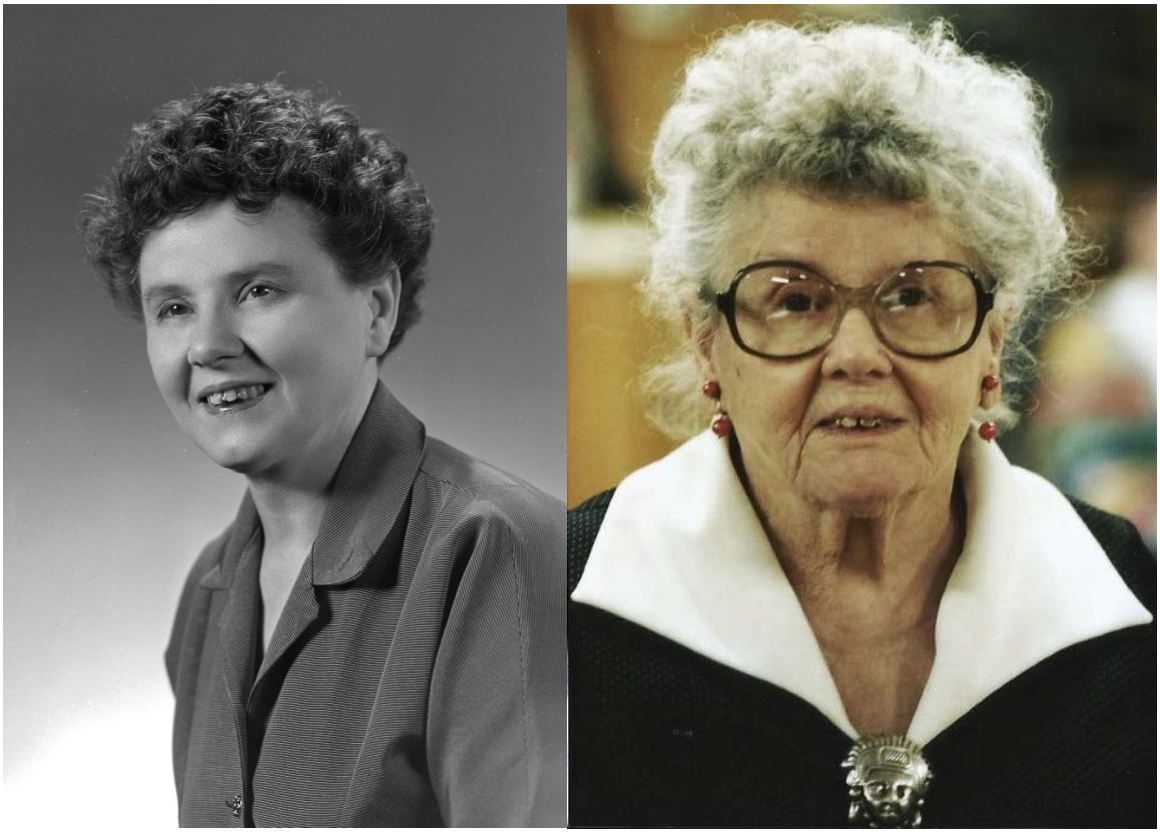
Edna Frances Perry

The Falls History Project

Discovering Local History

15th Edition: 2015-16



Dedication and Acknowledgements

It was on a warm summer day 15 years ago that I wandered into the History Room at the BRF Public Library and described a project we had launched in our History Department at BRFHS focusing on regional history. History Room director, Mary Woods, reacted with genuine enthusiasm and has been involved with us from the outset. Each and every time we needed help with research, Mary stepped up and gave of her time and thorough knowledge of the various holdings available to the public. Indeed, without her help, the many projects we have undertaken would have been impossible. It is with deep appreciation that we dedicate this year's entry to Mary. It is particularly fitting due to the strong connection Frances had with the Public Library starting in 1940.

Senior Michaela Custodio served as our 16th FHP intern and was captivated by Frances' story due, in part, to the interest Frances had in preserving the Van Schaick photographs. Michaela was part of the first H0-chunk and Ethnic Studies class at BRFHS during her junior year and has been politically involved with the National Council of American Indians (NCAI) while in high school. Her enthusiasm for Ho-chunk history and the broader world of American Indian studies served her well while undertaking the various tasks related to researching this story. Beyond participating in and transcribing the interviews, Michaela was able to spend time at the Jackson County Historical Society and the Van Schaick studio examining a portion of the collection stored there. In the process she located photographs of several of her ancestors! Michaela also helped to choose the two photos that will go on display at BRFHS in coming months.

Regarding those photographs, thanks to department colleague Kris Wrobel (now retired) and the Tiger Investment Club for their grant of $500 to help defray the costs of production. Due

to their generosity, the pictures are being professionally enlarged and framed for display and are impressive. Thanks also to Principal Thomas Chambers of BRFHS for his support of the display effort. Though not the central purpose of the Falls History Project, we have worked hard over the years to improve imagery within the school related to local history, something we intend to continue.

Finally, thanks to this year's interviewees, Mildred Evenson, Leona McKee, and Mary Perry. Each brought a unique perspective and helped us piece together the story of Frances Perry. It was Mary who originally planted the seed for the project many years ago during one of our many conversations about the life of this community. And it was Millie who became the catalyst when she contacted me in the spring of 2015 insisting that this story was worthy of exploration. Millie rightly sees the work that Frances did with the Van Schaick photographs as an important legacy, and hopefully this project will shed more light on that topic.

We hope you enjoy the story of Frances Perry!

Paul S. T. Rykken
Falls History Project Advisor
paul.rykken@brf.org

To access all the projects, visit our website:

http://www.brf.org/rykken/fhp/

INTRODUCTION

"All historical experience must be imagined before it can be understood."
(Historian David Blight)

In her 1994 book *Between Indian and White Worlds*, historian Margaret Connell Szasz explores the role that cultural intermediaries have played at the point of contact between European settlers and the indigenous people of North America. She uses the term "cultural broker" to denote such individuals and traces the use of that term to the post-World War 2 era and the rise of ethno-history. Ethno-historians combine the disciplines of ethnology and history as they reconstruct the past using archaeology, imagery, documents, folklore, and material culture to explore the complex interactions that shaped American culture.[1] Though Frances Perry may not have seen herself within that grand definition, my sense is that for many years she played the role of cultural broker within our community, and it was to that aspect of her story that we directed this year's project.

For 16 years we have been pursuing regional stories that collectively tell us something about the complex history of this small city on the Black River in central Wisconsin. Through 15 projects, nearly 50 interviews with local residents, and research into various archives, we have introduced the practice of history to young people at Black River High School. In the process, we have developed a growing archive of more than 500 pages that can be utilized by future generations of students to better imagine how this place came to be. In addition, three years ago we added a course in our department called "Ho-chunk and Ethnic Studies," a development prompted, in part, from research that came via the Project. Well received from the outset, the new class traces the story of the Ho-chunk people in our state and region, along with the European immigration that shaped Jackson County. In short, it allows students to find themselves and their ancestors within the local story.

[1] Szasz sites Nancy Oestreich Lurie's landmark book, Mountain Wolf Woman (1961) as one classic example of the emerging ethno-history of this period. Lurie has been involved with several of our projects over the years and played an important role in the curriculum work we have done at BRFHS since the early 1990s.

Our 15th edition focuses on the unique story of Edna Frances Perry. Born in the Kenyon Valley in 1897, the second of fifteen children, Frances survived polio in infancy. A voracious reader as a child and throughout her life, she graduated from BRFHS in 1915. Picture the young Frances and her classmates watching with horror from their hilltop vantage point as the downtown of their city washed away in the great flood of 1911. Imagine Frances and her classmate Lawrence Jones being regaled by local veterans of the Civil War at a school-wide assembly in 1915. As Lawrence and other young men went off to fight in the Great War in 1917,

Frances and other young women of her era, labored in the one-room schoolhouses of the County as teachers.[2] It was while teaching at one such school, Sandy Plain Elementary, located between Shamrock and Millston, that Frances met George Garvin, Sr. (WoShipKah), Ho-chunk tribal member. Garvin was a relative of neighbors to Frances in the Sandy Plains area, the widow of Chief Blackhawk and her daughter Sue Eagle (WaKonCheWinKah) and their children who Frances happened to be teaching in school. This marked the beginning, as far as I can tell, of Frances' life-long interest in the history, language, and culture of her indigenous neighbors. Garvin helped the curious Frances to understand some of the Ho-chunk language through the use of a syllabary. We chose to focus on that aspect of her life in the project presented here. Eventually, in fact, Frances was adopted by the Thunder Clan (bestowed by Adam Thundercloud) and took the name Ahucowįįgą meaning "Blue Wing," a name included on her cemetery marker.

At age 21 Frances began a journey into further education and teaching. She first attended Oshkosh University, but her adventurous spirit ultimately led her to Columbia University in New

[2] Interestingly enough, Frances was hired by County Superintendent Norma Jean Relyea, the first woman Superintendent in Wisconsin. Norma Jean's great-great grand-daughter Sarah (Kling) Halverson teaches Family and Consumer Education at BRFHS. Norma also was Mildred Evenson's great Aunt.

York where she earned her Bachelor's Degree. Imagine this young woman from west-central Wisconsin experiencing the world of New York City in the 1920s! Upon graduation, Frances took a position teaching English and Psychology in Westfield, Massachusetts at Westfield Normal, a prestigious women's college founded in 1839 by none other than Horace Mann.

Eventually Frances would return to Jackson County and in 1931 at age 34 married Howard Ephraim Perry, a local farmer and veteran of the Spanish-American War. Perry was 20 years older than Frances and died an untimely death in 1939 at age 62. In their 8 years of marriage, Frances and Howard were blessed with two daughters, Jill and Sarah. One can only imagine the heartache and shock that the widow Frances felt upon losing her husband after only a few years of marriage.

