables were cleaned, trash barrels dumped, and outside toilets cared for each summer. At the dump I tried a number of things including only burning when the wind blew out of the east away from the homes. I had to limit the days it was opened and used a front blade on the tractor to cover the trash with sand. A dump truck was used too. Eventually the Health Department closed our dump.

As a deputy sheriff, my duties were writing tickets for reckless driving, speeding, etc. I also policed accidents, family disputes, robberies, and any disturbances. We had no speed limit in the country or even in the state then. I was on call 24 hours a day and rode with a patrolman some of the nights. I was paid \$2.00 for each call I reported to, including fires and accidents. At the end of each month I turned a bill in to the county supervisors. One month in 1955 there were eleven fatalities in one mile section. Three people were killed near Vestaburg and in Montcalm [apparently west of the Gratiot County line]. If a prisoner escaped from anywhere, including Ionia County, or a bank robbery or murder took place, I was called out. It happened to work out that I was generally working alone then. Roadblocks had to be set up after serious incidences and arrests. It was six miles north to our county jail. One prisoner jumped out of the car one time on the way to the jail. Two deputies were required to transport a patient to the State Home in Traverse City or prisoners to Jackson Prison. I made sure I took another female along when a female prisoner was transported. It prevented any problems with being accused of something. Later I issued drivers licenses, kept the jail records, and was a radio dispatcher. After many years I switched work to the County School Attendances Officer. I was a member of the Michigan Sheriffs Association and the National Sheriffs Association.

One fire I discovered while on a night patrol. It was so big I called three other departments in to help us. When the blaze moved close to the bank, I and another deputy took all the money to the Stanton Bank for safekeeping. After that fire, we organized the Montcalm County Fireman's Association. It's still active today. This was before I became fire chief.

On one occasion, in Stanton, a woman was in the street with a shotgun. Her intentions were to shoot the judge. The Sheriff and the Undersheriff were on the lawn, standing

behind trees, while trying to talk her into putting down the gun. Just then the courthouse doors opened and out walked Dorothy Webb, the Abstract Officer, on her way to lunch. She didn't realize what was taking place. Dorothy got right in the middle of this ruckus. She kept a cool head and just kept walking till she was out of danger. At this time, Dorothy's husband Ken was the Stanton Fire Chief. Stanton was just six miles north of Sheridan. My wife Marguerite and I, Dorothy and Ken were members of the Eastern Star in our own towns but got together socially once in a while. Marguerite and Ken both passed away just a month apart in 1994. The following year Dorothy and I married.

I retired from my police work after 33 years and 40 years on the Fire Department. Back in the '50s I helped my four aunts start our family reunions. Now my sister-in-law and I are the oldest members to attend. How time changes everything.

I have been to the National CCC Headquarters in Jefferson Barracks twice. I have attended the Michigan CCC Reunion every year since the late 1980s. In 1990 my wife Marguerite and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary at the reunion in North Higgins Lake State Park and memorial.

In 2002 I helped dedicate the CCC Monument at the Lumberman Memorial in Newberry, Michigan. Which is just down the road a few miles from where I was in a CCC camp. I was the only one there from Camp Newberry.

Update

I reposted this entry from my old web site on the occasion of Waldo's 102nd birthday.