Brookover, Wilbur Papers.
"Life in Faculty Quonset Village on Cherry Lane-1946"

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LIFE IN FACULTY QUONSET VILLAGE ON CHERRY LANE -- 1946

EDNA BROOKOVER

FOREWORD

The primary focus of this paper is the life in Faculty Quonset Village in the years following 1946.

To understand this situation it is essential to know the particular setting of Michigan State College growth during that period and the location of faculty housing in relation to that total growth.

Edna Brookover [1990]

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THE MICHIGAN STATE COLLEGE BUILDING PROGRAM--1946[1]

Michigan Public Act #1, Extra Session of 1946, authorized Michigan State College -- "Forthwith To Complete A Building Program Without Unnecessary Delay". Actual construction of three major projects began within one week after the Governor signed the legislation on February 18, 1946. By February 1, 1947 a huge classroom building was over 50 percent complete.

In the MSC Bulletin, "The Means of Education", Vol. 41, No. 15, March 1947, is a report of the progress and plans for MSC future growth. MSC was able to meet within months--not years--the housing and educational requirements of the returning veterans.

The planning and construction story began in 1944, when Governor Harry F. Kelly established a special committee for the development of a post war program to meet the needs of higher education. Along with members of higher education, Henry Reniger, Sr. of Lansing and other major statewide contractors were appointed. John A. Hannah and Henry Reniger, Sr. would soon become subcommittee members of the Federal Post War Program for Higher Education.

In 1945, Henry Reniger, Sr. was appointed by U.S. Secretary of Labor to the National Building Trades Apprentice

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[1]"The Means of Education", MSC Bulletin, Vol. 41, #15, March 1947. From the Reniger Collection, contributed by Henry Reniger, Jr.

Board. The Apprentice Programs were developed to train and educate new apprentices for the building trades, i.e., bricklayers, carpenters, operators, plumbers, electricians, etc.

On the local front, Lansing Tech (now L.C.C.) located in the old Lansing Central High School, became the home for the future apprentice schools.

Michigan State College had long needed some new classrooms to meet modern needs. With the expected influx of students after World War II it was obvious that there would not be laboratories and up-to-date equipment for science, mathematics, etc. Seven million dollars was authorized to start construction at once. Buildings approved included a classroom building, a science building, agricultural engineering building, home manage
plant and facilities.

Until all the building was completed, the college day was lengthened to the point where classes began at 7 a.m. and closed at 10 p.m. There was no lunch hour, no dinner hour--classes were scheduled 15 hours of the 24 hours five days a week, and five hours on Saturday.

Such a schedule was expensive, for it required more faculty, and it required more heat and electricity to keep classrooms and laboratories open until 10 o'clock at night. Classes had to be larger, and in many cases, doubled. Some restrictions had to be placed on enrollment, if all veterans

who wished to be educated at Michigan State were to be admitted.

These restrictions bore most heavily upon young women. Because of lack of adequate housing, the College was forced to deny admission to all new women students except those who could provide housing for themselves in Lansing or East Lansing. As a result, women made up only 26 percent of the undergraduate and graduate student body for the fall term.

Temporary housing was used to help while the new buildings were being constructed. The fact that many of the veterans were married and some had children complicated the housing problem. Temporary housing structures included: 449 demountable trailers for families, grouped around 16 attractive service buildings constructed by the College; 104 Quonset Huts to house 1456 single men, together with a bath house with 40 showers and a cafeteria and kitchen to feed 2000 persons, steel barracks to house 240 single men, and 1100 family units erected by the Federal Public Housing Authority. The Federal Government invested about $355,000 in the form of water, light, sewer, and other site facilities.

Knowing that more faculty would be needed and that finding suitable housing might discourage capable instructors, the College arranged for the construction of 50 temporary houses for faculty members, 31 Quonset Huts and 19 so-called British Empire houses.