It was at this point that Frances began work as the town librarian, spending her days at the Carnegie Library located on Main Street.[3] She worked tirelessly to upgrade the library and became a local fixture in her new capacity. By the middle 1950s she was deeply involved with the Jackson County Historical Society and began work on identifying hundreds of photographs from the Charles Van Schaick collection. Van Schaick (1852-1946) took thousands of pictures beginning in 1879 that chronicled the lives of ordinary people in this region of the state. For 62 years he captured images of the locals, including amazing photographs of Ho-chunk people. Much of his collection, in fact, came to be housed at the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison and remains vibrant and relevant into the present period. In 2011, in fact, the Society published *People of the Big Voice*, a powerful resource for understanding the Ho-chunk story in this region of the state. The role Frances played in this process is documented in *Big Voice* and it is

[3] Black River Falls has the distinction of being the first community in the state to have a public library (1872). Between 1901-1915, 60 communities in Wisconsin constructed libraries with funding from Andrew Carnegie. The BRF Carnegie Library was built in 1914 and today remains the headquarters of the Jackson County Historical Society.

clear that she was a vital link in the important work.[4]

Our interviewees this year each had a unique relationship with Frances Perry. Millie has a living memory of Frances from early childhood and knew her in ways that only a close relative could. Leonna provided us with another window into that period of time when Frances was actively working as town librarian. Mary's friendship with her came when Frances had reached elderhood. Frances Perry was nearly 100 years old by the time of her death in 1996 and she lived a full life. Our explorations, of course, are incomplete and the best we can say is that we finally arrive at an interpretation of the person we are researching and how they fit into the town's history. Beyond her role as cultural broker, Frances truly served as a bridge between the old Black River and modern times. Consider, for example, that Frances' grandfather Timothy arrived in Jackson County in 1850 and served as a cook in one of Jacob Spaulding's logging camps! Her family roots run deep in the area and her voice connects us with that heritage. Like so much local history, the memory of Frances has faded into the mists of time, but her rich legacy endures.

Paul S. T. Rykken

June 2016

[4] Chapter 1 of People of a Big Voice provides a wonderful summary of Van Schaik's life and work and the role that Frances played with the photographs. There is further information in the final chapter of the book with various acknowledgements of the many people, both native and non-native, that became involved.

Interview with Mildred Evenson: 9 July 2015

Rykken: I was to start off with some background information about yourself. You were born in 1938. Can you give us a little information about where you grew up?

Evenson: I grew up on county trunk P, three miles east of Taylor, Wisconsin and it was on a farm, that my great grandmother, Jennette Vincent received as a wedding gift when she married Adam Relyea, she got that. She had a choice between a thousand dollars and that farm. So she chose the farm. If you know the Kling family from Taylor, they're my relatives. Bob Kling was my second cousin and they still own that property.

Rykken: Is Sarah Halverson related to you?

Evenson: Yes, she would be my second cousin. Bob's granddaughter.

Rykken: She's coming back from Holmen, to teach her in Black River. We're really excited about that. She told me a number of times about her, correct me if I'm wrong, grandmother, that was the county superintendent.

Evenson: No that would be her great grandmother. It would be Bob's grandmother. Bob is her grandpa and Bob's grandmother was Jane, Norma Jane McNab.

Rykken: Was she the first woman county superintendent?

Evenson: I would say so.

Rykken: I think Sarah told me that. Where did you go to school?

Evenson: I went to school in Taylor, Wisconsin. We didn't have kindergarten there and my dad was the principal of the grade school. He also taught seventh and eighth grade. Then I went to high school. That's the way it went.

Rykken: From high school, did you go to college?

Evenson: I did, I went to the La Crosse teacher's college and now it's the University. They changed the names. I wanted to be a teacher and completed the two-year elementary program.

Rykken: What made you want to be a teacher?

Evenson: It was a profession that many in my family were in. I thought it was possible and I liked children and I thought, "Well, that may be something that I can do."

Rykken: How long were you at La Crosse?

Evenson: I lived there two years, then we moved to Black River and my husband got a job at Norplex.

Rykken: Who is your husband?

Evenson: Donald Evenson. We got married in 1958. I was twenty years old. That was pretty typical what people did

Rykken: It seems young today. How long were you and Don married?

Evenson: We were married I think 54 years.

Rykken: Don has passed?

Evenson: Yes, he passed August of 2011.

Rykken: Do you have children

Evenson: Yes, we have two children. Diane and David. Diane was born in 1960 and her brother David was born in 1962.

Rykken: Do they live in the area?

Evenson: No, Diane lives in Minneapolis and David lives in Hutchinson, Minnesota.

Rykken: Do you have grandchildren?

Evenson: Yes, I have six grandchildren. Diane has two and David has four. My oldest grandchild, Patrick, is about 24 years old and Sarah (one of her grandchild) is 22. No great-grandchildren yet.

Rykken: When did you start teaching?

Evenson: I taught at Chaseburg for half a year and then we moved here. Then I taught at Hixton, when Diane was nine years old. I think that would put it at 1969. Then I did not continue teaching but later Mr. Schmallenberg and I had a conversation. He invited me to teach at Gebhardt.

Rykken: How long did you teach at Gebhardt?

Evenson: I'm going to guess, 14 years. I taught mostly second grade.

Rykken: Did you teach with Selma Gee?

Evenson: I taught with Selma Gee in Hixton but not at Gebhardt.

Rykken: I try to ask any of the folks I interview, what their first historical memory is?

Evenson: Well, we lived with my grandmother, Alice Lambert Relyea, and she and my mother would have conversations about me and what I was up to. They taught me how to say the Pledge of Allegiance and I would stand and recite that. I was four and I'm sure they were pleased that I could do it. Then they would have me do it for other people.

Rykken: You must have done the pledge a lot! You were doing the pledge before you went to school and then when you went to school, you of course, already knew it. A little history side note here but when you learned the pledge it wouldn't have had "Under God" in it because that was added in 1954.

Evenson: Right

Rykken: Do you remember World War II?

Evenson: I do remember World War II. I remember talking to my cousin David Relyea about it. He was one of the people who knew everything. He could educate me on the type of airplanes we saw going overhead. We would talk about the enemy and the swastika. We disliked that swastika and I think that we were kind of afraid for our lives, which was kind of silly but that was anxiety.

Rykken: Do you have any recollection of Franklin Roosevelt?

Evenson: I have little memory of him being president and when he died.

Rykken: Did you listen to the radio?

Evenson: Yes, we had a radio in our house. People would sit there and listen. As a child I wanted to listen to the Lone Ranger and the Spooky Staircase.

Rykken: When you were about twelve years old the country went into a Red Scare, do you remember any of that?

Evenson: Is that when we would hide under our desks, in a case of the atomic bomb?

Rykken: Yes

Evenson: Yes, I remember that.

Rykken: Do you have any memory at all of people up where the water tower is on 10Th Street, doing sky observations?

Evenson: No, I lived in Taylor, in the rural area. So I didn't know about that.

Rykken: Right. They had 24-hour watch for Soviet Airplanes. I think there were dozens of people involved, probably under the Civil Air Patrol. I've got articles from the Banner from that time period about it. People would volunteer a few hours at a time. They would teach them what to look for.

Evenson: Wow, and they were up on the water tower.

Rykken: Well, they were up on that hill by the water tower. People would bring them food.

Evenson: Oh my goodness! How long did they stay on they watch?

Rykken: A couple of hours, I think. I've interviewed people who actually did it. I have a wonderful picture of it from the Banner Journal, men looking up at the sky.

Evenson: Interesting.

Rykken: What's your memory of Dwight Eisenhower?

Evenson: We thought he was wonderful. He was beautiful. We saw his picture, wow -- he was just the best looking guy we ever saw. What year was he (president)?

Rykken: He was elected in 1952.

Evenson: Right. Donnie was a person in the Air Force and he would talk about him.

Rykken: Did you know Don when you were younger?

Evenson: Donnie lived in Pigeon Falls. My sister married Addison Hegge from Pigeon Falls and my brother married Marsha Hoff from Pigeon Falls. So three of six married people from Pigeon Falls. When Amy married Addison, I was the Maid of Honor and Donald was the Best Man. So that's how we met.

Rykken: Interesting. Were you interested in history as a school girl and while you were going through school?

Evenson: I probably was. We would be told to read our history books and that was difficult. They'd expect a fifth grader could read quite difficult material.

Rykken: Were you a person who read a lot?

Evenson: I loved to read. I did a lot of that.

Rykken: What kind of books did you read when you were younger?

Evenson: Well our family had, up in that attic, had a lot of teacher type material and Grimm's Fairy Tales. I loved Grimm's Fairy Tales. I just skipped over words I couldn't pronounce. My family also subscribed to the LIFE magazine, which came every week. I can remember my grandmother saying to my mother, "Have you seen the last LIFE magazine?" and I was sitting there, a little kid listening, and my mother would answer, "Oh it's on the library table." I always thought, if that's the last LIFE magazine, why was there always another LIFE magazine. (laughs) When I was younger I thought too literally.

Rykken: That's funny. Well we'll weave in more of your teaching in a little bit but I wanted to discuss about Frances Perry. So once again what is your relationship to her?

Evenson: She's my aunt and she was my mother's sister. They were distantly related because Frances was the second oldest and my mother was second youngest of this family of twelve. So that was their joke, to be distantly related. They know that my grandmother had at least 15 births. They lived out in the country and I don't think they went to the hospital to have those babies.

Rykken: So they did lose some children.

Evenson: Yes, they did.

Rykken: Of course, at that time it was pretty common.

Evenson: Right.

Rykken: I may be asking some things that we may have already talked about before but her first name was Edna.

Evenson: Right but she was never called Edna, as far as I know. That was the name of her aunt. My grandfather's sister, Edna.

Rykken: Of course we want to get into what she actually did but let's dig into that earlier history of her. What's the first time you remember Frances or was she just there from the beginning?

Evenson: Well we had a lot of gatherings and this big family would come to my grandparents, in Kenyon Valley. Everybody came that could come and Frances probably came in a cab with Jill and Sarah. She always looked very nice and she was in the kitchen with the rest of my aunts, making food, talking, talking, talking. I remember we had a "swarming" at my parents' house one time and she made us dolls out of natural materials like burlap.[5]

Rykken: Did anything jump out at you about her? Was she different from you other folks?

Evenson: One time we met at Lake Arbutus, in Hatfield. She would have been about forty and she had a swimming suit on! I thought, "This old person is wearing a swimming suit!"

Rykken: Did she like to swim?

Evenson: I think she did.

Rykken: Now she had an illness as a child.

Evenson: She did.

Rykken: What was that?

Evenson: She told me that her father, Alvin Roberts, said to his wife, my grandma, "This baby has a shorter leg." She was one of the first people in Jackson County to have polio.

[5] The term "swarming," as near as I can tell, is a rural expression that was used to designate a large gathering of people, and would have been common in the culture that Millie is describing here.

Rykken: Of course, this was before they had the vaccine. Do you remember many other people having polio?

