

Dorothy (Dunlap) Geiler Interview

“The Kinmundy Historical is conducting a series of interviews to preserve special stories from our community. This interview features Dorothy Geiler. Dorothy grew up in Kinmundy. She and her husband moved away and then returned when they retired. Each fall Dorothy joins other members of the Kinmundy Historical Society as a cabin host at Ingram’s Pioneer Log Cabin Village. She tells visitors about her family history with the Doolen cabin. In this interview, she will be sharing family history and special personal stories.

Daniel Doolen was my great great grandfather, and the father of Ben Doolen who built the log cabin out at Log Cabin Village. Daniel Doolen and his wife settled in Foster Township, Marion County, Illinois Section 11 where all their children were born and grew to manhood or womanhood except for 2—James Daniel and Emily who died when small children. Daniel Doolen was an extensive farmer and stockman, was an auctioneer and served as a justice of the peace for several years. He was an associate judge of the county court of Marion County from 1861-1865. He died September 7, 1877 and was buried in the Doolen Cemetery, Foster Township. His wife Elizabeth died April 17, 1889 and was buried beside her husband.

Benjamin Doolen was my great-grandfather. When he was 17 years old, he built a log cabin in Foster Township and got married to Laura. Then when he was 18, they had their first child, Hattie Doolen. Then when he was 19, he had to go to the Civil War. He had to leave his wife and little girl behind. They didn’t stay in the cabin. They went to her parents while he was gone because he was gone for almost (Is it 3 or 4) 4 years. When he came back, they lived in the log cabin another year or so and had another child. Then he built a frame house next to the log cabin—a 2-story frame house and then had their third child. That’s where they continued to raise their family. That’s where my Grandma Icee grew up and was married in that house.

When Ben went to the Civil War and served under General Sherman on his March to the Sea, they burned practically everything in their path—churches, and houses, and buildings, and everything. They were marching one day when they came to a church and General Sherman ordered the church burned. My Grandpa Doolen felt so bad about it, he asked his commanding officer if he could go in and save the Bible. They gave him permission to do that, and Grandpa went in and got the Bible and brought it out. We still have that Bible in our family today. It belongs to another grandson of Ben Doolen - Sherman Doolen.

I’ve heard lots of stories about him. He loved his grandchildren, but he was kind of grumpy. He was really a good grandpa and liked to play jokes on his grandchildren. One story I’ve been told by my cousin happened one Christmas. Grandpa Doolen went to his daughter’s house which would be Icee Doolen Garrett. Their Christmases were a lot of fun. My Grandma Garrett would make oyster stew in a big wash boiler and that was a big treat because they only had that once a year. This was a tradition. They they would do games. My Grandpa Doolen would string a cord across the living room and hang a sheet over it. Then he would get on one side. The kids had to stay on the other side, and then they would have a fishing pole and they would put that pole over the sheet and he would be on the other side ready

to put something in there for them. It might be something good and it might be something bad. My cousin put her fishing pole over the line one year and he put a little bucket full of coal on her line. When she pulled it back and saw what she had, she was very upset. That's just an example of how he was. He didn't pamper them, but yet he was a good grandpa.

My great-great-grandfather Moses Garrett came to Illinois driving a team of oxen and his wife came on horseback carrying her baby in her arms from Georgia. They were among the pioneers who settled on wild land in Section 10 of Foster Township in the vicinity of North Fork. This would have been in about 1826. Moses served for a number of years as justice of the peace, and he was commonly known as Squire Garrett. Hannah was a Methodist, and Moses was raised a Baptist. They were the parents of 9 children—one of whom, Thomas would have been my great grandfather and Thomas's son would have been Theodore, my grandfather who married Icy Doolen.

I had a very good childhood growing up in Kinmundy among relatives. I had my Grandmother Dunlap, who was my dad's mother living right across the street from me, and then my Grandma Garrett, who was my mother's mom lived about a block north across the highway from the park. I spent my time going from my Grandma Garrett's house to my Grandmother Dunlap's house. I had so much fun in that big house across the street in Grandma Dunlap's house. She lived in that big old house that had 20 some rooms, and that was a lot of fun for a little girl. I could play in any room I wanted to play in. She was an only child, and she had saved all of her toys from when she was a little girl. I would get to play with her little dishes and her dolls and her furniture. I could only do that when she was nearby because she didn't want anything to happen to them. It was really something special. I remember using the piano stool. That would be my little table, and I would put her little dishes on that table and have a little tea party. So I had lots of fun at my Grandmother Dunlap's.

Our family business in Kinmundy started with my Great-grandfather Matthews. He came to Kinmundy around 1888-1889, and he started a seed and implement business and also sold buggies in the same spot where the business has always stood. After he got older and wasn't able to take care of the business, his son-in-law, who would be my Grandfather Dunlap took over and he and his wife ran the seed and implement business for several years and then he changed over where he sold it to Gings of Farina and he turned the business into a heating and air conditioning and plumbing business. Finally my father took over, and that's what it remained until they finally closed the business.

One of my childhood memories is of the old jail cell located in what was then the fire house. It was back in a dark corner just a block from my house. When I was little my friends and I would walk around the block and we were always afraid when we walked past the fire house because we knew that jail was in there and we thought there might be somebody really bad in there so we always ran past the jail.