In addition it rushed the construction of 184 apartments in permanent structures for the use of married students and faculty members. Not enough of the new units were ready for all who enrolled in 1946 and it was necessary to house 600 men in double-deck bunks on the floor of Jenison Fieldhouse, and 200 women in the rooms on the top floors of the Union.

Thus Michigan State embarked on the most comprehensive post-war building program of any college or university in the United States to meet the needs of veterans returning from World War II.

THE LOCATION OF FACULTY VILLAGE

Faculty Village was composed of 32 Quonset Huts and 18 British Empire Flat Top Prefabricated houses. These were located in the area south of what is now Breslin Center and north of Shaw Lane between Harrison Road on the west and Birch Road on the east. An unnamed road which no longer exists ran east and west north of faculty housing. Cherry Lane then extended north of Shaw to the unnamed road. Forty eight of the residences were arranged in six courts with three each on either side of Cherry Lane. The other two Flat Tops were located in the southeast corner of the area near the intersection of Shaw and Birch. The nursery school was later built on the northeast corner.

The area to the north which was south of Kalamazoo Street between Birch and Harrison contained Quonset Huts, which housed single men and the large Quonset Cafeteria for students. The latter was located on what is now the north portion of the Breslin Center.

This large Quonset later housed the WKAR Television station. The large area east of Birch Road both north and south of Shaw Lane was occupied by barracks apartment buildings for married students. When there was a shortage of housing for faculty, sometimes faculty had to occupy barracks. The barracks apartments each had oil heaters.

The area west of Harrison Road and south of Kalamazoo was filled with trailers. These also housed married students.

LIFE IN FACULTY QUONSET VILLAGE ON CHERRY LANE -- 1946

EDNA BROOKOVER

It was early in the summer of 1946 when my husband, Wilbur, decided to resign the position waiting for him at Indiana State Teacher's College at Terre Haute, Indiana, and accept a position in the Social Science Department at Michigan State College at East Lansing, Michigan. During World War II, he had been Educational Services Officer at the United States Naval Hospital in Seattle, Washington. We were looking forward to retrieving our stored furniture from Terre Haute and settling down again.

We soon learned that we were eligible to apply for temporary faculty housing on the campus at Michigan State College. The college was doubling in size--from 7500 students to 15,000--and approximately 250 faculty were being added. World War II veterans, many of whom had had no chance for a college education, were coming to school. There was simply not enough permanent housing available in the small town of East Lansing. The new faculty members had three choices, especially if they were veterans--brick apartments, Quonset Huts, or British Empire Flat Tops. Quonset Huts were so named because they had first been built at Quonset, Rhode Island. Since we had no desire for apartment living, we asked for a Quonset Hut; we thought it would be larger and

warmer than the better looking, many windowed British Flat Top.

President John Hannah had succeeded in convincing both the Board of Agriculture which ran the College and the Legislature to prepare for the large influx of post war students who were going to school on the GI Bill. There were plans (see page 3) to not only house the faculty, but also to place married students in barrack apartments and in a large trailer court. There were also to be large Quonsets for single men students.

Faculty Quonset Village would be located in six courts of eight dwellings each. They would be on each side of Cherry Lane, a street which ran parallel to Harrison Road and across from the Michigan State Police Station. Three courts had eight Quonsets each, one had seven Quonsets and one British Empire Flat Top, and two courts had eight Flat Tops each. Two extra Flat Tops were located southeast.

In the late summer of 1946 we came to East Lansing to meet with Dean Rather of the Basic College and Dr. Walter Fee of the Social Science Department and to view the housing situation. One brick apartment had been built, but the place where Faculty Quonset Village was to be located was just a pile of dirt. There were no trees or grass. We were assured Faculty Village would be ready in two months when the college term started.

I was in tears all the way back to Huntington, Indiana, where we were spending a few months with my parents. Not only did I feel it was a disgrace to live in a Quonset Hut (which we had chosen to do), but there was not even a Quonset Hut to move into, and there was none to see.