Evenson: Well, I remember when I was in eighth grade. There was this big scare in Jackson County. You were not to go the fair or go swimming. There was a family who had four in their family that had polio. Yes, that was a big scare.

Rykken: I'm 58 years old, I remember going to the gym to get the vaccine, a little cup to drink. I remember that. There were hundreds of people there. So I remember when the vaccine came in. Apparently she (Frances) really loved her father and they must have been close.

Evenson: She did. I think they were.

Rykken: What sort of person was he?

Evenson: Oh, he was neat but according to my mother he was very strict with them but when we were children he didn't appear that way. He would greet us and hug us. He enjoyed seeing how big we got from the last time. But if you had all those children and very little, I imagine it not being so jolly.

Rykken: Yeah. How about her mother?

Evenson: She came from Van Dyne, which is near Fon du Lac. She was a quiet person, very pleasant in her manner. When I knew her, she was a very nice person and hard of hearing, which affected her talking to you.

Rykken: Did it appear that she and Frances had a good relationship?

Evenson: Well, when Frances would get interviewed for the paper, the papers would say that her mother did not know how to cook and said that she took naps and things. Which makes me think that grandma was smart (laughs) because of all that has happened in her life and she has time to lay down and take a nap, was a good thing.

Rykken: Were her parents educated people?

Evenson: He went through high school, my grandpa did, and so did my grandmother.

Rykken: Did they go to college?

Evenson: No but in those days, it was talked about and he maybe could have been a teacher, even with just a high school degree but he didn't.

Rykken: Were they people who read?

Evenson: They did read. They liked to read.

Rykken: Were they political?

Evenson: I don't know that for sure but I do know Frances and her father argued about politics.

Rykken: Do you remember anything that they argued about?

Evenson: I don't. I just know they talked about it. My mother talked about how the other children disliked that arguing. So it must have been something they knew about.

Rykken: Frances's grandfather had connection back to the very early days of Black River.

Evenson: He came here from New York State. He worked as a cook in the Spaulding lumber camp. This is the story; he was given the marsh-land for his pay from Spaulding, rather than money. He started this place to live. He had two different wives. This was in the Civil War time. Where am I going with this?

Rykken: Did he get into cranberries?

Evenson: No, but they just tried to farm, gather hay, and milk cows. There was no barn.

Rykken: Where was that land?

Evenson: The east side of Kenyon Valley. It still is in the family, my Perry family, "Dunc" Perry, who is now deceased. He bought it for 5,000 dollars from our grandma and grandpa.

Rykken: You would have never met her grandfather, right?

Evenson: No, but my mother grew up in a home that was fashioned out of a granary.

Rykken: Interesting. Is it still standing?

Evenson: No, that was taken down when my mother was around 14 years old. It's gone but the house that her brothers and some friends put up is still there. In the old house, there had been a little attic space and they could crawl up and read the letters that were stored up there.

Rykken: That's interesting. How would you describe Frances as an adult, what words would you use to describe her to someone?

Evenson: We thought of her as being very bright and capable. She was living in Black River and we grew up on a farm. We were country bumpkins and we thought she was really sophisticated. (laughs) I remember going up the steps by Moe's Hardware where she had an apartment. That's when she had been widowed, so she didn't have wonderful lodging. I remember going to visit her around Fair time. She rented an apartment right across from where the new library is today. There's a big Victorian house still there. I recall that she had to share the bathroom with the other tenants who had two kids. But Frances made the best of it.

Rykken: What was Black River like at that time?

Evenson: I think every store was full. There were lots of grocery stores and shoe stores. There were also two drug stores and several hardware stores.

Rykken: When you came into town, did you see native people?

Evenson: I don't remember that but in the pictures you see them.

Rykken: Did Frances ever tell you about her going to school in Black River?

Evenson: She went to Town Creek in Elementary, one of the man county schools at that time. I guess that it was a rough and tumble school but her folks were on the school board. They were supposed to behave themselves but there was a lot going on that was inappropriate according to what I heard.

Rykken: I wonder who her teacher was?

Evenson: Well, she probably had several. Frances claims that she was sick when they taught multiplication. So she said that's why she was not good in math, as a joke, I think. My mother talked about walking over Spaulding Ridge with her two sisters that were the last kids in her family. I wonder how often Frances actually did that considering her difficulty in walking due to the polio. I don't know that and I never asked her, but I imagine it would have been very difficult.

Rykken: She graduated in 1915 and I think she's a contemporary of Lawrence Jones. They even might have been in the same class.

Evenson: They probably were.

Rykken: We did some research one year on, at that time, Civil War veterans would come and speak to the students and there was one specific incident where Lawrence Jones was a senior in high school and a guy named G. M. Perry, I don't know who that would have been.

Evenson: That would have been her husbands' relative. There was a Judge Perry.

Rykken: This guy came and spoke to them because he had fought in the Civil War. Then Lawrence ended up going into World War I. Frances might have been in the class

Evenson: Yeah, I think she could have been.

Rykken: We know that she graduated high school, then immediately went into teaching. Did she ever talk to you about her teaching days?

Evenson: Yes she did. She talked about the different country schools she taught at. It almost seemed as though, she would be at one school then a different school. She would move around.

Rykken: I think in three years she was at three different schools.

Evenson: Yes, why was that?

Rykken: I'm not sure. It seemed like it was common. That they would change teachers like that. Did she seem to enjoy teaching?

Evenson: I think she did. I think she didn't like teaching math, according to what she wrote. She had to be creative, I'm sure.

Rykken: So she would have had to handle all age groups in those one room schools.

Evenson: Yes, how did they do that and there weren't materials? How did they manufacture them? They had slates.

Rykken: Right. Do you think during those years, she was boarding with people?

Evenson: Yes, that's what they would do, they would board with certain people, maybe the School Board people.

Rykken: And you mentioned that she didn't drive.

Evenson: She did not drive. So she would have been close to the school.

Rykken: And pretty isolated.

Evenson: Yes.

Rykken: Well, we know that she did that for three years. I think one thing we should talk about is that it was during that experience that she had some native children in school, and also began conversing with a native man who was a neighbor in that area.[6]

Evenson: Yes, someone who came to visit was my understanding. He would come and sit on the porch, maybe the porch of the people she was staying with. He taught her about the syllabary, which is the writing of the Ho-Chunk Language.[7] She was given ten words to study. So I image she did study them. Then when he would come back and visit and she said she never got a hundred. (laughs)

Rykken: The thing that interests me about that is that seems like the beginning of her being fascinated in their culture because that then ended up being a life-long thing.

Evenson: Right. Right. When she was young, she would see the Ho-Chunk people, at certain times, on the streets of Black River. I think they were there for annuity payments.

Rykken: She was taking an oral language and putting it down in a phonetic spelling.

Evenson: Right, she was able to decode letters (correspondence) by using the syllabary and they liked her for that reason. They thought that was pretty neat that she could do that.

Rykken: Do you remember hearing her speak Ho-Chunk?

Evenson: I remember her trying to do it and she didn't do it correctly, according to the person that was listening to her. She had to keep trying. It wasn't easy.

---

[6] The reference here is to George Garvin, Sr. (WoShipKah), a Ho-chunk man that becomes central to Frances' story, in many respects, due to her interest in Ho-chunk language and culture.

[7] The Ho-chunk language, as with other Native languages, was primarily transmitted through oral tradition. The written syllabary was developed to facilitate a simplified version for written conversion.

Rykken: So she wasn't fluent in Ho-Chunk but she could read it.

Evenson: Right.

Rykken: From that, I'm gathering then, she also began to hear stories from them. I found a couple of stories that she actually wrote down. I've got copies of them. That's an interesting thing. It's one of the things I'm going to ask about when I talk to the people at the Nation.

Evenson: Right. It's supposedly said that they wanted oral tradition and not to write things down and something about Frances that always fascinated me, was when she would tell you something, she would tell you in the same way. Now if you were going to ask me to tell you something about my family, I wouldn't be able to come out with a paragraph that was always going to be the same but she was doing that.[8]

Rykken: How do you think she did that? Is that a trait or something?

Evenson: Well that's the oral tradition. Don't you think?

Rykken: Oh for sure. Right because they'd have to not have inaccuracies. That's interesting. After three years, she made a dramatic leap out to Columbia University.

Evenson: Did she go to Oshkosh first?

Rykken: Oshkosh first, you're right. Two years there, and then to Columbia.

Evenson: Yes, and that was very unusual, that this little person had the gumption to want to do that.

Rykken: I wondering if, you said earlier that her grandfather came from New York, I'm wondering if that had anything to do with that.

Evenson: Possibly but I think he was in rural New York State not in the city

Rykken: She went right into the city. That's amazing

Evenson: Yes, maybe she had read about Columbia University.

Rykken: That would have been in 1920.

Evenson: Okay, yes, right after World War I.

Rykken: So New York would have been a completely different place than Black River. (laughs) So unusual.

Evenson: She talked about liking to go to the opera and the musical programs and plays.

Rykken: Did she talk to you about her Columbia experience?

[8] It seems pretty clear that Frances was practicing this particular facet of the oral history tradition. I have learned from Native elders that stories needed to be repeated very precisely to preserve accuracy.

Evenson: She did but I'm not able to recall exactly what she said about it, but I know she excelled in certain classes while there.

Rykken: I think she eventually she taught English and Psychology. Now from there she ended up landing a job in Westfield, Massachusetts. Did she even talk about that?

Evenson: She talked more about, at that time being near her aunt Edna because that was near where she was. She said that the young girls liked her because she was young and not elderly like some.

Rykken: So she was connecting with the students.

Evenson: She could do that.

Rykken: They probably thought she was interesting and independent. The school itself was considered a very prestigious school and apparently a hard school to get into as a teacher. She must have been impressive-

Evenson: Qualified to do so. Right.

Rykken: So in the process of going through all those different steps, for six or seven years, was sort of being pursued by the man that eventually would be her husband.

Evenson: That's what I understand. He was the age of her father, if I'm not mistaken. He lived on the farm next to the farm that the Robert's had.

Rykken: Okay, so she would have known him growing up, probably.

Evenson: Of course. She married Howard Perry.

Rykken: Howard Perry and they were married in 1931. Howard Ephraim Perry was his name.

Evenson: And her sister, Margaret married Forrest Perry. Two sisters married two brothers.

Rykken: Okay that's interesting. You would not have remembered him. You would have been a baby when he--

Evenson: I never remembered him and I don't remember her talking much about him

Rykken: They were, according to what I found, they were married for eight years before he died.

