

## Market Street Grocery

Henry G. Fraas

Some products came in barrels.

Dill pickles, olives sauerkraut

White vinegar and cider vinegar in 475 lb. barrels

Cookies 3 pounds - 29 cents

Macaroons, Lorna Doons, Oreos, Sugar Wafers

Smoked fish packed in a box.

Sturgeon

Bloaters- female herring sold in a keg

Eaten raw with onions

Herring roe (caviar)

White House - the first packaged coffee

George Washington- the first instant coffee in lead foil

Tea- packed in tin foil from china

Apples- packed in barrels

Baldwin, Northern Spy, Grimes Golden (softer than

Golden delicious

Red Delicious and Transparents- You could see through the skin

Other apples came in oily paper in wooden boxes. Each apple wrapped.

California Bartlet pears wrapped in paper

Tube city Produce on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave at the Railroad supplied McKeesport's produce

Winter vegetables

Cabbage, parsnips, turnips, carrots

Lunch foods

Thuringer- summer sausage

Spiced ham

Chopped ham sliced

Big baloney and ring baloney

Dried beef- chipped

Polish hams and hams from Denmark in cans

Pickled lamb's tongue

Cheese came in 5 pound bricks

Old English, American, pimento, cheddar, NY Sharp in a wheel

Schlitz beer- Near beer ½ percent alcohol

Sold during Prohibition

Soft Drinks- Coke, Canada Dry Ginger Ale, Hires Root Beer extract

Ginger Beer

Made root Beer only in the summer- mixed in a lard can

Extract, sugar, water, yeast- cap when warm

Put in a warm place and age

A couple raisins in the bottle made it really strong- might blow up!

10 cents / quart bottle

Used cans to make home brew- like a large sauerkraut can

Malt extract, hops (in a box)—Anheiser beer

Butter 55 cents a pound Brand Cross Valley

Couldn't sell margarine that was colored. Sold a capsule in a box.

People could color their own. 3 pounds 25 cents

Jersey Corn Flakes- made near Irwin

They were the first corn flakes and were thicker than Kelloggs

## Biggest Seller- Mother's Oats

Used the cartons- shellacked to make radios "crystal sets"

Wrapped copper wire around the box

100 pound bags- rice and flour

Beans in bags- limas, kidney, Roman, great Northern

Sugar 8 cents a pound On Sale 25 pound bag for \$1.29

Canned Milk- 16 ounce cans at first- later 6 ounces

Carnation, Pet, Wilson's

To use- punch 2 holes in the can- roll up paper to stick in the holes to keep the air out

Big stores like A+P sold milk in 14 ½ oz cans

Only gave the price- not the size

People thought it was cheaper

Salad oil and olive oil came in 18 -inch high glass bottles

Lard came in 50 pound cans- sold more than butter or margarine

Dug it out with a wooden spoon

Used in cakes and pies

Face soap- no wrappers

Hard milled soap so it didn't get soft in the dish

Laundry soap- Octagon, P+G, Fels Naptha

Soap flakes Chipso was the first one, then Ivory Snow (beads)

Kerosene sold for heaters and lamps

Red Star and Fleischmann's yeast- fresh

People would eat it fresh for health ideas.

Fresh fish once a week- truck from Baltimore

Oysters only in colder weather

Spices- McCormick most were packaged

Pearl Tapioca- round beads sold a lot for pudding

Campbell's soups

Heinz products

Some farmers traded chickens and butter for groceries.

Dressed the chickens on Saturday

Ice from under the 15<sup>th</sup> Street bridge

300 pound blocks shot down to the platform where it was

Sawed into 3 pieces of 100 lbs. each

The store's box held 400-450 pounds of ice.

## Family Stories

My grandfather Henry Fraas was born in Bavaria, Germany about 1884. His parents brought their three sons to America: his father didn't want his sons to serve in the Kaiser's army: Henry was just three years old. Their life in Germany was poor. They had some sheep, had some fruit trees, and worked on rolls of wool from the factory to weave in loose ends. It was a meager existence. The family landed in Baltimore and somehow ended up in western Pennsylvania.

Henry went to school through third grade. I'm passing around his writing practice book for you to see what a work of art it is. Henry told his parents he was afraid of the fourth grade teacher, so they told him he didn't have to go to school any more. There was no big push to keep kids in school, and as soon as they quit, they had to go to work. There was a gap in Henry's like at this point. Two of the brothers opened a bakery in Christy Park on 26<sup>th</sup> Street.

Sometime around 1910 Henry married Annie Crozier- an Irish girl. Her family had come many years earlier. They had a frame house on the corner of 30<sup>th</sup> and Beale streets in Christy Park. The house had a coal furnace and wavy glass in the windows. There were large porches in front and back. The house was surrounded by various flowers Annie planted, and there were fruit trees in the back yard. Their first child was Grace in 1911, and after her birth, the doctor told Annie not to have any more babies. But in May of 1916 Charlie was born.