Wilbur had to start school September 21st. Since the shells of the Quonsets were up, he came ahead and moved in. The bathroom had not been connected, so he had to use the facilities of the Brainard's next door. They had already moved in. During the Depression Wilbur had worked his way through college by working on construction gangs, so he felt he knew how to talk to the building crew. He hunted up one of the plumbers and told him he had a bottle of Scotch for him if he would come over on Sunday to connect the bathroom. The plumber came. On October 16th, I, with our two children, five-year old Linda and two-year old Tommy, came. Linda entered kindergarten the next day at Central School.

Although the buildings were not finished inside, everyone was moving in. For a while some had to use their neighbor's bathrooms. The Village was teeming with all ages of children, parents, trucks, and workmen. Soon our furniture--all five rooms of it--arrived from storage at Terre Haute, Indiana. We got all of it in except our dining room suite which had to be stored another three years. We had a little breakage when Wilbur thought he was opening a barrel of

cooking utensils, and instead hit two crystal goblets with a hammer.

The Quonsets were organized like typical five room houses. There was a living room across the front. In this we placed our six-foot long sofa, a large wing chair, a club chair, a bookcase, and a studio piano. There was a dining ell which held our breakfast set. The kitchen had a huge double sink, a refrigerator, an apartment size gas stove, an adequate counter space and storage cupboards. There was a hall back to the bathroom and the two bedrooms. A wardrobe was connected to the larger bedroom. In our bedroom we had a dresser, a double bed, and an antique secretary on which my husband wrote his first book. Everyone used under-the-bed storage, and some who were handy with tools made more storage for themselves. Jim Boyd, an agricultural engineer, made a wardrobe for his little daughter, Terry, out of the box in which the refrigerator had been shipped. He also built shelves in every conceivable place.

Since no one had been quite sure about the amount of heat the Quonsets would need, they were over radiated. We received steam heat from the college heating plant. There were eight radiators in each Quonset. Since the Quonsets were heavily insulated, only on the coldest days did we need to turn on more than two radiators. The insulation worked to our advantage in hot weather. We were very comfortable

although no trees had yet been planted.

The workmen told us each Quonset was costing seventy five hundred dollars each--as much as a new four bedroom Cape Cod house had cost before the war. We understood that one reason they were costing so much was that a large well paid, skilled crew had been brought in to do the work quickly. The crew had come from Alaska where they had been doing government construction. Since we had moved in on them, they had to finish the work after we were there.

Occasionally some of the workmen would be sitting in my living room taking a coffee or cigarette break, and I would hear them discussing us. One day I heard one of them say, "Some of these people don't have ANYTHING--just boxes for furniture". Of course many of the younger faculty had married and gone right into the service. They had not acquired anything; then, too, good furniture could not be bought immediately after the war. There was a shortage of automobiles and nearly everything else. Another time I heard one of them say, "They say these Quonsets will be here only five years. Hell, they'll be here twenty-five years". He was partly right. They were there for more than twenty-five years.

By the time winter set in, the Quonsets were finished inside. Later, the college planted grass, trees, mowed our lawns, and collected our garbage and trash. In the spring the individuality of the inhabitants really showed up. Almost

everyone planted flowers; some even had window boxes which were still on the sills when the Quonsets were moved to other communities years later. Many had small vegetable gardens. Some of the former farm boys were rather free with their advice when some inexperienced gardeners applied too much fertilizer and raised more leaves than vegetables. When a window peeper appeared at the bathroom window while Mary Jane Hatenyi was taking a shower, her husband, Les, reported it to some of the neighbors. One of them said, sympathetically, "It's a shame he saw her naked." Les replied, "Hell, I don't mind that; what I do mind is that he tramped down my tomatoes at the bathroom window," Les had tomatoes growing up on tall stakes.