Evenson: He had cancer.

Rykken: He had had cancer. In the meantime, they had two daughters. What were their names?

Evenson: Jill and Sarah.

Rykken: Are either of them still living?

Evenson: Sarah lives in Madison.

Rykken: She must be?

Evenson: Her husband is Jeff Goldstein.

Rykken: Is he Jewish?

Evenson: Yes. He was pictured in the newspaper as a well-known Madison dissident -- I love that.

Rykken: So she married a rebellious guy. Did you ever meet him?

Evenson: Oh sure, he came to the swarmings.

Rykken: Is he still living?

Evenson: He is. And Jill married Huntley. Oh what was his name? Bob Huntley of the Black River Huntleys. He was an only child. His grand-parents had perfomed in Vaudeville.

Rykken: I'm thinking she (Frances) would've been a young woman, widowed, with two little girls.

Evenson: Yes. Right. Very sad and hard to make a living.

Rykken: Did she and Howard have any money?

Evenson: He was a person that had an orchard and gardens. Frances would say how hard she had to work to take care of that produce and can it. You can imagine what canning would be like back in those days, lots of work.

Rykken: Where was that located?

Evenson: That's located off of Highway A, you go over the cut. I asked her one time, "Would you like to go out where you used to live?" and she agreed to show me. We went out there and she showed me a house that was run down very much so. We left and she talked a little bit about it. Then she told me, "You never have to take me there again."

Rykken: Wow, that's interesting. I wonder if it's where Cain's Orchard is?

Evenson: No -- different place. You know the cut when you're going to Hixton? It's south of there. You go in and around, those high hills.

Rykken: That's an interesting story because that indicates that, that may have triggered unpleasant memories—

Evenson: Or sad.

Rykken: Or sad. That's really something.

Evenson: Right. Kind of touches you.

Rykken: She had some tragedy in her life too. Now it's right about that time that she got involved with the library. Correct?

Evenson: Yes, she got a job at the library.

Rykken: Was she there for a long time?

Evenson: I think she was. She retired in '62.

Rykken: Okay so from '39 to '62. That's a good 22 or 23 years. Did she enjoy being a librarian?

Evenson: I think she did. She wanted certain things for the library and of course money was always tight and this was disappointing, but understandable, and she had to work till nine o'clock at night.

Rykken: I'm sure they were running on a shoe string.

Evenson: Yes, and she felt like she built up the library with books.

Rykken: Now after she was at the library for 15 years. She made this discovery of these pictures. They were apparently stored in the basement of the library.

Evenson: They were here. Carl Cadbey owned this place. He must have allowed them to be stored here.[9]

Rykken: In 1954, she became involved with the Jackson County Historical Society.

Evenson: They used this building as a repository. They did not intend to use this place as a museum but this was a place they could store artifacts that they knew someday might be worth keeping for a museum.

Rykken: So some of the things here have been here the whole time, probably.

Evenson: Well a lot of them got moved up to the Carnegie.

Rykken: But the room upstairs that has all those clothes . . . ?

Evenson: All those clothes! This is funny, I would hear from several people about Frances's funny story about underwear. (laughs) Of all things! Because there's a ton of fabric and materials of clothing of various time periods! And when people were on the stage coach, this I suppose was true, you know, how could you go to the bathroom, when they would stop the stage coach out in the middle of a big field. What were those women supposed to do?!

[9] Millie's reference here is to the building that was the site of the original Van Schaick photography studio in downtown Black River Falls. The building ultimately became the home of the Jackson County Historical Society and remains so in 2016, along with the old Carnegie Library on Main Street.

Rykken: (laughs) Yeah, that's something you don't think about. Just one more thing about her on a personal level with her daughters. Do you think she was a good mom?

Evenson: I do. I think she was a very strict mother. She paid attention to what they were doing and she tried to bring things into their life that would make them more knowledgeable. She was protective, more than my mother.

Rykken: Were there ever any other men friends for her?

Evenson: She did have a friend, Mr. Dickey, that was the head of the post office but that ended.

Rykken: So she never remarried?

Evenson: No, she was happy that way.

Rykken: I want to go back to these pictures. That's kind of where we get to this story.

Evenson: Oh there's a long story about the pictures.

Rykken: Yes, do you want to tell me about it?

Evenson: Oh I don't know enough to tell the story but they were discovered and they got excited about them. People may not be able to tell you about Jim Speltz on the streets. But he was a wonderful photographer. Took a lot of people's graduation pictures, he took our wedding pictures. He was very, very good.

Rykken: Are you aware that his pictures are now over at the public library and the History Room there?

Evenson: ---I heard that they are! Have you seen them?

Rykken: They're there in boxes.

Evenson: Are they in picture form or negatives?

Rykken: I think they're in negatives. Mary Woods is excited about it, for sure. That alone could be a major project for someone. I don't even know where you would start.

Evenson: They came from out west didn't they?

Rykken: I'm not sure about that. That's interesting though because, if you think about Van Schaick, he died in the mid-40s and Speltz probably came in the 50s, I'm guessing.

Evenson: Possibly.

Rykken: So he's kind of the next guy that photographed the town.

Evenson: Right. He was very highly thought of.

Rykken: He must have been intrigued in the Van Schaick story.

Evenson: And he helped, with the glass negatives.

Rykken: Oh he did? Let's get back to that, these pictures from Van Schaick were basically sitting in this building (Jackson County Historical Society Gallery).

Evenson: And there were some also stored in the fire station.

Rykken: I wonder how they ended up there.

Evenson: Well, they didn't know what to do with them.

Rykken: So Frances seems to be the person who sort of started that process. So now she's connecting back to her earlier connection, the language. So what did she want to do with the pictures? What was her goal?

Evenson: Well, I'm sure she thought they should be kept for the next people to come along.

Rykken: Did she start identifying right away?

Evenson: Yes she did. She retired in '62 and I know she spent many years writing on the backs of the pictures. She lived on Main Street right across from the Carnegie library and she was right there on Main Street. She had Ho-Chunk friends and they would come to her house. She must have had them in boxes, I don't know. I didn't see this happen but my understanding is that's how they got identified.

Rykken: You can see were this is going with her. She became more and more interested in who they were. She comes across to me as a person who is non-judgmental, is that correct?

Evenson: Oh very much.

Rykken: Just interested and that must have come through to them as well because eventually she ends up being adopted in the Indian way, do you remember much about that?

Evenson: I remember how happy she was about that happening. She was given the name Blue Wing (Ahucowjįgą) -- I don't say that right.

Rykken: And she was proud of that?

Evenson: Very much so. There was a naming feast and she did not invite her relatives to come to it. So we didn't see it but it was something she was happy about.

Rykken: This is also true of Nancy Lurie. Nancy Lurie was adopted by Mitchel Red Cloud Sr., the father of Mitchel Red Cloud Jr. So she and Frances, I'm guessing during the 40, 50, and 60s, are seeing each other quite a bit. That kind of explains to me that they would have had mutual interest that would have drawn them together. Can you tell me a little bit about a lady named Flora Thundercloud Funmaker Bearheart?

Evenson: (laughs) She was a person I was fortunate enough to know because of her being a friend of Frances. She lived in Tomah and Frances, probably in the 60s, 70s, would have her

come and stay overnight with her. They enjoyed being together. She did wonderful beadwork, just amazing. I would say she was a sweet person.

Rykken: So they became good friends, apparently?

Evenson: Yes. Elizabeth Hall was also her friend.

Rykken: Who were her non-native friends within the community, from Black River?

Evenson: It's hard for me to say who her non-native friends were.

Rykken: Where would you put her in the strata of the town?

Evenson: She was not wealthy but she was highly respected, I would say. People enjoyed her because she was a very good conversationalist. She had wit.

Rykken: So she took the time to talk to people.

Evenson: Yes, she enjoyed that. She would enjoy going to the grocery and talking to the people in the grocery store. She liked everybody- well I'm sure she enjoyed talking to everybody, to say she liked everybody, that's pretty broad.

Rykken: Is she someone, that when people would see her, would they describe her as being eccentric, or does that not fit? It seems like she did many different things and was independent.

Evenson: She wasn't interested in being involved in clubs where she had to Pledge Allegiance to the flag. (laughs)

Rykken: Was she active in things that we would like to consider charity work?

Evenson: No, I would say she felt that taking care of herself was her prime job and doing the work with the pictures.

Rykken: She was somewhat focused on that.

Evenson: Yes and she had a very small house. She did not always have room for other people but one thing that I enjoyed about her was when my kids would go swimming at the old swimming pool. There was a little nest of them that went together, then they would come back up the hill, "Let's go see Aunt Frances." They would go into her house. If she could she would invite them in, she would make them tea and they would have sugar lumps in their tea. So she liked to do that for them.

Rykken: Do you ever remember anybody being upset with her about anything?

Evenson: Mary Perry and I worked with Frances and we produced, "People of the Pines," and "Cradle to Grave" slideshows. She was on a tape telling about each picture and we still have those. I remember taking her to Baraboo. The native people were having a meeting. I got the impression that they did not know how much she did know about the pictures. We showed many pictures of the people with the beads. Frances would say these would be showing their wealth

and that they were sending the pictures to their Nebraska relatives.[10] I think the Ho-chunk had a different version of the beads, for example. I can't say what it was but Frances was very eager to show that she had these pictures and was willing to present them. She also wanted to share what she knew with the kids in school.

Rykken: Where did you present these?

Evenson: That was in Baraboo -- must have been in a high school.

Rykken: Did you do a lot of that?

Evenson: Not too much.

Rykken: Did she do any public speaking?

Evenson: Not that I know

Rykken: I guess we've talked about it a little bit but what do you remember about her and Nancy Lurie? Did they spend a lot time together?

Evenson: Nancy would come around Memorial Day for the powwow and the powwow they had in the fall. I would hear that Nancy Lurie was in town and coming to visit her. I'd hear about it, maybe afterward. Then I got to know Nancy and she lived in a wigwam at the Mission. I can remember that it needed to have furniture in it and David, Donnie, and I delivered several pieces for her. That was really interesting to see how that went.

