

GROWING UP ON WEST AVENUE: A Conversation with Imogene Blum

Imogene Blum grew up on West Avenue in the village of Fairport. She described West Avenue, Roselawn Avenue, Main Street, West Church Street, Woodlawn Avenue, Cole Street, and the Canal as being the boundaries of her world. All her needs and the needs of her family could be met within walking distance of her house at 78 West Avenue.

Her parents, Bert and Lillie Smith Copeland married in 1903 and moved to the West Avenue house in 1904. The property had originally belonged to Fairport businessman G.L. Seeley and was subsequently deeded to Polly Benedict, whose daughter Hattie owned it when the Copelands moved in. Built in the vernacular style with a front gable and side el, the house was divided into two residences, the Copelands living on the east side and Hattie Benedict living on the west side. The front yard was fenced with a pear tree in the yard, and the deep back yard had a vegetable garden and more fruit trees. West Avenue itself was unpaved with plank sidewalks.

Bert (or Berton as he was sometimes called) grew up in East Penfield, Lillie (or Lillian or Lil) grew up on Roselawn Avenue with her aunt and uncle and cousins. Bert enjoyed his extensive vegetable garden and his fruit trees in their big back yard. The children enjoyed catching fireflies and swinging on the rope swing. He worked in the village at a variety of jobs, as a store clerk in Hollender & Scoville's market, as a custodian in the Fairport National Bank, and in several offices and a laundry. While some women worked in local factories and farm wives labored on the farm, Lillie, like the majority of married women, did not work outside the home. She was there when the children came home from school, took care of the house, and canned all sorts of fruits and vegetables like berries, pears, beans, peaches, and tomatoes, most likely from her husband's garden. Imogene particularly remembered the home made chili sauce. The Copelands had four children: Stuart Ralph, the eldest, was born in 1904, but died at the age of 5 from appendicitis. Isabelle Louise was born in 1906, Imogene in 1918, and Gerald in 1921.

The West Avenue neighborhood was diverse. . In addition to the large cherry orchard across the street on the Schummer's property, which gave the street its original name of Cherry Street, there were many fruit trees on the street. Businesses were located on the eastern end of the street with private homes owned by doctors, business owners, and American Can workers, filling in the rest of the area. Businesses at the east end of the street included Hollender & Scoville market, Lieb's Bakery, Bahler's Hardware, the office of the Fairport Herald, Clifford's Buick dealership, the One Horse Grocery, Shaw's Hall, Dr. Whitney's dental office, and Ella Bennett's hat shop.

Dr. Briggs, Dewey Jackson, who had operated a coal business, the Hupp family of Hupp Motors, the Wignall family of Wignall & Murphy Hardware, the Cotter family whose son ran a meat market, the Forster family of the Forster Pulley Works, and the Clark, Seaman, and Burlingame families, among others, were residents of West Avenue.

As a child, Imogene Blum did not go far from her home at #78. She had a number of friends including Barbara Park, Mary Burlingame, Edith Hupp, and Elizabeth and Helen Waterstraw who lived in the neighborhood. The girls roller skated in Barbara Park's barn and on the newly paved roads, used the swing in the Park's lean-to and went sledding on Beardsley Street in the winter. There was no ice skating allowed on the nearby canal, but it was notorious for its several suicide drownings. There were movies to go to in Shaw's Hall (otherwise known as the Bijou Theater) down the street. The early ones, of course, were accompanied by piano. Summer events included weekend concerts by the Firemen's Band at the Village Hall on Main Street. She and her friends did not find it necessary to go the "north side," but they would usually go to the Candy Kitchen, which she describes as

having black and white tile, colored glass mosaic, and tables and chairs with bent wire legs. The candy, ice cream, and peanut brittle were all home-made. Riding up and down on the lift bridge while watching the tug boats and the oil barges was another popular activity.

Imogene and her siblings and friends all attended grammar school on West Church Street and high school on West Avenue. Minerva DeLand was the principal of the high school, Dr. Coffee the superintendent, and Martha Brown was her 8th grade teacher. Martha Hodson was one of Imogene's favorite teachers. She remembered sororities, fraternities, hazing and other rituals. Football and basketball were the most popular sports and of course there were dances and proms and the junior and senior plays. Imogene remembered that she didn't know how to dance and had few dates, but she did belong to the drama club and had a part in the senior play. She had a good voice for reading and projecting. Living on West Avenue, her family had "front row seats" from which to follow all the school activities.

She graduated in 1936 from the West Avenue School, which had opened in 1924, and went to work at the Fairport National Bank, which became Security Trust in 1944 and is now the Bank of America. Most people went home for lunch when the whistle blew at noon. The bank, however, had staggered lunch times, probably to accommodate those who wished to do their banking during their lunch hour. Most people she knew from her neighborhood worked locally; others would take the R.S. and E. Trolley to the East Rochester car shops or the city of Rochester for work.

Imogene Blum had a full working life. After leaving the bank in 1944, she worked at a doctor's office in Rochester until 1975. After that she worked at a dental supply company and then for a chiropractor. She did find time to marry Harold Blum in 1963 and they lived in the family home on West Avenue until 1975 when they moved to Pittsford Palmyra Road (still in Perinton, however). When Harold died in 1985, Imogene moved first to High View Manor and eventually to the Fairport Apartments.

In retirement, Imogene volunteered many, many hours as curator of the Fairport Historical Museum and had a wealth of knowledge about the village of Fairport. One could walk West Avenue with Imogene and she would recite the names and histories of all the residents up and down the street. She loved Fairport and was a marvelous resource to anyone curious about its history.

Imogene Copeland Blum ultimately moved into the Fairport Baptist Home where she died at the age of 91 on March 7, 2010.