We rapidly became a very cosmoplitan community. We were quite self sufficient. There were engineers, economists, journalists, music and art faculty, scientists, mathematicians, sociologists, English and language faculty, horticulturists and political scientists. People with children were mixed up with people without children. One of the most important things we learned was to cooperate with each other. There was always a friend around and a pot of coffee ready at most neighbors' homes. One could always borrow an egg, a cup of sugar, or whatever. We learned to share. We formed car pools, baby sitting leagues, etc.

Jim and Virginia Boyd lived two Quonsets from us. Their two-year old daughter, Terry, and our two-year old Tommy were

inseparable. We took them shopping with us, baby sat, and sometimes gave them baths together. They, in turn, got into their Christmas presents, learned to ride tricycles together, and had a great time playing in the muddy yards where grass had not yet been planted. One day, after a big rain, they went out together to play. Terry was wearing new shoes. Sometime later, we went to bring them in. They were hardly recognizable. They were covered from head to toe in mud, but they did have a great time. Virginia never did find one of the new shoes which Terry had lost in the mud. The only thing to do was put them in our bathtubs, and scrape the mud off. Virginia and I exchanged recipes, casseroles, and made doughnuts together. This was typical of other women in the community.

On Halloween, fathers usually took their children out trick and treating through the courts. On the Fourth of July flags decorated tricycles and bicycles and parades were held. Sometimes when we had outdoor birthday parties, drop-ins might show up.

The children learned to take discipline from whomever might be around. When Tommy and Terry picked Harry Brainard's flowers (he had no children), he talked to them about it. Often I would hear our negative little Tommy saying, "No, No," and Harry would be saying, "Yes, Yes, Tommy." Life for the children in the Village was like one big birthday party. They played together and fought together. Linda's first "best

friend" was Roberta Rogers, who lived in one of the Flat Tops. They were together every day, and Roberta's mother taught them to knit. They also went together to a children's drama class at Michigan State. So I was surprised one day when I heard Linda say, "And don't you EVER come back," to which Roberta replied, "I won't". They had quarreled over their crayons. In a few days they were best friends again.

When the John Mason family won a TV in a contest, they held open house every afternoon at five o'clock when the "Howdy Doody Show" came on. When six o'clock came, Fran Mason shooed everyone out. No one else had TV yet. We did not have nursery schools, because the mothers were all at home and could supervise their own children and any others who might be around.

Some people who were more introverted found life rather too close at times. For such persons it was not always easy to be ready to talk when meeting someone on the sidewalk or outside the door. In general, though, we all did very well. One of the pleasant sounds in our court was hearing Professor Hans Nathan of the Music Department playing his grand piano in the Quonset back of us. Although each family socialized with their own department, most residents probably formed their strongest friendships in the Village. We did not feel that we were a part of either Lansing or East Lansing. Occasionally there were disagreements over such things as cats

and dogs. One woman came to me and told me to keep my cat home as he had caused her cat to have kittens. Our cat had been given to Linda by her friend, Roberta Rogers. Some courts had much partying. One couple had a little trouble after a party and could be seen throwing mirrors, pictures, and furniture at each other. The next morning the neighbors observed that their trash cans were full.

Ray Lamphere, the Director of Married Housing on campus, was very responsive to our needs. The College took very good care of us. We paid only seventy two dollars a month which included everything but telephone. However, other needs developed. Finally it became clear that we needed our own government. Each court chose two representatives who met many nights until early in the morning to iron out a constitution. We voted on it by ballot and then elected Betty Brainard Mayor. She refused to serve. She had a dog, but no children. She felt we needed a Mayor who had children. So my husband was elected. When something was needed, he received the complaints and either he went to Lamphere or to President Hannah. Eventually a storage Quonset was built for us, and playground equipment was installed; later a nursery school, a postal station and cooperative grocery was built. By this time there were twelve brick apartments, referred to as "The Bricks." They had laundries in the basement, and we took our laundry on sleds or little wagons over to the apartment laundry to

wash. Usually we had to go at night when our husbands were home to baby-sit. Sometimes, though, we had to take our little children.