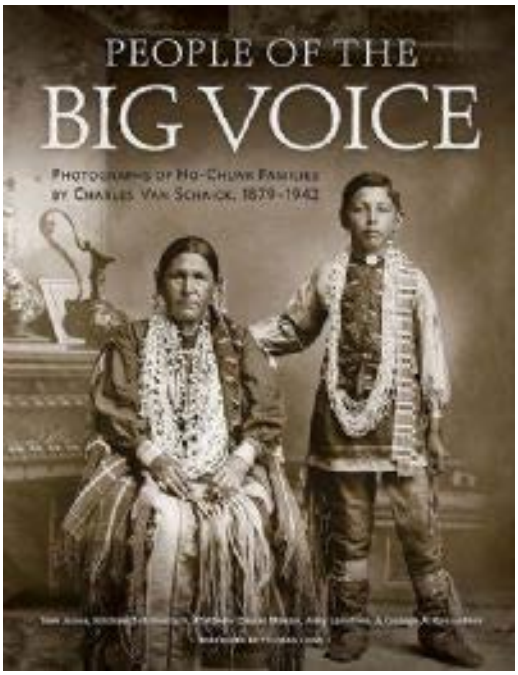
Rykken: I've interviewed Nancy a several times and she has the attributes of a scholar. When you talk to her, you have to be prepared for that because she clearly has her own obsessions, or things that she is very focused on, in a different way. She has so much background and knowledge. I talked with her a couple of months ago, on the phone, and she was not doing well, physically. She had a shoulder replacement and was recovering from that. I think she's 89 or 90 years old.

Evenson: She used to come to our house and get water. So we would see her as a guest, coming into our house. She loved to talk. I think she liked Donnie too because he was on the County Board. She could find out what was happening in the county from him.

Rykken: My dad used to say to me that, "When an old person dies, a library burns to the ground." I think about that with both Frances and Nancy Lurie -- you can't really replace their vast wealth of knowledge. That's one of the reasons why we wanted to do this project. We feel like the more we got to know about her story, the more we can see that she was a pretty important figure.

[10] The mention of Nebraska relatives is a reference to the division of the Ho-chunk Tribe that resulted from the Treaty of 1837 and the various removals that followed. Ultimately, a significant portion of the tribe ended up in Nebraska and they retain the name "Winnebago" today.

Evenson: To identify these people, with the Ho-chunk friends she had, and to go out to the Mission and ask, "Do you know these people?" Whenever you have a picture that you don't know who it's a picture of, it loses its importance.



Rykken: So true. I guess that's where we can kind of wanted to conclude what we're talking about. Do you think that's what she wanted to be remembered for? That's kind of her legacy?

Evenson: I think it is.

Rykken: We'll try to follow up on that.

Evenson: And the book, *People of the Big Voice*, is a wonderful book. At least in a small way, Frances played a role in the process that led to the book being published. The Wisconsin Historical Society published it and it is really great.

Rykken: It's a phenomenal source. It really is. Of course, Frances is mentioned in there several times. You're in there, in the Index but it's pretty neat because of all the people that were involved.

Evenson: And JoAnn Dougherty.

Rykken: What was her relationship with JoAnn Dougherty?

Evenson: They were both in the Historical Society. JoAnn and Frances would work together and they had to make an agreement, that they were not to talk to each other and they were going to work. So I'm sure they worked many, many hours.

Rykken: Was Donn Holder involved?

Evenson: Well, he and JoAnn were married but I don't think he was in the Historical Society way back. He was a person with a family and was a geologist. He moved around to many places, so he wasn't always in the picture.

Rykken: Do you remember anyone else that seemed to spend quite a bit of time on the pictures or was it mostly the people you mentioned?

Evenson: Yes, I would say so.

Rykken: There wasn't someone else that we've missed that was very instrumental?

Evenson: I don't think so. Frances asked me to be the curator of the Ho-Chunk pictures when she couldn't do it. I'm not a bit like Frances or that ambitious about it, but I have the project now

of trying to get the pictures into sleeves because they're flat pictures, plus they're slides and the flat pictures need to be protected.

Rykken: Have you ever worked with the negatives?

Evenson: No. I wonder if we kept negatives to any extent.

Rykken: They always refer to the glass plates.

Evenson: Yes, they're in Madison at the State Historical Society.

Rykken: Does the local Historical Society have any of those?

Evenson: Not more than one or two of the Ho-Chunk glass negatives. That's probably a good thing because they're taken care of there. Sometimes I wonder if we do a good enough job of telling the public that we have this resource, because we thought, at one time probably around the year 2000, that people would want to buy copies of their family members, that didn't happen.

Rykken: Well Amy Lonetree, talks about that. She came and met with Donn Holder and was able to located family memories. That was a big moment for her to be able to do that. I think you're absolutely right about that and the question is, "How you do make those kinds of things happen?"

Evenson: Right, publicity and when you're Mildred Evenson, you just kind of let it go.

Rykken: Well, we're hoping to publicize the story within the next year. We're also hoping to get some pictures at the school. Every time you do anything like that, you need to tell the story. So we'll keep trying to do that. It's difficult to get people to, I know this to be true because I've been teaching history for, next year will be my 37th year of teaching – it is difficult to get people hooked into their local history. In a way it's the most interesting history because it's their life but for some reason, that's a hard jump for people.

Evenson: Why is that, have you got an answer, what do you think?

Rykken: I think some of it has to do with their familiarity with the community; they've been there a long time, they sort of feel like, 'Nothing new under the sun here,' it's not exotic in any way. I think they just miss it; I think it just passes them by. It's an ongoing thing. I've found with kids, I teach with junior and seniors mostly, that once I get them into local history, they do like it because they want to know where they came from and what this place was like. Black River has a very, very unique history, in some ways, just because of the Native population and the river town. It's an old town, it's been around for a very long time. Millie, I want to thank you very much for this and we'll keep up with you throughout the next year and bring you in on different parts of the project.

Evenson: Well, that's fun and a very nice opportunity.

Michaela Custodio, 2015-16 Falls History Project Intern, joined Millie Evenson at the Jackson County Historical Society in May of 2016 to learn about the collection of Van Schaick photographs housed in the original Photo Gallery. Michaela was able to locate pictures of relatives and also helped to locate photographs that will be enlarged and framed for display at Black River Falls High School as part of this year's project.

Interview with Leona Greengrass Mckee: November 2015

Rykken: Could you state your full name.

Mckee: Leona Greengrass McKee

Rykken: If you wouldn't mind sharing your age.

Mckee: Yeah, I'm 80.

Rykken: You are? Good for you. Wow, I wouldn't have guessed that. Leona, do you have a Ho-Chunk name?

Mckee: Yes, it's a French name. One of my uncles named me because he was a veteran. He was in World War 2 or whatever that was. He could name me whatever because of that. He gave me a French name, Wa-sha-wena.

Rykken: What does it mean?

Mckee: Some kind of women, I don't know. Good woman (laughs)

Rykken: It's a good name.

Mckee: Yeah

Rykken: Where were you born?

Mckee: Tomah, at the Indian hospital by the VA.

Rykken: So, what year where you born? You told me you were 80.

Mckee: 1935

Rykken: Can you tell us a little bit about your parents and background?

Mckee: My parents? I had good parents. They were home for us, all the time. So I don't understand a lot of this other business with dysfunctional families, you know? We had a good home. Very sheltered and I guess maybe that's why we're all here. I got five sisters. We're all here and still going good. I'm the oldest. I'm not diabetic, but I got a brother who is diabetic and he's lost both of his feet.

Rykken: That's tough

Mckee: And he's still working. He a legislator, been there for over 30 years, I think. Long time.

Rykken: Is that Doug?

Mckee: Yes, Doug. That's my brother

Rykken: I've met him. Were you raised in a traditional way?

Mckee: Yeah I was raised traditionally. I'm also a Christian and I believe in my Lord Jesus and I won't back down and for that reason I don't get along too well with some of my people.

Rykken: Do some people resent that because they see conflicts between traditional practices and Christianity?

Mckee: Yes, I would say some do.

Rykken: As a sidelight here -- my grandfather was a missionary and he served at Bethany Mission in Wittenberg from 1920 to 1930 with the Norwegian Lutheran Church. This gets to be a complex topic sometimes when I'm speaking with native people due to all the negatives surrounding the boarding schools.

Mckee: My father went to school up there in Wittenberg when he was young.

Rykken: Do you know what years he was there?

Mckee: I don't know but probably before that because my dad was born in 1904.

Rykken: Were your grandparents part of the removal story?

Mckee: You know, my grandparents were gone already. I guess my grandparents, my dad's father would go get the money and distribute the money from the government. He was considered the Chief then. But anyway, he used to give the money and wear a fur coat and I saw him in a dream and my mother said that was your grandfather. Yeah I lived out in Dells Dam. I lived there until I was five years old and then from there I kind of forgot some things because I guess that bothered me, leaving, that home out there. And we came out to the Mission. And I started school here at the Mission school and I didn't know a word of English.

Rykken: Did you have Emma Ols0n as a teacher?

Mckee: Yeah, later. The first four years were her sister, Mrs. Johnson. Well there was another one there but I don't remember her name, and Mrs. Olson was my teacher for the last four years.

Rykken: Do you remember much about Emma Olson?

Mckee: Oh yeah, she was a good teacher. We had to learn. She did a lot of different things. Mothers would come and complain and tell on their kids and then she'd do whatever needed to be done (laughs), I think she would spank them, but we didn't see that.

Rykken: Did she discourage you from using Ho-Chunk language? Do you remember that?

Mckee: We weren't supposed to but, of course, I was just getting to learn. I think they put me right in first grade.

Rykken: I was just wondering if you felt like you had to give up your language?

Mckee: You know, I've been speaking my language forever. Even today I speak it all the time. I know there are some that don't understand me but I just keep talking.

Rykken: Good for you. You know, we teach Ho-Chunk language at our school, now?

Mckee: Okay yeah.

Rykken: Yes, Gordon Thunder and Dana DeBoer are the teachers this year. Gordon is a good man who has helped us with many things over the years. When you were being raised, where you in contact with a lot of non-native people or were you with mostly Ho-chunk people?

Mckee: Well in those days, when I was going to grade school, we had get-togethers with Girl Scouts. We attended the big meetings with the girls from the Mission school. We attended a lot of different things. Like, Fall Hall Glen -- we'd go there. Different places, then they'd send us, like summer time, they'd send us to Green Lake for camping -- Bible camp.

Rykken: Do you remember ever taking a trip to Milwaukee with Emma?

Mckee: Oh yes, I remember. We went on a retreat.

Rykken: Yes, she did that – I have heard people talk about the Milwaukee trips – she would take the students on the train and do various things in the city.

Mckee: Yeah, she was good.

Rykken: Do you remember ever growing up experiencing racism in the community?