When I was growing up, one of the pastimes was skating. Around 1951, a man came to Kinmundy, and he had a skating rink. It folded up. He pulled it in a trailer behind his truck, and this skating rink was made of wood and it folded up in four quarters and then he would pull into the park and take that off the trailer and open

it all up and when he got it all opened up he had a pretty large skating rink. The kids loved this because that was about the only entertainment we had at that time. We had a lot of fun down there, but that only lasted for a couple of years.

The tent show was another activity that was a lot of fun. It was in the late 40's. They also called that the Toby Show because Toby was the star of the show. They would come to town, and they would put this big tent up and it had wooden seats inside. One thing I remember about it was that they sold candy in boxes. The candy I thought was the most delicious candy I ever ate. Then they would put on a show. It had Toby who was the funny man, and then probably 3 or 4 others would take part in the play. They would stay about 4 nights and have the play each night. People would come and watch the play. It was really a lot of fun.

When I was real young, probably 7 or 8, they had free movies down town. They would put benches in the road. They were wooden planks that would make benches that went up and down the street and then they would hang a screen—a big movie screen at the end of the street, down there by where Carolyn Shanafelt has her flower shop. Everybody loved it. They had it on Saturday night, and that's when all the farmers came to town and sold their produce or eggs, milk, whatever they brought to town and bought their groceries. So Saturday night was a big night in Kinmundy when I was a little girl. There were two grocery stores in town. My mother bought groceries at Mahan and Motch because she thought they had better meat. Then, Jesse George's store was more like a general store. It had everything—clothes, shoes, groceries, and everything you could think of. Jesse worked behind the meat counter and he liked to taste the meat so he would reach in and get a piece of bologna and have a bite of bologna or bite of salami and if you didn't know Jesse or some stranger came in, they would be shocked to see how he handled the meat. It was a good store because Jesse gave credit and lots of people bought their clothes and all their supplies there and would only pay once a month where Mahan and Motch didn't work as easy with the credit and they were strictly just a grocery store. Bargh's Drug Store was another business in town. It was wonderful. Mom didn't let me go to Bargh's until I was probably 13 and then she would let me stop there after school. All the kids would go there after school and sit in a booth, have a Baby Ruth candy bar and a lemon blend, they called the drink. Everybody liked it. Mid Bargh, the owner would stir up this drink. About 4 o'clock when I had only been there about 30 minutes, the phone would ring and it would be my mother telling Mid Bargh to send Dorothy Frances home. There went my fun.

I went to Kinmundy Grade School and High School all in one building. Grade school was downstairs and high school was upstairs. My first teacher was Margaret Weishardt, and I thought she was the most beautiful woman, nicest woman that I had ever seen. Then I went to 1st and 2nd grade there, but then the war started, and my dad went up north to work in a war plant so I had to leave for 2 years. Being gone 2 years, I missed Miss Heaton's class. We came back when the war was over and I so happy because I hated it up north.

One of the special events was a junior carnival they had every year. The juniors would build the floats and then they would have a parade on Saturday and then on Saturday night they would have this big carnival inside the gymnasium. We would put up stands and sell things and have games, throw balls at things, and then at the

end of the evening they would crown the king and queen. This one year my best girlfriend and I worked in the food stand and neither one of us knew anything about food or making coffee or anything. There was a huge coffeemaker for the people and we were supposed to make coffee. Not knowing how much coffee to put in that machine, we dumped the whole 5 pound tin of coffee in, and it just about did some people in, I think.

I started dating my husband when I was in high school. He was already out of high school, but of course, in a small community like Kinmundy, you knew all the kids, and I had known him since I was about 13. Of course my parents wouldn't let me date when I wanted to date. I wanted to date when I was 13 and they wouldn't allow it so they put me off until I was 14. When I was 14, I started to date my husband Bob, and then I dated him until I was 16, and then we got married. In those days the boys were all being sent to Korea and people were marrying younger than they do now because they were afraid the boy wasn't going to come back. Something was going to happen, and they wanted to be married. My husband was drafted before we got married, and we knew he was going to be sent to Korea so I absolutely waged a war with my mom and dad to try to get them to let me get married. Finally they did give in if I would promise I would finish high school. So Bob and I were married in October 1951 and then he went to Korea about 3 months later and I stayed home and finished high school while living with my mom and dad.

When he came back from Korea, he worked for my dad in my dad's business. We had all of our children there in Kinmundy and then about 10 years later, my dad decided he was going to retire. At that point, we moved to Champaign where my husband had a job. We lived in Champaign 3 years and then we moved to Tuscola. That's where we spent the next 30 years, and then when we retired, that's when we came down here to the cabin.

When I was young, Kinmundy was a pretty little town, a nice place to grow up, perfect place to grow up. Now Kinmundy is completely different. The buildings are gone. The stores are gone. The businesses are gone, just like most other small towns. It doesn't have that feeling. It used to have that feeling, so homey and comforting when I would come back, but now, even though I'm living back here, I don't have that same feeling about Kinmundy that I did. It's just different.

Dorothy has seen a lot of change—some good and some not so good. Through it all she has formed strong ties with family and friends and views Kinmundy as a very special place.”