Late in the winter of 1947 we had a blizzard. The roads were snowed shut between Michigan and Indiana. When my husband attempted to travel to northern Indiana to his aunt's funeral, (the children and I were already there) he was stranded near a big brick Victorian farmhouse between East Lansing and Charlotte, from where he called me. Trucks and cars were stranded along Road 27. Finally a veterinary picked him up in his truck and put him up at his home in Charlotte. There was not a room available in town; every motel and hotel was full during the blizzard. It was feared the weight of the snow might crush the Flat Top roofs. This did not happen, but the snow did seep in around a window in some places.

When the snow began to melt, we had a flood. On Easter Sunday we were returning from Indiana and found we could not get down Michigan Avenue. The Red Cedar River had flooded and much of the campus was under water. There was 12 feet of water in the basement of Jenison Field House. The only heat we could get was by turning on the gas oven or using dangerous electric heaters. So, in boots, snow pants, and whatever we could find, we survived three nights and two days. We put blankets up between the eating area and the kitchen to contain the heat from the oven. We were offered housing

elsewhere, but we chose to stay put. One of the young professors in our village refused to teach his classes; he said President Hannah was not keeping his part of the bargain because he did not keep us warm. Most of us considered this was just another of life's little foibles and adventures and felt that "This too shall pass". Besides, we were all in it together.

Our group changed Faculty Folk Club forever. A very understanding lady, Mrs. C. L. Bratton, was president. She realized our problems, but she wanted us to attend the meetings. When we asked for a nursery in order that we could attend Faculty Folk and Newcomers' meetings, one was set up for us at the Peoples Church. Some of the older members of both Faculty Folk and the Church were aghast. Nothing like this had ever been done before! On afternoons when there was a Faculty Folk or Newcomers' meeting, we young wives, wearing hats and gloves, could be seen pouring out of our Quonsets or Flat Tops with our little children in tow. Mrs. Bratton was a great lady. She made us feel wanted and listened to our concerns.

The conservative little town of East Lansing was still having a problem accepting John Hannah's white elephants--namely all the temporary housing with which he had desecrated the beautiful campus. One prominent East Lansing lady was heard to remark, "What has happened to our lovely little town?" The campus was full of ugly temporary housing; the streets were

full of 7500 more students, and 250 new faculty. One Sunday afternoon one of our neighbors, Teresa Millar, was in her yard when a car drove slowly past and she heard the remark, "There's one of them now."

Another time one of our members, Eunice Schloemer, was on a Faculty Folk Club program committee for the following year. When she returned home and told us that one of the programs the chairman had suggested was to hire a bus to take the members through the "underprivileged" section of the campus, a large gathering of indignant women congregated in her court. The program never took place.

One time our first-grade daughter, Linda, brought a classmate home on the bus from Central School. The child, who lived in one of the biggest houses in East Lansing, was from an old and prominent family. When she entered our Quonset and saw our cat, I heard her say, "Why I wouldn't think anyone who lived in a Quonset could afford a cat." When her mother came to pick her up, it didn't take me long to invite her in "to see what a Quonset looks like". I thought she could also see that we did wear shoes and had furniture. We had a little discussion about travelling. I was able to match her accounts of trips recently taken. In another instance an older sorority sister, whose husband happened to be an executive of a Lansing company, said to one of our members, "If you people amounted to anything, you would not live 'over there'".

All this points to the fact that many, perhaps most, of the townspeople did not understand that their world had changed. Many had been born and had lived in East Lansing all their lives. They had not been in the service and knew nothing of temporary living, or the problems returning veterans faced.