Mckee: Okay I graduated in 1953 from Black River Falls and there were only a handful of us and we got along at that time. I still got friends like Janet Krohn, I graduated with Janet.

Rykken: We interviewed her too.

Mckee: Her and I were in the hospital same time, we had babies on the same day, November 7th.

Rykken: I was going to ask you if you were married -- and you have children?

Mckee: Well yeah, I had 7 but I got three girls and three boys now. They're all grown, my oldest is 58.

Rykken: Do they live around here?

Mckee: No, my two oldest ones live in Wisconsin Dells, oh and my son, my oldest son and I got three here; Shelly and Robin and my youngest son lives in Minnesota.

Rykken: I had a student here, I've been here 25 years, a student named Forrest.

Mckee: Forrest is my grandson.

Rykken: I had him as a student.

Mckee: Yeah, my son's nephew.

Rykken: Okay, so you raised a big family.

Mckee: Well I just raised my three girls and three boys.

Rykken: That was a busy life.

Mckee: Yeah it was alright. Sometimes it seemed like it took forever for them to grow up.

Rykken: After you graduated from high school, did you go on to any other school?

Mckee: I was supposed to go on to school, my uncle was going to pay for it, but I ended up not going at the time. I went to work instead. I was in Madison for a while, just a few months. Then I was in St. Paul and worked there. I worked at West Publishing. I did proof reading for the law book publishing company.

Rykken: You must be a good reader?

Mckee: I used to be then but not now. I couldn't read after that; I couldn't even read a magazine without looking for the mistakes (laughs). But later on, after all my kids grew up, when I was 50, I went back to school. I took all kinds of things. I was CNA for a while and while I was doing CNA, I took massage, on my own. That was 30 years ago and then I went to AODA. I went to school for counseling.

Rykken: That's impressive to do all that after you were 50!

Mckee: Yeah, I was always the oldest one in the class.

Rykken: That's kind of an inspiration for me to hear that!

Mckee: The other students would always have to help me all the time. Yeah, they were always good to me.

Rykken: Well, we want to find about your connection to Frances Perry. When did you first meet France Perry?

Mckee: It was when my girls were young. They were in grade school, Monica and Nelly. I lived in town here and they use to disappear, here I found out that they were over by Frances Perry's place because she would have cookies and milk.

Rykken: So you met through your children?

Mckee: Yeah, they'd disappear.

Rykken: Where did she live? Did she live down by the old library? Or was this when she lived out in the country?

Mckee: Frances lived across from the library.

Rykken: Where did you live at the time?

Mckee: I lived up on Chestnut Street.

Rykken: How long did you know her? You must have known her a long time.

Mckee: Well, I used to know her when I went to high school.

Rykken: Did you stay in contact with her throughout the rest of her life?

Mckee: I didn't really but my mother used to go there, at that time. They were doing a lot of translating with Flora (Bearheart, pictured here) and my mom use to spend a lot of time there. I think that's how my daughters started going over there, because my mother would go.

Rykken: What was your mother's name?

Mckee: Melinda Greengrass.

Rykken: How would you describe her, Frances Perry, what kind of person was she?

Mckee: I don't know just a caring person, I guess.

Rykken: Did she ask you questions about the Ho-Chunk culture or was it just a normal friendship?

Mckee: It was a normal friendship but she was getting all that from my mother and Flora.

Rykken: Who is Flora?

Mckee: Flora Bearheart.

Rykken: Now that's a name I've heard!

Mckee: Then, of course, Nancy Lurie.

Rykken: Did you know Nancy Lurie?[11]

Mckee: Yes, I think she used to go with my uncle when she was very young before my uncle was with anybody.

Rykken: We're worked with her and she's helped me develop a new class here in Ho-Chunk history. I've communicated with her and she's not very well now. She had a stroke. She lives in Milwaukee.

Mckee: She had a wigwam behind my mother and my uncle's place in the mission.

Rykken: Is it still there?

Mckee: I don't think so.

Rykken: Did you ever get an idea about why she was so interested in Ho-Chunk language?

Mckee: I don't know but she spoke it fluently. There were a few merchants in town that spoke fluent, like at Moe's hardware.

Rykken: They knew how to speak Ho-Chunk?

Mckee: Yes. Just like Mr. Stucki.

Rykken: Did you know him?

Mckee: I knew Ben Stucki but I didn't know his dad.[12]

Rykken: Did you and Frances speak Ho-Chunk to each other?

Mckee: Sure, yeah.

Rykken: That must've been fun.

Mckee: There's just very few now that I can converse with.

Rykken: Can you tell us anything about the pictures, down at the historical society that Frances was trying to get the names of, did you help with that?

---

[11] Nancy Lurie is an Ethno-Historian of note in Wisconsin and has a long-standing connection with the Ho-chunk people, dating back to 1944. Author of several books, most notably Mountain Wolf Woman, Dr. Lurie has significantly contributed to a greater understanding of the history of American Indian people in Wisconsin.

[12] The reference here is to Benjamin Stucki (1893-1961) and his father Jacob Stucki (1857-1930). The elder Stucki arrived at the Mission in Black River Falls in 1884 to assist Jacob Hauser who had established the Mission as part of the outreach of the German Reformed Church in 1878. Ben worked with his father and also eventually became the Superintendent of the Neillsville Indian School, serving there for many years.

Mckee: Well we still do.

Rykken: Part of our project is that Michaela and I are going to go down there and look at some of those pictures.

Mckee: There was a lady, Anna Olson, who got me into historical society. That was many, many years ago.

Rykken: Are you still involved with that?

Mckee: Yes. It's hard in the winter.

Rykken: I know Millie is pretty active there.

Mckee: Oh, she is. Her and a few others.

Rykken: One of the things we heard is that Frances had students that would help her do that. Did you remember that?

Mckee: I don't remember that.

Rykken: I think that was in the 1950s, because she was a librarian.

Mckee: I think that was after I graduated.

Rykken: What do you think she was trying to do with those pictures? What was her goal?

Mckee: I don't know.

Rykken: It's kind of interesting because those pictures aren't very meaningful unless you know who's in them and that's what it seemed like she was doing. How long would Flora Bearheart have been alive?

Mckee: I think she lived to her 70s. She was living out at Tomah Bluewing, next to her son's place. My sister lives in that house now.

Rykken: Was there anyone else in the tribe that was working with Frances? Besides the people you already mentioned?

Mckee: I don't know.

Rykken: I didn't know you knew Nancy Lurie. I got to know her pretty well, actually I've gotten to email with her sometime in the last couple months and she still is very sharp.

Mckee: Yeah, she had the wigwam behind my mother and uncle's place, Eli Youngthunder.

Rykken: Did you know that Eli, the young Eli, is now teaching here. I think he told me, in Ho-Chunk way, you're his sister.

Mckee: Yeah. He's my brother in Indian way.

Rykken: He's a history teacher here.

Mckee: He told me but it didn't sink in.

Rykken: Of course, he speaks Ho-Chunk, which is good for our school and some of the kids that are trying to learn the language.

Mckee: He said he was going to come and visit me with his little guy.

Rykken: He just had another baby too. They had they're third baby, another boy. They have three boys. (laughs)

Mckee: That's good. Yeah he wants to come and speak Ho-Chunk with me.

Rykken: In your acquaintances in town here, were there other people besides Frances Perry that were doing that kind of work or interested in the Ho-Chunk people.

Mckee: I don't know, just Mrs. Olsen (Emma).

Rykken: Did you know Mitchell RedCloud, Jr.?

Mckee: No, I was very young maybe 12 or 13 when they use to come to my neighbors and the young men would always go there to meet because the old man, Mr. Winneshiek was there by himself -- Richard Winneshiek.

Rykken: So you saw him?

Mckee: Yeah, that was Norm's (Norman Snake Sr.) Coka, his grandpa. That was a neighbor, Old Man Richard. He had twin daughters, Anna and Anna Belle, and they were my sisters in Indian way, my big sisters. That's why Norm calls me, ma. Where ever I see him, "MA."

Custodio: Definitely has a loud voice.

Mckee: Yeah, he does.

Rykken: Did you know Lavera Risinger?

Mckee: No.

Rykken: Just wondering because her name has come up a number of times.

Mckee: She might've been coming to Frances, after I left school.

Rykken: She's actually 95 years old and in Pine View now. She had connections with native people and I'm going to try to interview her if I can.

Mckee: Yeah, I left right after I graduated in 1953 -- I left.

Rykken: You were gone for a lot of years.

Mckee: Yes, a lot of years and then I came back and then I left again.

Rykken: If you could wave a magic wand and help us know what we should teach the students about the Ho-Chunk people, what do you think we should try to teach about? I'm just interested in getting your perspective.

Mckee: I don't know but they sure need to learn a lot.

Rykken: We're trying to do a better job in school with that. We've been working at that for a while here.

Mckee: It's hard. I don't know but I think if they know the language it would be really good. That's the most important.

Rykken: Do you think the language can be preserved?

Mckee: I don't know but I think they're trying. Not all of them are in it, just the ones that are really interested. It's very important to learn.

Rykken: There's so much of the culture is rooted in the language. Did you learn a lot of Ho-Chunk history while you were growing up from your parents?

Mckee: I just grew up Ho-Chunk and I know different things like respect for relatives and what to do, be quiet. They didn't come to visit the kids, so be quiet and when we went some place, we stayed in the car.

Rykken: Michaela, is there anything you would like to ask?

Custodio: Well personally for me, I would like to know your relationship with my grandma Anna (Winneshiek) because when I was younger, I didn't get to spend very much time with her due to my early years and her being older.

Mckee: Yeah she and Annabelle were different, night and day, but they got along. I don't think they could do without each other either. They were always together but they were different and they were twins. Anna had boys, mostly boys and two girls. Then Annabelle got the girls and just two boys.

Custodio: Yeah, my grandma Anna named one of her boys after her dad, Richard but thank you for sharing this information with me. It means a great deal.

Mckee: They were close and they always called me little sister.

Rykken: How did you and Millie meet?

Mckee: Probably at the Historical Society. I've been there over twenty years. We've been working together.

Rykken: Millie has an interest in the Ho-Chunk people as well.

Mckee: And Anna Olson did too for a long time

Rykken: Was that Emma's sister?

Mckee: No, a different person. I don't know what her maiden name was. I think that was her married name. She moved to Eau Claire. I donated a lot of my mother's jewelry, clothing, and moccasins. They're all down there, in the Carnegie.

