

# Creston Interviews

*by Anne Hale*

*These interviews were conducted as part of the  
Civic Studio project in Creston.  
<http://civicstudio.org>*

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I interviewed, or attempted to interview, four individuals who have lived in Creston for decades. Therefore, these citizens are now in their nineties, and they were willing to share some information about themselves, Creston, and the interactions betwixt the two.

Jessie

The first thing Jessie told me was "I am ninety-two years old". Impressive, no? Jessie kept repeating how unqualified she thought she was to shed light upon Creston; "I have only been in Creston since my junior year in high school". Yes, although she has lived here since 1928 or 1929, she felt she did not have as much insight as her classmates who have lived in Creston their *whole* lives, in the same house since birth. She gave me their contact information, and although I assured her that she could definitely tell me things that were interesting and that I hadn't known before, she really seemed insistent upon passing the baton of Creston stories/info to her classmates. I did get her to tell me a few facts:

She remembered when Leonard Street was a gravel road, she went to Creston High School her junior and senior years of high school, and graduated from Creston High in 1930.

Eleanor

Eleanor has lived on Edgewood NE for her entire life (Jessie told me this). When I phoned Eleanor, she laughed at my request for any information about Creston. At her laughter, I smiled from the other end of the phone and asked, "Are you laughing because that is an odd request?" And she laughed and sounded befuddled as she truthfully admitted, "Yes", and she said that she didn't have any information.

Maude

Maude too thought that both she and Creston did not have much worthwhile to share, but I assured her that any information would be a blessing, and would undoubtedly be new information for an outsider just beginning to learn about Creston, such as myself.

She lives on Forest facing Spencer, and has lived there since she was six years old. She remembers playing where the Creston High School was later built, and she was in Creston's first graduating class in 1927.

I asked her about the differences between Creston now and Creston as she was growing up. She told me that schooling then was "serious". "We were afraid of our teachers, I mean, we respected them. We called them 'Missus' or 'Mister'." She was enrolled in "gym and all of the other subjects", which she said she enjoyed.

I asked her about some of the businesses in the downtown section of Creston and about how those had changed. She said there used to be drug stores and doctors' offices and ice cream shops that are all gone now. She and I agreed that it used to be almost entirely family owned small businesses there, which is a contrast from today's business chains in Creston.

One interesting fact she also recalled was that they called the movie theater across the street from us "The Peanut", and as she was growing up one could get a movie ticket for a dime.

For more info about businesses, Maude looked in the back of her Creston High yearbooks and read me some of the ads that were from local businesses. She reported, "there were 3 dry goods stores, 2 of those were run by widows. There were 2 ads from coal companies, 1 ad for a '\$25 made-to-measure suit for men' at 1350 Plainfield, 2 drug stores between Sweet and Leonard, and 2 candy kitchens". I asked her if she ever visited any of those stores, and she said she did regular one of the "candy kitchens", usually the one which sold ice cream sundaes.

Marinus

Marinus first began telling me about the unique locations and businesses in the Creston neighborhood. He listed Kent Country Club, a mural painted by students to promote community, Briggs Park, as well as football fields, swimming pools, and track fields at schools and parks in the area.

He said the original Creston High School building is still in use and standing, and it is ninety years old. In the 1950s a new building and

gym were attached. He said the area has always had a sense of pride, and especially an affection for the school. He also mentioned that their school mascot has always been the Creston Polar Bears.

An interesting fact Marinus made me aware of is that Plainfield Avenue, the main artery of Creston, continues north all the way to Traverse City. He said there have always been small businesses in that central Creston strip along Plainfield Avenue. Some have been there he said for fifty years and they still exist, in one form or another. There was a car dealership many years ago, and today it is a body shop. He explained that during the war, there was a teenage night club in Creston as well. He continued expelling all of his information in a rapid fire of memories of growing up and living in Creston. It seemed he was walking through down, or perhaps flying, in his mind, listing everything he saw in his mind's eye. He reported the boundaries of Creston to me, and told me about the railroad which used to travel downtown. There were also street car track which went through Creston at one point. He said there were three to four bars in the Creston district, and told me of some restaurants, including the Choo Choo Grill and Shipman's Pub. There was also a coal company in the area. He told me of a "tremendous sliding hill" in the area, where children would slide down on "cardboard boxes and inner tubes", as well as Cowboy and Indian movies he used to see in Creston for 15 or 25 cents. He then outlined the progression of cinema as he experienced it, from movies, to drive-ins, to television, and then to "big ones" (movie theaters) like Studio 28 and Celebration Cinemas of today.

He was telling me of the many different High Schools in the Grand Rapids area when he was growing up, he recalled Creston, Ottawa Hills, Union, Central, City, Davis Tech, and Christian High Schools (respectively). He attended Davis Tech, which was more of a trade school. He then went to Calvin College, where he went to school during the morning and afternoon, then from 6-11 p.m. he'd work at a machine shop, following which he'd frequent the French Village Bar to have a beer. He told me of a man there named "Streamline Eddie, he used to pee his pants". We had a good laugh. He then became the Dean of CC. Another interesting factoid about Marinus which he let me in on is that his doctoral thesis, which he took a year off from junior college to write, was the book *A Study of the Establishment of Grand Valley State College*. He said it is 257 pages, and I looked it up; it is in the Siedman House Library Collection which is viewable, but non-circulating.