As you see in the photo, they drove out into the country in their Model A. They are all sitting on the running board. Henry Ford advertised you could buy a car in any color- just as long as it was black! The car was delivered by train and had to be picked up at the station. It cost about \$362 with on insurance. People loved them for many reasons. They road high over the road, making it somewhat safe to

drive on fields or rough country. There were no side windows- just a curtain to lower if needed. Only one door on the passenger side allowed for entry. The driver's side had only a line in the body to look like a door. It's interesting that the driver could shift gears between forward and reverse without going through neutral. That would rock the car like a rocking chair! The car started with a crank, and when it got dark, someone had to get out and light the kerosene headlights. The family enjoyed rides in the mountains, but coming home could bring more adventure. Coming downhill the brakes would heat up and the wooden spokes in the wheels would get hot and threatened to catch on fire. So they had to have a bucket of water with them just in case.

Charlie and Mary went to Eleventh Ward grade school in Christy Park. All the students went home for lunch. Both schools are now gone. Next came high school at Cornell. The Twin Rivers School stands there now and even Spring Street that ran down the hill has been buried under turf.

Mary Benner and her family lived on 31<sup>st</sup> Street. Her mother Gertrude was married twice. The first husband was Edward De Merzereau (b.1866), and they had two children, Albert and Vida. After Edward died, she married James Benner (b.1874). He worked hanging wall paper and Gertrude cleaned houses. Their son James died young from the flu. Then came the event that Gertrude and her doctor thought she had a tumor. He operated. But when he did, he found a baby!. So he closed her up and on May 21, 1918 baby Mary was born- my Mom.

At age eight Mary took piano lessons for \$1 from Mary Orr. She lived at 1920 Jenny Lind St, The house is still there. During the Depression, Miss Orr charged \$1 for each of the 3 lessons and the

fourth one was free. So Mary's Mom cleaned Miss Orr's house in return for the first three lessons.

In high school Mary had two things to wear for four years- neither were hers. The dry cleaner gave them to her because people had no money to pick them up. She also had to save the waxed paper from her sandwich for the next day's lunch. She knew what it was like to go to bed hungry. During high school Mary got top grades, and the music teacher asked her to play for choruses each day and concerts. As a result she never took gym class! Mary had a full scholarship for college, but her mother said "No! You cannot go. You have to help support the family." I know Mary felt badly about that for the rest of her life. So after graduation the school district hired her as secretary for the high school.

Grandpap never made much money with the grocery store. People had little to spend. The steel mills paid only \$1 per day. Many people made less. So they would tell him to put their groceries on the book. ( to be paid later) For \$20 per month a family could get 110 pounds of rice, 100 pounds of flour, beans and basics. For every \$5 that the customer paid on the bill, he got a candy bar. Most people needed delivery. In the early years Henry would deliver the food by wagon, powered by his horse Tom. In high school Charlie worked before and after school. He took orders and delivered them. In the winter he had to get a big fire going in the potbellied stove to melt the ice off the windows. Later on Charlie was the delivery guy. In the winter men would cut 100-300 pound blocks of ice from the river and deliver ice for people's ice boxes. Charlie delivered 100 pound blocks and most often had to chisel away at the big block to make it fit in the side opening. As the water melted, it dripped into the big pan under the box.



Charlie told me of delivering food to a man in his late 80's. He was having breakfast- a slice of black bread with ½ inch slice of Limburger cheese with the rind on (very stinky) and a 12 ounce glass of moonshine! He had the same thing for breakfast every day. Charlie tried to get customers to try new products. They sold two kinds of canned peas.- three cents and 10 cents. No matter how long you cooked the 3 centers, they always sounded like marbles when poured into the bowl. Dad was sure if he could only get them to try the 10 cent peas, they would love them. But no success.

Charlie also had to shoot the river rats in the cellar. They was the size of large cats and could chew through concrete blocks. Dad took a rifle to the cellar and shot, but the bullets bounced off the stone foundation and flew past his head. So his next plan was to wait until a rat got into an empty sauerkraut or pickle barrel, which was lined with wax. That made it too slippery for the rat to jump out, and he would shoot them as they jumped at his face.

Charlie also has to take out the garbage from the cellar. They used the barrels for this also. He would take them to the city incinerator and dump them on a metal grid that kept the metal from falling into the fire. All around the edge of the room men sat watching. This was Depression time and people couldn't afford anything. The baloney would rot from the middle and bulge. Canned salmon would ooze. Men would run for those items and anything else they could get.

All during high school Charlie never saw a football game or went to a dance.

Grandpap Henry would come home and fix supper for himself.-  
A bowl of sliced radishes, lots of pepper and milk. That was it.

I have three good memories about by grandparents. If I had Sunday lunch with them, we had baked beans and toast with sugar on it.