Rykken: When you were a little girl, did you ever hear stories about boarding schools or the removal of the native people. Did you ever hear those things?

Mckee: No, but later on in life I see bits and pieces on TV and it's not good. It hurts me.

Rykken: Do you think your parents were affected by it?

Mckee: I don't think so. My mother was a Christian to start with. She was an orphan brought up by David Decorah and Jenny. David was one of the first convert preachers out here under Stucki. My grandmother died during child birth, when she had my uncle Ben. That's all in the Bible. You know, when Benjamin lost his mother. They named him that. My mother lost her mother when she was seven years old. We've found relatives in Iowa. I got relatives in Iowa, my mother was a Seymour. It's a native name, from my grandpa. That's the only one I saw when I was ten years old, we went to see him on his death bed. My brother and I, Chuck, (two years younger than Mckee, no longer here), I guess we were talking Ho-Chunk out in Nebraska. During that time, they were already speaking English, all the children, so my grandpa thought we were real cute because we were talking Indian.

Rykken: Who do you talk to these days in Ho-Chunk?

Mckee: Well, when they're around, I talk to my sisters all the time, all day long. I can't get my grandchildren to talk but I still talk Indian to them. You know Nicole (McCook) and the boys?

Rykken: Another question I have too, was, how do you think it would be today to be a parent of Ho-Chunk children with what's all going on in the world? Do you think it's hard for them to hang onto their culture?

Mckee: If we had the help they have now, today, and what we knew, would help. We came up the hard way. We didn't have any electricity, no running water, and today they have everything. They have it too easy—

Rykken: It's too easy but then it makes it harder for them to understand their own culture.

Mckee: Yeah, it's kind of like they don't have to (learn their culture). The parents have to be pretty good parents.

Custodio: Did you teach your children the language?

Mckee: No, because my husband was from Nebraska and he was already into English and he made fun of my language when I talked.

Custodio: Is that because he didn't know it?

Mckee: No, he knew it. It was because nobody else was speaking it where he came from.

Rykken: So some loss of the language happened that way too. My great grandfather was a Norwegian immigrant. So of course he spoke Norwegian. My grandfather was raised speaking Norwegian, but then they didn't teach that to my dad, so much. By the time it got to my generation, it was pretty much gone. It doesn't take long to lose language. It takes about a generation. There's a lot of work to be done there.

Mckee: It's very hard to learn the language, like Eli (Youngthunder) is doing. They were having language in the tribal building that was good. They were almost too good for me because I didn't have to use animal names and numbers but today they got to learn all that. I don't know my numbers.

Rykken: So it's more complicated now?

Mckee: Yes, but I speak all the rest of it. I've talked Indian a very long time.

Rykken: Is there anything else you would like to add?

Custodio: Sure. Do you think your children had a good bond with Frances Perry because you mentioned that you met her through your children?

Mckee: Yeah, my mother and my children. I can only remember her giving them treats. They were talking about something though. (laughs)

Rykken: One of the things we learned about Frances, is that she originally taught in a country school out near Shamrock and she had native children in that school. It seems to me, that's were that connection was made, right about then, when she was very young. She was probably 18 years old.

Mckee: I think the Thunderclouds were in Shamrock. They have a road out there.

Rykken: I think that's true, Thundercloud Road. She taught at a school that's no longer there but I know where it was. Bill Quackenbush showed me where it was. I'm trying to get this history right.

Mckee: That's good, I'm glad because a lot of time the history is not right. Like even in the latest book, what do you call that latest Ho-Chunk book?

Rykken: *People of the Big Voice?*

Mckee: Yeah.

Rykken: I struggle with it myself and of course I'm non-native. I'm looking into a culture that's different from my own but so much of it was oral.

Mckee: Yeah, I saw that a lot of names were not spelled right and sometimes the translation wasn't right but that's really easy to do. They really did a good job overall.

Rykken: It's a really impressive book. I don't think my students understand how important those pictures are. Those pictures are kind of amazing. They're pretty unique, really, because that one photographer was in town, that Van Schaick. Do you remember him?

Mckee: No I don't.

Rykken: You would've been very young when he was an old man. He died in 1946.

Mckee: Yeah I was only ten or whatever.

Rykken: It would have been unlikely that you aware of him but he took so many pictures, hundreds of hundreds. We're going to try and work on those pictures a little bit. That's part of our goal.

Mckee: So you're going to work at the gallery?

Rykken: Yes, I shouldn't have said work there, but Michaela and I are going to try and go down there and see some of those pictures.

Mckee: That would really be nice. I'd like to go there but it's upstairs and I don't trust myself to go up there. Millie still goes up there.

Rykken: I've looked at them and one of the things that we're hoping is that we can find three or four of them and get them enlarged and actually hang them up in the school. I think that's going to be neat thing to do. That's part of the project.

Mckee: I'm glad you're doing something positive.

Custodio: I want to thank you for coming in. This was a really good interview.
Rykken: Yes, Leona, we thank you so much for coming in and being willing to share some of your knowledge with us. You are very kind to do that.

The new schoolhouse—built in 1936

The school at the Indian Mission near Black River Falls, Wisconsin. Leona McKee attended this school for 8 years prior to enrolling in Black River Falls High School where she graduated in 1953. This school operated within the Black River District as a county school until District consolidation after the 1962-63 school year.

Interview with Mary Perry: November 2015

Rykken: If you could give us your name.

Mary Perry: Mary Perry

Rykken: And you age?

Mary Perry: I was born in 52, so 60 something. I don't know.

Rykken: Where were you born?

Mary Perry: Where was I born? Well, in Spooner but my actual birth spot was Rice Lake Hospital. It was Dr. Olson.

Rykken: Can you briefly describe your professional career at Black River Falls High School? I know you've spent many years here as a teacher.

Mary Perry: This was my first teaching job in 1975 until 2011. That's a lot of years.

Rykken: And you taught art?

Mary Perry: Yes.

Rykken: Was there any connection between your teaching of art and Frances Perry? Or are those just two disconnected things.

Mary Perry: I think this is what I remember, this is in my memory but I'm not exactly sure with dates and stuff. Nola Slaughter was from the Alma Center area and she enjoyed history and said there is someone you need to know. This was when I first came here, which was around the late 70s. This is what I remember, that she was one of the first people I met. They said you need to go and meet her. Drop in for five minutes and stay for forty-five. That was the thing with Frances -- you plan on stopping in for a minute and it was never a minute. Everyone knew that. (laughs) From that, I think at that time, I was pretty much just interested in her family background and she lived so long without a husband and that she had so many siblings and her interest in the library and reading book because I really love to read too. I never really thought about her studies, so much the first visit but then, somehow with Millie Evenson, we got into this whole 'let's look at the glass negatives' and get into this Historical Society thing. We began with cassette recorder and taped her while she spoke. We were looking at slides, apparently some of the glass negatives were in slides already. We would look at these black and white slides. She sure could go. (laughs) So we would just kind of get into it. I think the main objective with Millie and Frances was to get these shared more.

Rykken: Which is still a driving thing with Millie . . .

Mary Perry: Right, I mean if I think about it. There were two and a quarter tons of glass negatives. Some of them were ruined, I think. That is just a big long story but the pictures were so valuable. This is an awesome thing for me to think about but as rugged as some of the lives were at that time on all people. All these photographers made them look like a million bucks. It was just amazing to me. I mean look at these Van Schaick photos -- they are unique. Then you see other more candid photos of how people lived and it really takes you back. These pictures don't do that part. It was just incredible to me that these pictures existed.

Rykken: I'm just calculating a little bit but the time you saw her or met her, she was probably already 80 or in her mid-70s.

Mary Perry: She was elderly but she was so. . . I have a really fine example of somebody that is physical unable but intellectually just hard to keep up with.

Rykken: She actually started doing the photos in the 50s, that much I know, because she originally got some kids to help her. So she was already well into that by the time you met her.

Custodio: And did she introduce that to you, right away when you met?

Mary Perry: Well I think every single time we got together, we talked about them. That was the thing to talk about. It was like, where are these, what are these and what are we going to do with that. That was it. It was just moving forward, although it was a slow pace because we had a lot to do.

Rykken: Did you help her with those or did you, more or less just talk about it?

Mary Perry: I have notes on what we did. We had groups of slides that we gathered for presentations that we would take to the schools and community.

Rykken: Did you do it with slide projectors?

Mary Perry: We did. That's why we changed the glass negatives into slides. So the first set of slides that we got to share was called 'Cradle the Grave' It would start with a picture of Frances, a picture of Flora, a cradle board. Those were the first three slides and then there would be photos like this. (shows photos) and then Millie, and or I, or both of us would give presentations, we wouldn't do it a million times but when the time seemed right. For Ron Perry when he taught Social Studies, with Don Holder when the historical society wanted to see them. I think on an in-service day. And then I have notes on the comments I would make on the slides, like the regalia that I knew about, certain parts of their attire and if we could recognize people we call them by name. That was 'Cradle the Grave.' Then I think there was another one called 'People of the Pines' I believe Millie was very interested in doing something on Winnebago children. I've never seen that one or remember seeing it.

Rykken: Did she talk to you about her interest in the Ho-Chunk language?

Mary Perry: Because of her location, right on Main street, right across from the public library, it was kind of a sweet spot. If you were to pick a spot in town to live, that was it. People would stop and if she was fortunate enough to meet a Ho-Chunk person, she would ask them words

and that's how she learned about the syllabary and speaking the words. That's a very difficult thing for me to explain because the language is difficult, especially if you see it in written terms first. Flora would come, and this is why Flora was pretty significant in all this, because she would come visit and tell stories to Frances and Frances would have to tell them back. I love this story because the Ho-Chunk language is oral, so this is exactly what they would do. If Frances would not get it right, Flora would make her do it over again until she did.[13]

Custodio: Did you get to see that in person, when they would do the stories?

Mary Perry: Not so much. I didn't hear the stories. If you asked her a question she would go twenty to twenty-five minutes. She had something I'm a little bit guilty of and that's circular language.

Time interrupted by Looking at Photos of Flora

Rykken: That's the picture of Flora, that's somewhat famous.[14]

Mary Perry: I'm so lucky to have met her.

Rykken: Mary, something that we're trying to come up with is to put up pictures in the school that are going to be significantly big. That's part of the project.

Mary Perry: There's something about Flora that really sticks with me. When I met her, when she was really elderly, she could barely get up from her chair. It was a big effort for her to stand up for that long (referring to the picture of Flora standing up) and yet she had a kindness and a sweetness about her that, who knows, she could have been in horrible pain but you never heard that from her. She was a giggler too. She had a big aura.