Campus housing changed the East Lansing School system. In addition to the children in the faculty housing, there were children of married students in both the barracks and trailers. Some of the faculty even had to live in the barracks, because all the regular faculty housing was full. There had been a city school system. The state still had not done much consolidation and had mostly one room district schools for grades 1 through 8. Our district was the little one room Harrison Road School at the corner of Harrison and Mt. Hope Road. A few children did attend there the first year. However, the school was too small to accommodate more students. Besides, most of the highly educated parents would have objected to sending their children to a one room school.

The first year the college paid tuition for our children to attend East Lansing Schools. There were two elementary schools in town--Central School (which had once been the High School) and Bailey School. Kindergarten through third graders attended Central and fourth grade through sixth attended Bailey. The first year we had a car pool. Ours consisted of Linda,

Roberta Rogers, Dick Schloemer, Alan Babb, and John Mason. I was reminded by Linda that whenever Roberta's father, Max Rogers, drove, the girls always sat in the front seat.

By the second year, President Hannah had prevailed on the East Lansing Schools to consolidate, and buses were purchased. Some of the parents had not had the experience with busing which we had had from our earliest years in Indiana's consolidated school systems which started with horse drawn buses. The first week of school the bus stopped beside our Quonset at 631 Cherry Lane. Many nervous parents gathered to see their children load, and whether the driver looked responsible. They were apprehensive concerning the children's safety. When they discovered their children loved riding the bus, and, in fact, were envied by East Lansing children who had to walk to school, the parents relaxed. There was a little competition between the children. The Bailey children called the Central children "Central Sewer Rats" and the Central students called the Bailey children "Bailey Brats".

By the time Linda was in second grade a new elementary building--Red Cedar--was nearly completed on Sever Drive off South Harrision Road. Since this was along the Red Cedar River, there were many snakes. The teachers decided to educate the children about snakes. They had contests to see who could catch the most snakes. Some of us warned our children not to bring any snakes to our homes. Other parents were more

hospitable. Duane (Mokey) Gibson brought a box of snakes home to his Flat Top, which was back of us. When one snake escaped in the house and was never found, the whole neighborhood knew about it.

Living in Faculty Village was a great way to start life in a new community. I wouldn't take anything for the experience. The college took good care of us, and was very responsive to our needs. Former President John Hannah deserves much praise for his vision and the way he anticipated and handled the great influx of post World War II students and faculty. No other campus in the United States could match Michigan State for its excellent temporary housing. As housing loosened up in East Lansing and faculty literally "got on their feet" financially, people began to trickle out of the faculty housing. Building also started. The biggest result was the group which formed the Lantern Hill subdivision, which was very successful.

The friendships we made in the Village have lasted a lifetime. We have been much like relatives. The problems of one have been the problems of all. Although many people lived in the Village longer, after three years we bought a house. The next morning after our first night in our house, five-year old Tommy said, "Mama, when are we going to move back to our Quonset?"

Contributors: Isobel Dickinson Wyn Gibson, Virginia Boyd-Ralston, Eunice Schloemer, Linda Brookover Bourque, and Wilbur Brookover

...RIENTATION HALL at bottom center...Quonset Village & Cafeteria at ri..., with PRE-FAB APARTMENTS COVERING 70 acres of ground. The 11 BRICK APARTMENTS in center are for married faculty and some married veterans. Fifty faculty houses across from Michigan State Police Bldgs. on So. Harrison.

One of the small Quonset h
of the Wilbur B. Brookover fam
for the whole family. Tommy c
right, helps mother take dishes
be painted.

The State Journal set up a picture on spring cleaning.

Edna, Linda, and Tommy Brookover

Terry Boyd and Tommy Brookover on Boyd's car

Terry and Tommy playing in the mud

Easter Sunday

Bed time in Quonset Village

Alan Bebb, Tommy, Terry, Paul Graver

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631 Cherry Lane

Linda's
7th
Birthday
with
Roberta Rogers

Wilbur held a seminar at our Quonset

Wilbur with Linda & Tommy

Mokey Gibson, Linda Brookover, Alan Babb