In the winter I loved to use their magnifying glass and study the amazing designs of snowflakes on the wooden porch. Since it was open underneath, the snowflakes didn't melt for a while. Then too the winters were cold and snowy. We used to push open the storm door and stick a yard stick into the snow to see how much we had- it was impressive. And my favorite was sitting on Henry's lap and look through his scrapbook. He collected all kinds of stories and history. And we talked a lot. We were great buddies. And right next to him was his short wave radio. He would turn the dial to Moscow or Peking or anywhere in between.

We had his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday party at our house, and on leaving, he said to my mom, "If anything happens to me, promise me you won't send me to the hospital." That night he had a massive stroke. The second stroke was the end. I was only seven.

Charlie knew he would never go to college, so he took a job with Goodrich Tire Company. Charlie had lots pf muscle and broad shoulders. The boss put him on breaking truck tires off the rim with a 20 pound sledge hammer. He would do 12 tires in a row. He also got the job of changing the inside flat on the big trucks. His next job was to move from store to store and find out who was stealing. Each store manager got more pay than Charlie.

Charlie and Mary got married prior to this and had a apartment in Dravosburg. Mary gave piano lessons and started looking for musicians to study with. The law did not permit married women to work, so she

had to quit her secretarial job. The school had to hire three workers to do the amount of work Mary had done.

Mary would walk her Scottie dog Gus down the hill along Dravosburg cemetery to pick up the mail. She and Gus stopped in the landlady's deli with her mail. Gus would sit up in front of the meat case and the owner would give him a hot dog in a little brown bag rolled on the top. Gus carried it up the hill and drivers often came close to wrecking while they stared at him. Charlie was allowed to spend 2 cents each weekend on a coffee cake. One Friday he got carried away and bought a 5 cent pastry. Mary hit the roof! "You can't spend 5 cents! You'll ruin the budget!"

Somehow Charlie saved \$362 dollars, quit Goodrich and opened a tire store in Braddock on third and Braddock Avenue. It is still in business with the company that bought it. It was a slow start.

Then came Dec. 7, 1941. Dad locked the store and joined the Navy. He was stationed at Great Lakes to work on codes. When the folks at home had to observe blackouts, the other people in the apartment building would come to Mary's apartment and she would play the piano in the dark to pass the time. She was also playing the organ at church every week and studying advanced work with organists and college instructors.

After the war they built a home on the back half of the family property. I loved that home with all the big trees, the grape arbor and flowers. Hedges surrounded both houses. Some places in McKeesport had cinder sidewalks instead of concrete. That's what we had until Dad put in concrete walk. And it's interesting that the streets were paved with bricks. I learned later that a former mayor of McKeesport Mayor Kinkade owned (or was part owner) a brick factory. So McKeesport was his customer. Actually the bricks were quite durable until they shifted

on some streets and looked like a wave headed for the curb. Charlie told me that there was so little traffic during the Depression that grass grew in the streets.

1952 was an amazing year. On a day in July Mom was ironing in the kitchen and her brother Albert was helping out. All of a sudden Mary hemorrhaged. She was due to have a second baby. The doctor told her the baby would be born dead or an idiot, because of the length of time without oxygen. They saved Mary's life. And my sister Trudy turned out to be very smart, interesting and wonderful. We were blessed with a happy outcome.

Another time Mom was ironing and listening to a minister on the radio. He was talking about giving 10% of your income to the church. At that time Mary and Charlie had about \$11.30 in the bank. Mary called Dad at work and asked him if she could write a check for the 10% to send the minister. Dad said, "Sure. Give it all away. There isn't much." So she wrote a check for \$1.30, walked down 30<sup>th</sup> Street and mailed it in the box in front of Ayres Drug store. She turned and glanced at the clock in the store. It read 1:11. She walked home and kept ironing.

That evening she asked Dad how the day had been. He said, "Same old Tires and Batteries -Batteries and Tires. But then at 1:11 someone came in and bought something- and then another and another and another." Mom kept donating and customers kept coming.

As time passed by it was so clear that both my parents worked very hard. I know it influenced me to push myself to get good grades. At the high point Mom had 75-78 students a week for piano and organ lessons. We heard Frosty the Snowman in 20 variations and great tunes li The Halibut is a happy fish. His fins stick out and his tail goes swish.

Dad put in six days a week for 42 years. During the winter tire rush he would get home at 10pm and start to do the book keeping for the day.

Charlie got five other tire dealers to join with him to start a factory to recap tires. They had 52 employees working three shifts. They imported a rubber mill from Japan to expand production. There were a lot of problems- and dangerous ones. The last time a contract came up, the workers demanded so much increase it would have trashed the business. Then the personal death threats started. The conclusion was to sell the factory. Fortunately each investor got all his money back. Charlie sold his tire store the next week and presto!- he was retired.

Mother kept on teaching and playing the pipe organ at First United Methodist Church on Cornell. I asked her three times if she was going to retire. She said."No!" So I quit asking.

On the holiday for Martin Luther King Jr. I was to pick her up for an appointment. My sister called to say there was an event. When I got to her house, Mom was slumped in a chair. She had died. She just passed very quietly at age 92 ½. She was an organist for 78 years and had just played for the service the day before.