Rykken: The thing that triggered this project was the fact that this women, Frances Perry, was so insistent about trying to identify these pictures and the people on the pictures. I'm sure Flora worked with her on that. I'm sure they did that together because old pictures do not mean much unless you can identify the people or places in them. And of course, for Ho-Chunk people, in the post removal period, it was a very difficult time in their culture and keeping that alive. Frances became part of that process.

---

[13] This account is consistent with what we have learned regarding the oral tradition among the Ho-chunk people. Gordon Thunder recounted this to me on more than one occasion. Accuracy in story-telling, down to the smallest of details is part of this tradition.

[14] The picture referenced here is of Flora Thundercloud Funmaker Bearheart (WaNekChaWinKah) and was taken around 1910 by Van Schaick. In conjunction with our 2016 FHP, this picture, along with a photo of Civil War veteran James Bird (WeeJukeKah) taken around 1900, will be framed and displayed at BRFHS. Both photos are included in People of the Big Voice, published in 2011 by the Wisconsin Historical Society.

Mary Perry: She was just so cool. She did not remind me of anyone else, so unique in her way of life, in her historical background, in her forward thinking, in her descriptive way of saying things. She was so amazing.

Rykken: Did she ever talk to you about her marriage?

Mary Perry: Not very much

Rykken: Because that was a chapter that seems painful because her husband died pretty young, leaving her with these two little girls.

Mary Perry: I might be wrong but when she was married, they were way off from a lot of people. I remember her telling me, she would go months without seeing anyone. If you could imagine that, not being able to see anyone for a whole month. I don't know what his job was, he was away too, but that was really significant to me. She was married but he was not there very often. Her life was really rugged if she could go for that long without things that you might need. I don't think she ever drove a car, so she would have to make do.

Rykken: I know this from Millie, they were doing sustainable farming, they were living off the land to an extent.

Rykken: Did she ever talk to you about her going to school in New York because that was a whole different chapter in her life?

Mary Perry: Not much. She would mention it and she would mention her husband but she would not stay on it very long. The two children she had before she lost her husband are probably the greatest gift she had gotten, because they would come visit her when she was older.

Rykken: The reason I brought up the school was because I find that intriguing that she made that leap from her very humble background and ending up at Columbia, in New York City. From rural Jackson County to New York City, then ended up teaching at an elite prep school and then came back. That was an interesting journey. Not typical.

Mary Perry: It is. That I have a hard time imagining it. I guess I just see her in that little house on main street.

Rykken: Did you maintain that relationship out to the end of her life?

Mary Perry: Not to the end, not to the time she had gotten really ill. I think the best years I had with her was in the late 80s. We did that video tape.

Rykken: I think that's down at the library.

Mary Perry: I have a copy of it but when I ran it once, it never came out really clear, it was really hard to see it.

Rykken: They have that down at the library and I've looked at it but it was really hard to—I've looked at the recordings over there too. Unfortunately, they're in that format that is going to go

away. I believe they're on cassette tapes. That's another part of the project too. Every time we do one of these projects, we try to bring something back. That went away.

Mary Perry: The tape had some streakiness to it but there were some things that were really quite valuable. The camera was on her and there was wonderful scenery behind her in her backyard., when she was talking, and I think there was some really good vocals -- she even sang the Cranberry Song.

Rykken: That's on the internet. It's her singing it, she sang it in folk way. You can find it by looking up her name and typing in Cranberry Song.[15]

Mary Perry: That would be just a perfect example of what she was like.

Rykken: I have one more questions to ask you. Did she talk about being adopted by a Ho-Chunk person?

Mary Perry: And they called her Blue Wing.

Rykken: Yes, that's actually on her grave. Did she talk about that to you?

Mary Perry: When we went to see Flora. That came up because she was already called Blue Wing.

Rykken: The reason I bring that up is because there's a term for people that go between worlds and the term is called Cultural Broker. I'm wondering if Frances was in that position in Black River. She obviously was not Ho-Chunk and she never pretended that she was Ho-Chunk but she had an ability to go between the two, the white world and the Ho-Chunk world, in a fluid fashion.

Mary Perry: I would also describe it like this, she went the way she went and she had her eyes wide open. She was a sponge to everything. She was not biased about anything, she had no big strong negative opinions. She didn't really care what she wore. What was in her mind was the most important thing.

Rykken: She had a lot of curiosity.

Mary Perry: Every time I hear that statement, I think about Dorothy Parker about the curious minds. I always think about Frances. Her biggest problem in life would be shutting her mind off at night. She probably never had a bored moment in her life. Even for someone who lived out in the sticks for months, she would entertain herself with a mountain of things.

Rykken: I've had exchanges this year with Nancy Lurie. I know you're familiar with who she is. She is very elderly and not well. I don't know how much longer she'll be with us.

Mary Perry: Is she still in Milwaukee still?

[15] The song is part of a collection of Wisconsin folk songs and was recorded in 1960, accessible at the following site: http://memory.loc.gov/diglib/ihas/loc.natlib.ihas.200197185/default.html

Rykken: She's been in Milwaukee but she had a shoulder replacement and she's had really tough health. Anyway my correspondence with her has been very limited but I can see her and Frances certainly spending a fair amount of time together, when Nancy would come and visit.

Mary Perry: Frances was pretty excited when she came. They had a lot to talk about that both could contribute to but I don't know much about Nancy.

Rykken: Yes, and I've only had brief conversations with her about France but I know that they were clearly interested in the same things and both curious individuals. Nancy was the anthropologist and Frances was more of the folklore type of person, different angle. I'm in the second year of teaching a class in our high school called Ho-Chunk and Ethnic Studies -- I'm not sure if you were aware of that. We're actually affiliated with UW-Green Bay and the kids that take it here get dual credit. Anyway Michaela took it last year. She was in the first class we had. Anyway how do you think Frances would react to that? Would that be an automatic good thing?

Mary Perry: I don't know. I think her deep respect for the Ho-Chunk people did not cause her to say things that would lead to the idea of everyone "melding together." The separateness of the culture was certainly important to her due to that respect.

Rykken: It would be a complicated subject for her, perhaps. Your answer kind of makes sense to me from what I studied about her. Her driving passion was not to necessarily bring this into the schools. Her driving passion was simply to understand a culture different from her own.

Mary Perry: To understand it for what it was not to blend it together, so that it became less significant because there were so many awesome things to look at.

Rykken: Were you aware of any resentment of her from any angle, for example from Ho-chunk people? She was obviously, not digging around, but exploring.

Mary Perry: I was not.

Different Topic

Mary Perry: Frances believed so much in ideas, thoughts and people standing on their own merit. She did so much with the Ho-Chunk people. I don't think she did anything to upset anybody. Now that's something in itself. If I'm correct about that. I know I've done and said some stupid things and not even known it. I remember talking to Charity Thunder once and said, "Charity I just said so many things that I don't even remember." And she said, "But your heart is in the right place." So she kind of forgave me for all my dumb moves or statements but I think Frances didn't do so much of that because she had such a pure open mind about it. That is why she was so easy to stop and see for five minutes because then you would stay awhile. It was always pleasant.

Rykken: The other interesting thing is that she goes back to the old Black River because of her long life span – she crossed paths with so many people.

Mary Perry: She was a very strong person for not being physically able to do many things. She was very strong willed without being offensive. Very, very strong.

Rykken: Did she fit in well with lots of people or was it kind of like, I go visit France? Was she a social bug or was she kind of by herself?

Mary Perry: Frances was really a talker, like people would stop over to her house to hear her talk.

Rykken: Thank you for the interview Mary!

Timeline: Edna Frances (Roberts) Perry

5 January 1897	Edna Frances Roberts is born in rural Black River Falls -- the 2nd of 15 children, of Alvin E. and Alma Disch Roberts. Her grandfather, Timothy Roberts, had been a cook for Jacob Spaulding, the founder of Black River Falls. Frances contracted polio at 7 months which contributed to a slight lameness. She believed this was part of what caused her to become such a voracious reader.
June 1915	Graduated from Black River Falls High School
1915-1918	Frances began teaching at county schools (Sandy Plain, situated between Shamrock and Millston, a second school on the west side of the river, and Lone Pine, located on the east side). She earned $40 a month during her first year of teaching and began saving money for college. Several of her early students were Ho-chunk children. It was at this point that she began to learn Winnebago syllabary from George Garvin, Sr., eventually collecting significant amounts of information about the tribe and its language, something she continued to do for the remainder of her life.
1918-1920	Frances attends Oshkosh University for teacher training. She did not enjoy her experience there, as related in later interviews.
Early 1920s	Frances accepted teaching positions in Lake Michael, Flintville, Colfax, and Laona.
Mid 1920s	Frances completed her Bachelor's Degree at Columbia University in New York. New York city was a two-year adventure for young Frances. After graduation, Frances taught English and Psychology at a girl's college in Westfield, Massachusetts -- Westfield Normal (today Westfield State University). This was a prestigious school that dated back to 1839 and was founded by Horace Mann.
26 October 1931	Frances married Howard Ephraim Perry. The wedding is held at the Baptist parsonage in Warrens, Wisconsin. Howard had been proposing to Frances for 6 years. Their home was northwest of Black River Falls. They enjoyed 8 years of marriage and had two daughters, Jill and Sarah. (Jill became Jill McDowell and lived in Maryland and Sarah became Sarah Goldstein and lived in Madison, Wisconsin. Ultimately, Frances had 5 grandchildren).
October 24, 1939	Frances became a widow upon the death of Howard. Frances suddenly was left to support her 4 and 5 year-old daughters.
1940-1962	Frances served as the town librarian upon the retirement of Annie Wylie. She was credited with revitalizing the library and brought her love of books and people into the job.

1949	Frances purchased a home across from the library where she resided until moving to Pine View late in life.
1955	Frances headed the Jackson County Historical Society during a period of reorganization and became the first curator of the organization. Beyond her work on Ho-chunk language, she did a great deal of work identifying hundreds of photographs from the Charles Van Schaick collection. She was ultimately adopted by the Thunder Clan (bestowed by Adam Thundercloud) and took the name “Blue Wing.”
December 10, 1996	Frances died at Pine View Nursing Home in Black River Falls
January 5, 1997	Memorial service is held in Frances’ honor on what would have been her 100th birthday.

Edna Frances Perry

(1897-1996)